

PLANETARIUM



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FROG GOD
GAMES

PLANETARIUM

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Planetary – A Compendium of Worlds

Science is stranger

By Edwin Nagy, Ph.
Chief Science Officer
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There is so much amazing going on these days in the world of astronomy that my first thought when asked about helping to prepare planets for Starfinder was, "Let's just write up the real ones." There's a moon of Jupiter covered with ice they think is sitting atop a liquid ocean. New information coming to light on Mars, Venus, and even our own little blue marble, make all our wildest tales seem practically mundane. And just as I write this, we're discovering three, no four, no seven new planets around a distant dwarf star that are candidates for extraterrestrial life. The count of known extra-solar planets has gone from just a few to a few hundred (over a thousand as I check in again today...) in the past decade, and the estimate of the numbers that might contain life within our galaxy is difficult to fathom. Based on this, the opinion of the existence of alien life has gone from, "that's a fool's errand" to "statistically speaking, it must exist." While preparing for this project, one of the books I read was, *Under a Crimson Sun: Prospects for Life in a Red Dwarf System*, arguing not about whether life exists, but putting forth the thesis that rather than looking for Earth-like planets around sun-like stars there is much greater probability of life on smaller, tidally-locked planets orbiting red dwarf stars (like the ones just discovered!) I also listened to a series of lectures from The Ohio State University's Astronomy 141, "Life in the Universe." The existence of life beyond us is now a science course!

What did I learn in all this research? The most exciting realization was the variety of possibilities. Gas giants, rocky planets with underground water, foggy, acid-filled spheres, twin stars, triple stars, Earth-sized moons orbiting other planets, planets whose molten cores had solidified and lost their magnetic field, the crushing density within the cores of some planets that means that even chemistry is different, and so much more. Even without bringing in magic, that old staple of RPGs that allows us to wave our hands and make floating castles and fire-breathing lizards, there is so much realistic variety possible — and with just a little hand-waving, the sky is sure not the limit.

While some of the worlds do incorporate magic, most of them rely on pseudo-scientific explanations for the various phenomena. Rather than just positing an area of higher gravity, we added a locally dense sub-stratum. This area of volcanoes and lightning storms isn't just the home of a mad wizard, there is also large tectonic fault and a higher than normal circulation of water and ice in the atmosphere. In some exciting way, we're closing an age-old loop. We first created stories of magic to explain the unknown. Then, we developed science but got to play with the ideas of magic. Finally, we get to play with science — although just to keep a bit of mystery, we haven't gotten rid of magic.

So if there are so many great planets in our real universe, why do we need to bring out a book of fictional planets for gaming? Well, of course, it's really about the story. It's always about the story. Each of the planets in this book is more than a "what if" game of physics and chemistry — although a lot of them start there. These planets are all inhabited, and they all have a story going on, a story that we hope you'll latch onto and make into your own story around the table, real or virtual. Most of these planets also have

a social "what if?" to go along with the science. What if a former merc started a new life on a whizzing asteroid? What if a super-intelligent species colonized a planet of Jurassic horror? What if a planet became uninhabitable before its populace developed interstellar travel? These are the pieces that make the planets in this book come alive. This is what will hopefully grab your adventuring party and give them tough decisions to make, exotic cultures to explore, and terrifying dangers to overcome.

Writing the living part of the planet was a whole different challenge from creating the planets themselves, but has one important thing in common — even without stretching the bounds of science too far, there is an infinity of possible. On Earth, we are basically all related — from the tiniest single-celled life form up to the mighty blue whale, we have much in common. But what if life were to begin anew from a different random mix of chemicals, or with the same mix but in a different environment? Maybe five-fold symmetry (like the starfish) becomes dominant. Maybe vision develops in the far infra-red or x-ray spectra. Maybe species develop the ability to consciously control scent emission and communicate through smell. Once we break away from our world, procreation could require three, four, or seventeen parents to come together. So many concepts break down, or can break down. Here the challenge is to keep the populations of these foreign worlds exciting and different, but still relatable. We need to be able to tell stories that include creatures we know well — such as humans, dwarves, and cyberbots — but add in something new, something that tells us that we're not in Kansas anymore. When we push into these strange lands, however, even writing about life become troubling. How do we write down names for a species that communicates with light? What do you call animals that live in the water and the sentient creatures that capture them? What if the sea life are the sentients? We have so much of our language tied up in our body parts that it's hard to talk about anything without using hands and minds and hearts. How do we write about a species that has none of these but still has sentiments that relate to cold hands and warm hearts, or mind what their neighbors are doing? When creatures that get their energy from the sun become the dominant sentient species on a planet, are they still plants? What if there are also plants — how do we differentiate those?

As you'll see throughout this book, each author tackled these challenges differently. You'll find some favorite old friends waiting for you (dwarves and dragons, and so on) and many brand new ones as well. You'll find planetary descriptions that cleave fairly close to fantasy yarns, and others that push hard on science and technology. Some are detailed views into a tightly knit social structure, while others float high above, looking down from a satellite. The one thing in common is that each has some adventure waiting for you.

As you read the various stories wrapped up in their own worlds, I hope you'll enjoy the diversity, the humor, the terror, and the adventure. I hope some of them speak to you enough that you'll want to take some PCs there to visit, to get involved with the locals, and see what sort of trouble they can get into. Have fun with them. Mix them together. Transplant your favorite creatures from one to another. Move the planets around and swap out the stars. We've had our fun. Now it's your turn. Whether you try to stick to "hard" sci-fi or whether you like to soften it up a bit with some magic, there is no shortage of fodder for adventure within these covers.

Chapter One:

Atalo, the Green Hell

Physical Description

When viewed from space, Atalo is an acidic green, oblong-shaped globe with four different sized moons orbiting it at various speeds. Not a perfect sphere, the planet itself has one side slightly flattened, giving it the appearance of a deflating ball. This anomaly has produced speculation as to what caused the planet's irregular shape and has given rise to many legends by almost every race upon Atalo. The planet's surface features boiling oceans, acid rains, countless ruined underwater cities, frequent earthquakes, and tsunamis due to the constant volcanic eruptions that produce fleeting islands that last years, months, or mere days. Atalo's harsh conditions are hazardous to just about all creatures and forced the native wildlife and sentient races to evolve long ago in order to thrive.

Atalo is over 85% ocean, with small sets of islands and archipelagos accommodating the variety of plant life and settlements. Some of these landmasses dot the ocean in long chains spanning great distances. Jungles are plentiful on these islands and are filled with acid-resistant trees that sometimes stretch several hundred feet into the air, with branches large enough to support a house. Additionally there are primeval swamps where gnarled roots form hollows, housing all manner of creatures.

Oceans of green-colored acid give off mist and noxious fumes providing the indigenous habitats a bountiful mixture for chemosynthesis. The acidic liquid covering Atalo gives life to an array of creatures such as cannibalistic ground lizards to schools of intelligent elephantine fish that often breach the ocean's surface to dine upon surface algae. But just as the acid helps some life forms flourish, it just as easily destroys others. Any creature not fully immune to its acid effects quickly dissolves into a pool of sludge soon after touching the liquid.

The atmosphere is acidic and humid but humming with life; its thick blanket of atmosphere traps the sun's energy, making the surface a lush, steamy paradise. For most humans visiting Atalo, the pungent air is survivable, but extremely irritating and uncomfortable to breathe for more than a few minutes at a time. Some that have grown up on Atalo can be seen strolling outdoors without the need of face masks or air tanks, but the majority of the populace moves about with oxygen supplements on hand.

Temperatures on Atalo average slightly higher than most humans are normally comfortable with, but can dip below freezing near the world's northern regions. Most of the green, cloud covered planet is hot and humid, with near tropical conditions year round. Amazingly, the ocean's temperatures do not vary much due to the hot climate and the numerous amounts of deep sea volcanic vents that spew forth hot sulfuric liquid. This leads to rainfall over the islands that is steady and very predictable. Most settlements count on this predictability and set protective shields that rise over shops, parks, and other public areas at set intervals of the normal rain times due to the acidity of the ocean.

Atalo's largest and most populated landmass is that of **Anchoron**, an island located at the head of one of the longest-spanning island ranges: the **Dragon's Teeth Archipelagos**. Its diverse terrain spans its red-colored sand beaches at **Paparon** and black sand

beaches of **Punron** to lush acid-rainforests. Within this island nation, there are two active volcanos, **Khakaltic** and **Latet**. Latet is the more active of the two, with its daily coughing forth thick clouds of acrid smoke that is as unfortunately frequent as the acidic rain storms. Achoron holds the world's largest spaceport, as well as the world's largest seaport.

Below the dark green acid of Atalo's ocean surface lays the true wealth of the planet. Mostly unexplored, the oceans teem with alien creatures beyond most people's imaginations. Most sought after of these creatures is the terrestrial **jormungar** sea serpent. This creature, in its ancient form, was said to grow up to over a mile in length from its jaws to tail.

Civilizations, History, and Current Status

Atalo was once part of a binary system of planets that revolved around a medium-sized star, but this once fertile land of snowy ice caps, bright blue waters, and diverse cultural evolution changed when its sister planet was destroyed by a planetoid-sized meteor. Its destruction altered Atalo to the volatile nature it is today. Most of the debris from the sister planet collected over the next few millennia and formed the four large moons now orbiting Atalo. The main trade station for all of Atalo's imports and exports is located upon the largest of these moons.

The sentient race that first evolved on Atalo was destroyed within a short period of time after the cataclysmic repercussions of the destruction of the sister planet. Fallout, radiation, and meteorite impacts caused such a global upheaval that nearly every form of life was utterly destroyed. Only due to mere chance did enough single-celled creatures remain to allow the cycle of life to begin anew.

Most of the populace now lives in a myriad of land cities, floating cities, and undersea settlements. In addition, small moon settlements offer a variation in daily life for the atalins.

Sentients

Atalo is a planet of survival. Factions of humans, elves, dwarves, and other races intermingle as minorities vying for power amongst the warring nations. These groups all compete for hunting rights, dividing up the world's oceans into faction-territories which are hotly contested and frequently fought over. Ruling over the largest of these territories is the indigenous species of the callolet race.

Atalo is extremely militant and violent in almost every regard as those that do not fight typically perish quickly. The majority of sentient creatures on Atalo either are paid to fight or are fighting to leave. The violence between factions is promoted mainly by the nature of Atalo's economic future. This is based off the hunting of the jormungar sea serpents. Almost every facet of culture on Atalo is based around this practice of

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KAATAK

Not much is known of the ancient race that developed and populated Atalo before the cataclysmic destruction of the sister planet. Most people living on Atalo care little to even ask who they were, let alone perform research into the beings. The 'hunt' being most creatures' only focus, but some alien scholars have begun to unravel the ancient society that once dominated the now hazardous planet. Ruins primarily inhabit the deepest areas of the acidic seas. Current belief holds that this early race was reptilian humanoid and were gather-farmers.

The scientists investigating the **Kaatak Ruins** off the coast of Achoron have recently found vaults where records of this culture were kept, untouched by the planet's acidic waters. This ancient society's art, language, literature, and science were perfectly preserved; unfortunately, the callolet government wishes to confiscate these documents in anticipation of discovering some new form of weaponry they can use to fight other factions or to more easily hunt the sea serpents.

Physically, the ancient kaataks had skin covered in scales that varied in color from dark green through to shades of brown and gray. Taller than humans and powerfully built, kaataks were often between 6 and 7 feet tall and weighed between 300 and 350 pounds, with females typically being larger and heavier than males. The kaatak had non-prehensile muscular tails that grew to three or four feet in length, and were likely used for balance or swimming.

Researchers have pieced together that the kaatak gathered into tribes with average settlements near 200 members. Kaatak society appeared to be matriarchal and leaders held their positions out of sheer strength and power. Although females were responsible for hatching eggs, it was their male counterparts who were responsible for raising young and maintaining the camp. All the males in the tribe would work together to raise the young.

These creatures were summarily enslaved upon the arrival of the aboleths. The kaatak were unprepared for such devastating creatures and were quickly overwhelmed. Their enslavement remained until the cataclysm of Atalo's sister planet came to pass.

hunting, harvesting, dissection, and sale of the serpent, in particular, the sale of the creature's brain matter which is extremely valuable.

Atalo's lower life forms also tend toward apex hunters, with animals and vermin uniquely adapted to the planet. In addition, herds of acidic seafaring oozes, monstrous plants, thoqqas, acid drakes, and sea dragons are commonplace. The humanoids that have evolved upon Atalo are known as the callolet.

Culture

The hunt is paramount in atalin culture. In every faction, the hunt dictates a person's way of life. In the more integrated faction, the hunt plays merely an economical motivator, but in callolet territory, the hunt is a rite of passage, even spiritual in nature. This is their driving motivation for the hunt, although jormungar serpents are completely edible and thus are the callolet's primary food source. Additionally the body is used for the construction of homes, vessels, and of course it's sought after brain tissue. This tissue holds a vast array of utilities, though it is most commonly used as a fuel source for space engines. It has also been shown to contain cerebrospinal fluid that can cure diseases, reverse the effects of aging, and protect most sentient creatures' brains from the destructive nature of radiation that can occur during space travel.

Once other space faring races found the high quality source of fuel that is so bountiful on Atalo, it quickly became one of the galaxy's most sought-after resources. This led to an increased interaction between off-worlders and the callolet. Interactions such as these helped the callolet to further engage in trade, exchange, and learn of advanced technology, including that of interstellar travel. One of the more dangerous yet influential advancements has been the exchange and proliferation of more advanced weaponry.

On the waterways and entrenched along the beachheads of islands lie vast fortresses, caravans of ragtag vessels, humanoids riding enormous acid-water creatures, all scavenging, searching, or hunting each other and the jormungar serpents. The technology seems to ebb and flow between the nomadic movements of factions and even smaller tribes.

Technological Level

Atalo is considered by most an emerging technological culture. Although almost any hardware can be found in the planet's shops, they are extremely rare and may be up to ten times the normal price. Outside the callolet territory, the prices increase and selection decreases drastically. The majority of technology scattered about Atalo is of callolet design. This technology is very distinctive in many respects, most noticeably in its unusual combination of tribal design. To off-worlders the callolet are known for their variety of technological weaponry. A hallmark of callolet technology is its complete resistance to the effects of corrosives.

Aside from weaponry and armor, Atalo is reliant on hovercraft, jet propulsion, and other fuel-driven engines for transportation. Only in the most populous locations can one find spacecraft, and even then they typically come with an extremely high price tag.

Economy and Resources

The true power of the callolet is that their advanced weaponry has allowed them to more efficiently hunt and kill the jormungar. For decades, off-worlders have come to purchase the extremely rare brain matter for use in their space drives.

Government

Atalo is a series of thirteen faction territories with an overlord serving as a dictator of each one. The largest callolet territory pledges its fealty to **Warlord Wint Valat** (LN male callolet operative 12/soldier 5). Warlord Valat's

territory has been self-declared as a state of **Calldore**, which is recognized by off-worlders as an autonomous region. This callolet government is the most widely used for trade, as the other factions are seen as too violent or unsteady.

Due to the quick exchange of power in warring territories, other authority on the world is a revolving door and difficult to keep record of.

Ecology

Atalo has a diverse array of creatures and plants inhabiting the planet. Both island-sized kelp beds and forests of acid eating algae scum float like a layer of skin over the ocean's surface, covering miles upon miles. The jungles covering the islands contain numerous species of plants with leaves the size of small homes.

However, most who come to Atalo seek the jormungar. What most do not understand is that the enormous sea serpent is actually the end life cycle of a smaller humanoid race. These two are not separate species, but rather represent a biological continuum.

Flora and Fauna

The majority of all life on Atalo can be found within its oceans. Most numerous are the acid eating bacteria and algae forming a floating skin over continent-sized portions of the ocean. These blanket the surface, but provide a nutrient-rich byproduct from which a multitude of forms feed. In addition, seaweed forests and kelp beds harbor a rich variety of sea life.

The patches of land to be found on Atalo are hotly contested, with warlords in control hoarding the plant life and the fruits they produce. A feature most off-worlders seem to quickly note about Atalo is the lack of flying creatures. Something unknown to both the natives of this world and off-world scholars is whether birds or other flying creatures simply have not evolved on this hostile planet, or if the highly corrosive atmosphere has decimated them.

Within largest stretches of land within the territory of Calldore, the first attempts at cultivation and agriculture are still in their infancy. Small farms have begun to rise up in the greenish-black top soil.

Along the craggy island chains, the most abundant acid resistant tree is the **neutrom tree**. Its bark is silver and smooth, and its boughs somewhat upswept. In the hottest season of Atalo, the leaves grow to enormous sizes and bare crystal blossoms in small three point clusters. Armor coating is typically made from the leaves and bark of the neutrom tree. The crystalline blossoms are edible and very nutritious. They are semi-sweet and comparable to rock candy-like substance that is high in vitamins.

Apex Creatures

Only a handful of Atalo's countless species has been observed and categorized.

Blink Eel

Though they resemble sleek eels the size of a small boat, blink eels are as smart as humans, although quite sadistic in nature. As social creatures, blink eels travel in large schools, preying upon any lesser creature they can outmatch or gang up on.

Callolet

When the first space travelers came to Atalo, they came in contact with a race of translucent humanoid creatures referring to themselves as the callolet. These humanoids



have two arms and legs and are largely visible only because their interior is comprised of swirling acidic gas. This gas forms into more viscous liquid structures that comprise their internal organs with the main visible structure being the callolet's eyes. The sensory organs appear to be made of a white-hot, liquid golden metal. They are able to breathe in the noxious fumes and then spray out the substance in a concentrated form as a breath weapon. As a defense to most creatures, the callolet can excrete a slick coating that is toxic to the touch.

Giant Sea Horse

These underwater creatures are as large, if not larger than, a normal land horse and although quite aggressive, can be domesticated and trained to serve as a mount.

Jormungar Sea Serpent

The jormungar sea serpent is hunted almost exclusively on Atalo, as the most widely sought after creature on the planet and across the known galaxy in hopes of extracting its cerebral spinal fluid and brain matter. Known to only a few is that the rumored humanoids seen riding the beasts

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aren't controlling the sea creatures or cousins to them, but are the offspring of the jormungar. Not until the jormungar reach an ancient age do they grow in power and size to reach the length of a mile or more.

Jormungar are birthed in large caves, emerging from egg sacs the size of human babies. These cluster of eggs are sometimes millions in number. Once they emerge the young grow to seven feet in height in a matter of weeks. After this initial growth, they tend to remain in this Medium size for the next few hundred years, after which they begin a rapid molting period, where they quickly shed this outer layer of scales and grow exponentially. This growth is accompanied by an increased desire to feed and to mate.

Ooze Shark

The jormungar is the most widely known of large predators in the atalin seas, but coming in at a close second has to be the ooze shark. This colossal creature appears as a torpedo in its sleek shape, but is made of a transparent hide. Large fins and a tail-like structure give its shark appearance, but no desirable organs appear within. An opening in its front and rear allows the ooze shark to propel through atalo's acidic ocean and help the beast to obtain incredible speeds. The creature has no need to slow in order to feed, leading some hunters to witness small ships being consumed within the blink of an eye. Those lost within the ooze shark's mouth can be seen hurtling through the creature's inner digestive track only to hit a sticky filtration screen. These inner screens are horribly barbed and covered in a sticky base substance that allows the ooze shark to dissolve and ingest its prey.

At times, when the creature is unable to consume the vessels or prey whole, they can be seen smashing headlong into large ships. The ooze shark's body transforms during this collision and they morph around these vessels, and though they universally have acid corrosive protections, the ooze shark secretes a base liquid that is so potent it can weaken the outer armor of most objects.

Qaa

Ravenous and cruel, the qaa merfolk are, unfortunately, among the most prosperous of atalo's oceanic races. Great cities raised on the backs of giant sea turtles darken the ocean hunting lanes, where they launch endless raids against their air-breathing enemies who come to enjoy their hunt. Warlike and proud, the qaa rarely ally with others, and view most other races as food sources. However, if individuals happen to impress the qaa with their hunting or fighting skills, they may find the qaa respectful and engaging.

Slorsh

These gelatinous cube variants are rare oozes that have gained sentience and have begun to construct a rudimentary society. Most of these cubes have adapted the ability to form pseudopods, and some advanced individuals have even been known to form humanoid body shapes. The slorsh have created their own language, art, and have begun to venture out in attempts to communicate with other districts.

Population Centers, Landing Sites, and Points of Interest

Atalo is most easily seen as divided into 13 inhabited territories, referred to as **Districts**, and one large hunting ground. The largest area of these, in total square mileage, is **The Expanse** hunting grounds. The Expanse has a total coverage of roughly 70 million square miles, compared to the planet's remaining land and smaller sea coverage of 30 million.

The Expanse

The Expanse lies in the southwest portion of Atalo's hemisphere. This massive ocean area is famous for a number of reasons; first is that it is considered the greatest area to hunt for the jormungar sea serpent, second is that three-fourths of its center is a flattened surface. The curvature of the planet itself flattens in the Expanse. This has a number of effects; the planet itself has a slightly higher rate of rotation and the days and nights are shorter due to this. It also allows visual sight of ships sailing upon the Expanse almost three times further than normal distance.

The Expanse is also near the dead center of all the inhabited land masses. This unclaimed territory is under constant flux of territorial war. However, most species see the Expanse as too large to claim, even if they had the manpower or technology to control it. The callolet see the Expanse as an almost religious or holy ground and view any claim upon its territory as offensive and a near affront to their culture. They believe that every being has a right to hunt or be hunted in the Expanse.

The Expanse has easily the largest recorded number of sighting of jormungar sea serpents on Atalo, with a near ten to one ratio as compared to other lesser seas. This is due to a number of factors. The jormungar sea serpents migrate through the Expanse on their way to their primary spawning grounds. In addition, the Expanse's sheer size allows the sea serpents enough territory for each serpent to hunt lower sea creatures without risk of too much overlap.

The Expanse's flattened surface has been the cause of conjecture throughout the evolution of life upon Atalo. Most have not even remotely guessed at its true, dark beginnings. In actuality, the cause of its decreased curvature compared to the rest of the planet is due to the ancient race of aboleths. The aboleth are aberrant creatures with tremendous psychic powers and abilities. They came to Atalo eons ago and inhabited the liquid world. Their population grew to immense proportions and soon their technology began to evolve. This led to further propagation of the race into other planes of existence and other solar systems across the known galaxy. It was during a test of these emerging discoveries for the aboleth, that a chain reaction began which could not be controlled. The effect of this gravitational experiment decimated the local aboleth, their cities, slaves, and not only turned the atmosphere and its waters into an acidic environment, but pulled the curvature of the ocean into the flat Expanse.

The hunt is everything in the Expanse, at times even bringing war between feuding factions to an end. As soon as a fin of the great sea serpent is spotted, the hunt begins and normally only ends with the serpent being taken, or with the destruction of the sea vessel. Hovercraft, submersible vehicles, jet propelled ships, and even wind powered ships cruise across the acidic waters of the Expanse, cruising through the seas in search. It is common to spot not only fins of the great beasts, but other faction pods in full battle for their lives against the

massive and deadly serpents. Coils hundreds of feet to even a mile long wrap upwards in revolt of being shot, stabbed, or harpooned and crash down upon the ships. The jormungar's claws, teeth, and size alone are enough to destroy most vessels, which do not account for their ungodly strength, and concentrated acid breath they use as weapons; it is no wonder they typically destroy all but the most experienced of hunters.

Recently, rumors have spread that hunters have seen humanoid creatures that resemble a cousin-like version of the serpents actually riding the beasts.

District 1: Calladore

The largest occupied territory is designated as **Calladore**. It is an island chain along the Dragon's Teeth Archipelagos. This territory is fiercely defended by the callolet and has well defined borders that most other warring factions recognize and do not contest.

Anchoron City

Anchoron is the largest city and settlement within Calladore, and is known as the **Trident's Tip**. An island located at the head of the Dragon's Teeth archipelago, Anchoron is the most important political power on Atalo. The population is primarily callolet, though other races also dwell therein. The city government consists of a cryptocracy of (mostly) anonymous individuals known as the Glass Society. Their figure head is the boisterous Warlord Wint Valat. Besides Warlord Valat, these hidden rulers maintain their identities behind interactive screens due to the frequent assassination attempts by other warring factions. As Warlord Valat is the only open target, he has no true directory power, though he is an extremely experienced warrior and has a palace made of jormungar bones.

1. CAGE SQUARE

The main square in the center of Anchoron is referred to as **Cage Square**. Lined from street to street, as high as forty feet are metal cages, holding captured humanoids hung out in the acidic elements as decoration. The moans and screams of the tortured and dying fill the air, provoking the occasional glance up from shoppers and passersby. This is the callolet's main prison, if such an idea exists in their culture. More commonly any and all criminal acts are met with a swift execution.

2. BATH COLISEUM

Callolet have one main social gathering and that is the daily bath, most typically in the **Bath Coliseum**. This arena-sized bath house uses a unique blend of perfumes and minerals amongst the thousands of small to large bathing areas. Warriors of all sorts can be found lounging here and taking their shore leave from their hunting vessels.

3. ARDET SPACE PORT

Although space travel is mostly limited to the elite wealthy and offworld traders who frequent Atalo, the spaceport is often a place of attraction for the local callolet. A small inlet with an advanced multilevel landing platform jutting out into the cove near its center accepts daily spacecraft. The bleached ribs of numerous sunken ships, sea vessels, and space vessels alike are littered about the cove's acid-filled lake.

A majority of these ships are of callolet design. They have begun to experiment with space exploration and the failed results still frequently can be seen and heard as they explode in massive balls of flame.

4. CLOAK OF INVISIBILITY

The east section of the city, in a stretch of otherwise unassuming grasslands in the vast plains is actually a precipitous fissure that splits the landscape and

plummets deep into Atalo. The fissure falls off so abruptly that careless travelers sometimes come close to falling into the hole, and local callolet have taken to calling it the **Cloak of Invisibility**. Spelunkers who have plumbed the chasm find little of note for the first several hundred feet, but farther in, where the light of day can scarcely reach, a series of now-disconnected caverns dot the sides of the cliffs. The tunnels wind beneath the earth for miles, constantly looping around and branching off to create a complex web of interconnected cave networks. The complete absence of acid liquid makes the Cloak of Invisibility truly a place of wonder on Atalo.

5. FINAL GLORY

Upon the western plains of the city, generations of callolet interred their greatest hunters, weaponsmiths, storytellers, and builders amid dozens of stone armories, temples, feast halls, and other fitting eternal residences. Despoiling any crypt is met with quick death, as it is one of callolet society's greatest crimes.

6. TROPHY MARKET

Legitimate merchants, traders, brain-buyers, local farmers, looters, and bandits all call truce to participate in this endless market. Mainly brain matter of the jormungar is on display here, but other body substances of the sea serpent can also be found. In addition, food, weapons, tools, livestock, lost faction treasures, and even the occasional alien-forged curiosity can all be found among the tents and space-shuttles of this bazaar.

The callolet **Lord of Coin, Datto Bagloid** (LN male callolet operative 14) keeps the peace in the market, viewing it as vital to his brigandry and other operations in the surrounding lands.

7. CRASH LANDING

The largest hotel in Anchoron, the Crash Landing is a rowdy place, situated just off the Trophy Market. Connor Mezzes (N male human soldier 12), the owner, lost his arm out on the hunt to an unavoidable burst of acid breath from a legendary sized jormungar serpent. The hotel takes its name due to its location atop the remains of one of the largest ships to crash land on Atalo. The landing was fairly successful, with only the front third of the ship being destroyed. This ship-hotel lists slightly to the left and is the subject of many jokes amongst the callolet locals. Connor still enjoys the location and so has had the structure fortified; he is fairly certain the building won't collapse — any time soon anyway.

8. WEAPON BALL

This peculiar factory is a massive orb of callolet design that contains one of the most prolific weapons factories on the planet. It appears as a ball sitting on a block of metal 1 mile in radius. Sitting near the Trophy Market, it is seen as a status symbol for the callolet to shop at the Weapon Ball and to acquire the latest or most advanced weapons they can afford.

9. TOWER CONTROL

This tower is made of dark metal that soars thousands of feet into the air, its sides sheer and smooth as glass. The structure is in charge of all incoming space traffic as well as dispatching and coordinating the city's sea vessels setting out on the hunt.

10. ANCHORON SHIPYARDS

No other place on Atalo manufactures vessels of hunting and war at the pace, quality, and volume of the **Anchoron Shipyards**. The poorly kept secret behind the unsurpassed excellence of the shipyards lies in the metaloid harvested by the dwarves of District 7 and sent to Anchoron in vast supply. The mutually beneficial arrangement serves to protect the dwarves' pact with Anchoron in return for supplying the callolet with the hardest, lightest metal on Atalo.

Planetarium

Puron Beach

Though it is not known for its tourism, Atalo does have two destinations that are frequented heavily by locals and off-worlders. Warlords of enemy territories have even been spotted at these destinations, after paying huge sums of protection money no doubt. **Puron Beach** is one of the most visited locations on all of Atalo. These black sand beaches are edged with lush acid rainforests that harbor an immense number of jungle creatures like the eight armed tree climbing primate known as the **octtogorn**.

A number of beachfront hotels line the drives that run up and down the beach. Most of these destinations are controlled by the government and the profits are used to augment the price of keeping a permanent military presence.

Paparon Beach

Although Puron Beach is the primary destination of tourists, **Paparon Beach** once held that distinction for the people of Atalo. These red sand beaches were once the locale the hunters would come to relax and have shore leave from the months or years being out at sea. Soon after, its reputation as a luxurious place to enjoy oneself spread.

Today, its hotels are old and not as well kept. Its streets and beaches have begun to show signs of the acidic rains and erosion due to time, but that does not stop those looking for shore leave at a bargain price from venturing to Paparon.

Khakaltic

Being a shield volcano, **Khakaltic** has a very gently sloping profile. The shape of Khakaltic is distinctly asymmetrical. Its flanks are shallower and extend farther from the summit in the northwestern direction than they do to the southeast. The volcano's shape and profile have been likened to a "circus tent" held up by a single pole that is shifted off center. Because of the size of the volcano and its shallow slopes, an observer standing on the surface would be unable to view the entire profile of the volcano, even from a great distance.

Latet

Found to the flank of Khakaltic, **Latet** is a type of cinder cone volcano that has heavy pyroclastic activity nearly every 24 hours. Large streams of lava can be seen streaming from the top of the volcano, creating a natural glowing beacon that brightens the night sky. It is seen as an act of bravery (or perhaps foolishness) to live near Latet due to its volatile nature. Ash and magma bombs are continually ejected from its vent, which sends lava toward towns and villages. It is not uncommon for an entire town to go completely missing in a matter of hours, having been covered in lava and ash.

Kaatak Ruins

The ruins of Kaatak run like a giant scar across the shallow sea that designates the border between District 2 and Calladore. These ruins have been used by the local callolet for centuries as a landmark during low tide, as the tops of the ruins can be seen through the green tint of the sea. Today, much of the ruin has been buried in silt and sand, but several square miles remain intact, with pure white-tipped towers gleaming from below. Beneath the white-tipped metropolis lies an ancient tomb that holds many answers to the riddles scholars ask when delving down to the Kaatak ruins. The twisted burial chambers were designed so as to deter would-be graverobbers, and ended up resembling a labyrinth more

than a crypt. The tomb is that of the first kaatak that did battle in defense of his people against the invading forces of aboleth.

To this day, the vengeful spirit of **Popkit Ssaasses** yet lurks in the cracked catacombs of his tomb, imprisoned in a maze-chamber of his own design and driven to madness over millennia of frustration and impotent rage.

District 2: The Sea Dome

One of the largest human settlements on Atalo is referred to as **the Sea Dome**. This undersea city has a dome of transparent steel constructed over the entire city. Each individual building has its own structural defense in place, just in case the dome were to fail, and in fact, they expect it to at times. All constructions are required to be able to withstand the pressure of flooding acidic liquid and be independent of the dome. Each citizen is required to carry their dive suits in a small emergency pack at all times. Most see this as a small price to pay for the majority of their lives being spent in a nonacidic environment without the need of breathing apparatuses.

The entire city is covered in low vegetation topped by clusters of big fern-trees and club-moss. There is a freshwater spring near the center of the dome. This is what truly made Sea Dome possible, for it brings in thousands of gallons of fresh water each day. Shortcomings include its extreme isolation and its reliance on supply missions for food, fuel, and other essentials. Like all economies, the Sea Dome relies on the hunt to bring in jormungar brain tissue to sell to off-worlders and even to its war neighbor, the callolet.

Inside, the city is a place of smaller domes and spires, ornate columns and statues of sea gods. Most humans can be seen training for the hunt, repairing submersible vehicles of all types, constructing weapons, or repairing sections of the sea dome.

District 3: Acid Gem Faction

The sparkle of the Acid Gem faction's land masses can be spotted miles before one actually crosses into their territory. This is due to the high concentration of luminescent crystals that form around the upper region of the small volcanos along their island chain. Some of these islands only form for a few short years, before crumbling back into the sea. The crystalline structures are exceptionally aesthetic, but their formation disrupts the land mass's natural cohesion and leaves most of these islands prone to erosion.

The Acid Gem's territory also bears an entire tiny sized silicon-based life, with crystalline humanoid bodies. Teams of these tiny creatures can be spotted due to their body's brilliance, running through the plant undergrowth. These creatures are also very war-like and tribal, using primitive weapons of spears made from wood and bone. Known as the **Ocaampo**, these humanoids see humans and callolet as delicacies and have their own 'hunt' for meat by stalking and attempting to slaughter Medium-sized humanoids at every chance they get.

District 4: Dragon Island

This island is a network of steep cliffs and jagged rocks. Thousands of cave openings dot the cliffsides that seep out acrid smoke in seemingly endless waves. From these cave openings, obsidian-colored black dragons dart in and out, constantly on patrol, circling the island, swimming, fighting, or flying in formation setting out on the hunt for the jormungar. Undersea caves give access to the interior of the island. This is **District 4**, better known as **Dragon Island** after its ruler: the Gargantuan black dragon known as **Arkinkall Revetereb the Unholy** (CE great wyrm black dragon).

It is unknown just how many dragons truly lurk within the spires of rock jutting up hundreds of feet on Dragon Island, but squadrons of hundreds have been spotted descending upon jormungar out in the Expanse, or teaming together to drag back the serpents' carcasses. The interior of the island is actually hollow and the rock spires connect to one another, which allows the dragons to exit from every side of the island. Within the interior, lush marsh is cultivated and grown. Swamp plants, small animals, fish, and crustaceans are farmed with a delicate touch normally unseen in these dragons.

Black dragons are very anti-social, hating all intelligent life outside their own faction, although daily infighting is not only common, but expected. They do sometimes ally in trade agreements with off-worlders and have been known to interact with the Clear Sky humans in trade for vegetation food supplies.

District 5: The Vent Dell

The Vent Dell is a series of volcanic vents and geothermal rifts constantly filled with smoke and toxic gasses. Nestled deep beneath the caldera of a massive volcano that comprises the land mass of **District 5**, the rifts serve as home to a war tribe of acid giants. **Warlord Sutavoss** (CE female acid giant soldier 10) rules the district with an iron gauntlet. Extremely volatile, she has been known to mobilize the entire acid giant faction to wage war over the smallest perceived slight by a non-giant. Technologically superior to most other races on Atalo, the giants may have been able to seize control over the planet, except for the fact that they are slow to procreate and have vastly limited number of soldiers compared to the collolet.

District 6: Clear Sky Islands

Known as the **Clear Sky Islands**, this chain of islands is the furthest point away from the Expanse and as such, seen as the least desirable territory in terms of the hunt. What makes **District 6** so unique though, is for the odd column of clear sky that hovers over the island chain. Like a protective tube, no green haze floats over the island, no acid rain falls upon its soil, and the humans who defend and live in the Clear Sky Islands have no need to walk in protective suits or use air masks.

The cause of this unusual atmospheric anomaly is still under investigation, but it is thought that whatever experiment might have created the Expanse, causes the acid environment, and perhaps took part in the destruction of Atalo's sister planet, might be the underlying cause of the almost pure oxygen atmosphere column that exists over the Clear Sky Islands.

The population also has the highest concentration of agriculture of the entire planet and indeed, grows more than 80% of Atalo's crops. With this sustaining factor, the humans of the Clear Sky Islands have been able to barter with nearly every faction for peace agreements and protection against any faction that may show aggression against it. The Clear Sky faction also continues to participate in the hunt, but it is seen more as a recreational sport, rather than a survival need.

District 7: Cold Wrench

District 7 is comprised of Atalo's largest population of dwarves. Seven small islands comprise the entirety of the territory, with each of the islands rich in heavy metal ore. This ore attracted off-worlders to settle and mine the metals. Soon, these became permanent settlements and in the end, the dwarves began to colonize the territory fully. Central upon each island is a fortress stronghold that has each repelled a number of larger invasion forces and at least one direct attack by an enraged jormungar.

The dwarves are known for their destructive engines and mechanical mega-golems standing forty feet tall and wielding massive energy cannons. These mega-golems hold a pilot and crew, with the option of carrying an assault force in its back cargo hold. The dwarves can be seen occasionally out at sea, hunting jormungar with a squadron of mega-golems in pitched battles against the sea serpents.

The name of District 7 came about as more of a nickname or slang for the dwarves use of one of their mechanical crafting devices. The hydraulic mega-wrench is used to tighten the three-foot thick bolts holding the mega-golems together. Teams of dwarves can be seen running around the constructs, repairing them with these wrenches. The wrench itself consists of a steel anvil that secures over the dwarf's chest with an extending arm that will quickly retract inwards to grip objects in between. A number of collolet and human warriors have met their end being crushed in the blink of an eye by these devices.

District 8: Cracked Fall

A ragtag jumble of unnatural, black, rocky islets identifies **District 8**. The islands are actually massive pieces of a meteorite that broke apart in the atmosphere and landed close by one another in the shallow waters. The **Cracked Fall** is inhabited by the largest assembly of vagabonds and adventurers on Atalo. At low tide, the Cracked Fall is accessible from one island to another, with only the last fragment of meteor island having its tail end in deep enough water year round to have a port for large ships. The locals tend to use rickety canoes and smaller sailing vessels to island hop during high tide. It is not unusual to see many larger ships anchored a half mile away at sea, the crew using small dinghies to reach dry land.

The Cracked Fall is ruled by an enigmatic shirren named **Warlord Fteek** (NE male shirren mystic 4/envoy 2), who maintains order in this district through cajoling, bribes, and outright violence. His other insectile brethren make up a majority of the population in this district, but a fair number of humans, androids, and ysoki ratfolk have taken up residency.

District 9:

Vaablorg – The Cube Faction

The landmass known as **District 9** is not a true island, but the collection of detritus from the entire ocean that has collected into a heap of swirling trash and anchored into place. Sea currents somehow converge in District 9 and with them come all manner of debris: jormungar carcasses and other dead animals, pieces of destroyed vessels, food, and vegetation can all be found floating toward District 9. The intelligent gelatinous cubes that call themselves "the slorsh" collect these items from the sea. This swirling mass has created a vortex and the rubbish has been pulled toward the sea floor and anchored itself to larger chunks of matter imbedded into the sand and dirt. **The Gluub**, or Warlord of the **Vaablorg**, is **Gluub Oolapssf** (N gelatinous cube envoy 2/mystic 12).

District 10: Dead Lands

Most factions avoid District 10 at all costs, despite the permanent island in the region that has territory that edges around the Expanse — resources which would normally be extremely valuable and fought over. This is because the population of this faction is comprised of exclusively undead, giving it its name: the **Dead Lands**.

Planetarium

Its ruler, **Warlord Kezz** (NE male human mystic 20) as he is known, is a powerful lich-like being. A thousand years ago when he came into power, he performed a ritual of necromancy that erupted in a chain reaction, transforming the entire populace into a mixture of ghouls, zombies, vampires, and other undead beings. These former humans no longer need to breathe and can be seen moving about without air masks, or even acid protective suits. None of the other factions have figured out the reason for the undead's immunity to the effects of the acid environment, but also have not stayed in the territory long enough to truly investigate. To an outsider, these undead may seem wild and barely sentient even though they are actually organized into a rigid caste system. While it's certainly true that undead plague other races in their eternal hunger for the flesh of the living, these undead organize into hunting bands, not only to hunt the jormungar, but other sentient races as well.

The Dead Lands faction is known for using massive zeppelins and airships while they participate in the hunt. On rare occasions, off-world ships have been seen landing in District 10 in apparent trade agreement. From a distance, vessels venturing close to the territory can spy vast necropolis cities sprawling with the roaming dead. It is said that the undead even keep living slaves to breed as cattle. Witnesses have viewed caged naked, pale-skinned victims raised in captivity and kept in herds, farmed for their very flesh. Some faction warlords have even made pacts with the undead to sell them slaves of their enemies captured at sea.

District 11: Bone Island

Atop an immense stone plateau, the ever-growing Jormungar Bone towers can be seen in **District 11**. Entirely composed of jormungar skeletons taken from the hunt, hundreds of towers appear both unbelievable and terrifying. It is said that construction of a bone tower is ceaseless, and as a tower's residents finish a hunt, they can almost instantly be spotted beginning further construction. A powerful priestess known as the Razzorzazz (LE female ysoki mystic 10) rules the **Bone Faction** and District 11. The entire island is comprised of ratfolk who are fanatical worshippers of her and think her a god.

District 12: Faction Vesk

The most recent of power factions is **Vesk Faction**, named for the race of large reptilian men that have slaughtered any and all who stand in their way. The vesk came to Atalo seeking riches and wealth, and to test their skills in hunting the legendary jormungar serpent. The island chain they claimed is almost below sea level, the murky and perpetually shaded regions is informally known as the **Shade Swamp Island**. Once part of the primeval forest that covered this entire region, Shade Swamp Island is a rotting, brackish marshland of tangled trees, dense overgrowth, quicksand, man-eating plants, monsters, and more. Small villages are cut from this swamp, holding marauding vesk tribes that even war amongst themselves.

District 13: Green Hell

District 13 has the distinction of being known as the **Green Hell**, like the planet itself. It gained this notoriety from its lack of central governing body. Hundreds of small war-tribes battle daily for control of the district. No one faction ever truly can claim superiority for more than a few months at a time. Although it is the poorest

of all the districts, its denizens still venture out for the hunt. Death, destruction, blood, and terror are a constant reminder of District 13's moniker.

The acid waters in District 13 territory teem with life both familiar and bizarre. Along with the unintelligent beasts — ooze sharks, blink eels, and giant seahorses — the district also plays host to a race of civilized acidic mermen. These beings call themselves the **Qaa** and make their homes on the backs of colossal sea turtles. These enormous turtles are used as mobile war platforms and are used in an attempt of the Qaa to migrate with the movements of the jormungar. Though the Qaa tend to be friendly and helpful to those outsiders who manage to impress them with their hunting skills, the sea-dwellers' civility should never be mistaken for weakness.

Jormungar Spawning Area

In one of the deepest valleys of the ocean, dozens of the jormungar humanoids maintain city-states and fortresses, all with the intent of providing a protected area in which their elders can swim, go through mating rituals, and lay eggs. Millions of eggs are laid year round, as the larger, older, and less intelligent jormungar fall into pure instinct in their elder years.

The younger jormungar tend to the millions of eggs on the ground and protect them from smaller creatures that might prey upon them. While the relative balance of power between the jormungar states shifts regularly, as the larger jormungar age, the ones just beginning in this second stage of life retain some wit about them and vie



for continued power before they descend into a mind of pure instinct.

Squadrons of Medium-sized jormungar can be seen riding elder jormungar, patrolling the border and keeping the peace within their territory. Any outsider is normally met with hostility first and questions later. If the young jormungar are present with an overwhelming force, they do not hesitate to herd the ancient jormungar into a battle frenzy and direct them at the intruders if need be. If approached in a diplomatic fashion, the jormungar typically talk of station, honor, and matters of precedence.

Adventure Hooks and Campaign Seeds

While at this time, Atalo remains a planet of primarily of the hunt, adventures on the world need not be limited to war and hunting. While adventurers may be brought in as hired swords, gunners, or security, they may also engage scientific exploration or infiltration of factions. Even stranger adventures are possible as detailed below.

The Deep Door

While exploring an ancient aboleth ruin, the PCs stumble through an undiscovered portal and find themselves in an active aboleth fortress on a distant planet or other plane of existence.

Alternately, the aboleth may have discovered the

ancient abandoned portal and have begun to come through with the intention of reclaiming Atalo. In order to stop them, the PCs will have to venture through the portal and shut the lost doorway down — then somehow fight their way back.

Into the Depths

Relations between callolet and the trum humans of District 5 have become strained, and it's up to an outside party — someone from neither faction — to play arbiter and set things right, whether with words or weapons.

Crush

Scholars have noted that the Expanse has begun to collapse and turn from a flat region into a bowl shape. In addition, any ships sailing through the region experience heavier than normal gravity. They need the PCs to dive to the bottom of the ocean in an attempt to find out why. Using a submersible vessel, the scholars have spotted the ruins of an ancient city where the disturbance appears to be emanating from.

Most Honored Hunter

The appearance of the PCs has triggered a unique reaction from the callolet people, as they believe one of the PCs is the legendary Most Honored Hunter and is destined to hunt the largest jormungar ever to be killed. The PCs have to go on the dangerous hunt or risk offending the callolet people.



Chapter Two: Kallio Prime

Physical Description

The planet of **Kallio Prime** appears as a glossy black sphere with a red hue, like a hazy droplet of blood cast out into the depths of space. Once a lush and fertile planet, it now sits in close orbit around its binary suns. These two stars, **Kaze** and **Lio**, were roughly similar in size during the beginnings of life in the Kallio system. Lio was slightly larger and burned brighter than its brother. This led to Lio burning quickly through its fuel source, causing it to expand at a steady pace across its solar system. In the present day, Lio is a red supergiant that has engulfed the other 10 planets that once made up the planetary system. Now, the planet of Kallio Prime is the lone survivor. Its orbit wanders dangerously close to the red supergiant and as a result, its atmosphere has been reduced and its surface heated to blistering temperatures.

Before Lio began its expansion, the Kallio system was full of diverse life on each of the 10 planets. The system thrived on community and interplanetary exchange of materials and resources. Kallio Prime was the largest of these planets, had the most resources, the largest population, and was the first to implement what would later become the standard for Kallio's interplanetary government. But now, with the ever increasing heat, most of the humanoids set off into the depths of space in search of other habitable worlds.

Although the people of the Kallio system were adept at planetary hopping, as they called it, they had not invested in deep space exploration and the fate of those that left in search of other worlds is unknown. What is known is that those people on the surface of Kallio Prime who could not survive in the blistering temperatures retreated into the very depths of the planet itself.

Most of the planet's surface is now a blackened and charred wasteland. Due to its steeply angled rotation, which is near horizontal, the same side faces the two suns with little reprieve. Most of this mid-sized planet's surface is comprised of black obsidian, however, the side facing Lio is splashed with color of a boiling ocean of white and red. The surface is one of massive volcanoes rising out from mountain ranges of black obsidian. Massive chunks of iron dot the mineral and metal rich landscape.

The mixture of heat and evaporating water creates a thin layer of atmosphere that occasionally becomes even thinner with blasts of solar radiation tearing across the planet. The sun facing side can reach upward of 650 degrees Fahrenheit at its hottest, while on the opposite side of the planet temperatures can range anywhere from 200 to 212 degrees. The races of Kallio Prime refer to the surface world as the **Kiln** and although the temperatures soar, it remains populated by a variety of life.

This is stark contrast to the underground environment in which a majority of the planet's populace lives. The **Below-World**, as it is called by the terrestrials, ranges from a pleasant 90 degrees in the average civilizations, to the deeper settlements which increase in temperature as they near the planet's core of superheated liquid iron-nickel. The otherwise lightless tunnels of the Below-World are interspersed by enormous, shining cities. These cities are powered by endless seas of surface solar panels that run massive power conduits to the Below-World.

Civilizations, History, and Current Status

Kallio Prime hosts a vast array of life, but most of it lies deep within the planet. The Kiln has blasted away any lifeform not resilient enough to live in extreme heat. As for the remaining life forms on Kallio Prime, they have only recently emerged from a long and devastating war between the surface-dwelling azer race and the Below-World Svartalfar Empire.

Kallio Prime still thrives as it once did, the center of an industrial planetary system, but without local planets. It has a major space hub and directs an enormous amount of traffic with alien races and merchants. Its planetary spaceport is actually located on the far side of the planet's surface, known as **the Boil**. This name refers to the intense heat of the surface boiling up the planet's water into massive clouds.

Almost directly opposite of the surface's most intense heat is the coolest surface spot. It is here where ships seem to disappear into the surface, but actually pass through a 1-mile-wide hole covered with a projected hologram. This rocky-looking illusion leads into a large hole that opens up into the subterranean world below. This tunnel leads to the space hub called **Vorlaw Station**. The station is the home to over 10 million citizens and is the largest city on or in Kallio Prime. Hundreds of thousands of side tunnels lead off from the central hub of the station that network across and through the entirety of the planet.

Sentients

Kallio Prime plays host to a numerous amount of sentient life due to the migration of aliens over the last millennium of Lio's expansion into a red super giant. One of the most detested of the non-indigenous lifeforms to take up residence upon Kallio Prime is the influx of the **shining children**. These creatures of burning light and strange geometry move through the upper regions of the Below-World and to the surface with an ease that other races fear and envy. Although the shining children remain a mystery, most native **kallions** fear that the shining children are somehow responsible for Lio's expansion and the death of the entire Kallio planetary system.

The Below-World is truly where the life of Kallio Prime is harbored. A mix of exploring azers, freed sinjin, and the native kallions easily mix with **derro** race to make up the majority of residents in the peaceful city-caves. These regions are under constant threat from large numbers of the wild **dire corby** tribes, the bat-like **sabosan**, and of course the ever present empire of the **svartalfar**. One of the mysteries of Kallio Prime is the presence of the xenophobic race known as the **thyth**. These creatures are rarely seen, and even more rarely interacted with. They are said to be the first true sentient lifeforms to have existed in the entirety of the Kallio system.

Azers

Great towers of the **azers** tip the charred mountain tops of the surface. This proud race, originating from the Plane of Fire, has crafted massive fortresses of iron and obsidian that scatter the landscape. Azers live in their strict caste system with the **Burning Caliph** seated at the **throne of fire** in their city known as **Iron Core**. The city of Iron Core boasts a population of 30 thousand azers with double that number in slaves. Most of these are made of the once ancient surface humans, now charred and mutated beyond recognition, known as the **sinjin**.

Azer culture does not exhibit a vast array of variability, the result of generations of azers insulated from outside influences. Although they know of the races that live in the Below-World, the azer seem content to stay in their cities of iron. For the azer, class and clan divisions are strong, and of great importance. Commerce and craftsmanship both play a strong role in all aspects of daily life, for honor and disgrace applies not only to oneself, but also to kin and clan.

Azers outside of Iron Core hold themselves apart, forming small, insular enclaves that attempt to replicate traditional clan life. Few have the desire to engage with outside races other than to trade wares and weapons.

The sinjin are humanoids with massively scarred flesh. They are hairless and thick browed, appearing more prehistoric in stature. Due to their powerful limbs and small craniums, the azer find them excellent laborers. Small tribes of sinjin are scattered about the Kiln and fight for resources directly with the azer, often coming into conflict with the dwarf-like race. The sinjin hunt in large bands in an attempt to surround and isolate their prey. Their major food source is another fierce hunter, the race of salamanders.

Derro

The derro inhabiting the Below-World are not native to Kallio Prime. They migrated from the Kallio system's first planet, **Anaze**, ten thousand years ago. When Lio's expansion through the system began, the derro had just been introduced to kallions. They began negotiations with kallions to trade in technology and magic, but then staged a merciless attack on the small band of kallions. The derro slaughtered them and took their ships and technology for their own. Some went on to explore other planets and systems, but a majority of them attempted to dominate Kallio Prime. The pending attack was put down and the surviving derro retreated into the Below-World.

The derros of Kallio Prime have retained a hint of that early technology, but have lost most of the essential knowledge to continue with space exploration. They tell the tales of their brethren leaving to explore the stars and lust for the comforts of the surface, yet the light of the stars cause them to blister, burn, and die.

The Below-World is a dangerous place and the derro encourage this notion by quickly silencing any strangers who stumble upon their settlements. Derros value their privacy and any undesirables, especially if they hold valuable technology, are quickly overrun and either killed or captured.

Derro are stout and strong, but not stocky. They retain a lithe appearance and are extremely agile. The average derro stands at 3 feet tall and weighs around 70 pounds.

Dire Corby

Dire corbies are subterranean predators who resemble humanoid crows with muscular arms and fearsome talons. In the Below-World, they live in massive tribes

of ravaging nomads. They make their homes in large cliffsides or along massive chasms. Sometimes they purposefully make enough noise to lure predators into the region, just to spring the trap of hundreds of corbies leaping down upon them in ambush. Every explorer knows the lightless tunnels of the Below-World as the **screech halls** when the bands of dire corbies are about.

A typical dire corby stands at 5 feet tall and weighs between 125 and 150 pounds, with little difference between males and females save that the latter tend to be slightly smaller (though no less deadly). In addition to being savage predators and enjoying the mad rush of taking on intelligent prey even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, dire corbies are also notorious cannibals when it comes to their young, and a mother dire corby must carefully defend her eggs lest a flock of male corbies from the same rookery descend on it and devour the unborn children in a flurry of yolk and blood. This ultimately counterproductive tendency only further supports the impression most races have of dire corbies as dangerously unbalanced beings, and may explain why the creatures remain relatively rare.

Kallion

The earliest race in the Kallio system to develop space travel was the kallions. They once held a vast empire upon the surface of Kallio Prime that covered most of its continents as well as colonies on other planets. Their mixture of technology and magic gave them a distinct advantage to the task of exploration through the dangers of space travel and the visiting of other worlds. They were also the first diplomats between planet races, a guiding bridge that helped to garner trade and cooperation. They also were the first to predict the great expansion of the star Lio.

In the first few hundred years after the inevitable fact of Lio's expansion began to sink in with the various races, the kallions began to transform the great fissure into the spaceport it is today. The descendants of those first kallions to descend into the fissure have taken on a slightly different appearance than their ancestors were documented as having. Their small craniums began to enlarge, their large size slowly thinned and became Medium-sized. They are currently the largest proportion of Kallio Prime's sentient life.

Physically, the kallions are equivalent to humans. They share all of the same characteristics of humans, but also gain the option of the darkvision racial trait (this replaces the skilled racial trait), as the select few of the race that have rejected the use of technology mutated and can now see clearly in unlit tunnels of the Below-World. Their physical stature runs from 5 to 6 feet in height and they typically weigh close to 200 pounds.

One of the odd trends current with the aristocratic kallions is the cyberlinking to construct automatons. The kallions purchase high end robots shaped in their own image, or in the military's case an armored soldier, and control its body from within a protected wireless network hub. This is currently being explored as a safe form of surface, deep Below-World, and space exploration.

Sabosan

Led by a vampire-king, the sabosan are an intelligent and evil race of bat-like humanoids dwelling in vast caverns in the Below-World. Sabosan are vicious predators who are a combination of sentience, intelligence, and a bat's natural adaptations for hunting. They favor warm temperatures, preferring to make their lairs in places that are inaccessible to most intruders, such as caves close to the surface or extremely deep within the Below-World. With wingspans almost three times their height, sabosan are agile and graceful fliers, capable of traveling

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miles on a single current of air in their dauntless search for prey. They have been seen floating down the miles of Below-World transient kallion shuttle tracks.

A sabosan's emaciated frame belies its strength and agility, which are not apparent from its gaunt appearance. Its giant, leathery wings can reach a span of almost 20 feet. Both males and females have red or dark brown fur on their heads, necks, chests, and backs. Sabosan stand just under 6 feet tall and weigh only 150 pounds.

Salamander

The salamanders that inhabit large portions of the surface on Kallio Prime are much less organized than the azers despite also hailing from the Plane of Fire. Their legions of fierce warriors are much feared by the other residents of Kallio Prime. The azers are known for their metallurgy, but it is not known for certainty if it their own abilities that produce such metal wonders or is it their enslaved salamanders that truly create the inspired works.

Though their lairs typically hover in temperatures of 500 degrees Fahrenheit or more, salamanders can tolerate lower temperatures. They tend to use lairs built into the rocky mountains that line the oceans. Because their habitat is so extreme, salamanders only save treasure that can withstand high temperatures, such as swords, armor, jewels, rods, and other items made from high-melting-point metals. Salamander society is a cruel one based on power and the ability to subjugate those beneath oneself. Beings beneath a salamander that cause it discomfort are often dealt a slow and painful death.

Svartalfar

Svartalfar are the descendents of fey who evolved on the second Kallio system planet of **Batta**. Five moons surrounded this planet, essentially cutting it off from direct light of any kind. This unique feature was compounded by the fact that a cabal of shadow demons took refuge on the world. The cabal plunged the world into a practice of shadow magic and all emerging life forms slowly became influenced by direct access to the Plane of Shadows. The svartalfar grew and soon the teachings of the shadow demons grew to myth and legend. Svartalfar appear human in form, except for ears which are pointed like an elf's. Their skin is very pale, to the point of almost being white. Their hair color ranges from a yellow blonde to bone white and both males and females wear it long and loosely bound. In addition to looking human, svartalfar have similar builds and life spans. Their eyes, which are solid black, are developed to see in complete and utter darkness. They decorate their torsos and upper arms with geometric tattoos. These tattoos hold spiritual and tribal significance to the svartalfar. It is said that you can read a svartalfar's entire life story in their tattoos. Among their own kind, svartalfar wear dark colored clothing that show off their tattoos. For males this means that they wear only dark colored breeches and black leather boots. Females usually dress in a similar fashion, but add a halter top to the ensemble. Among other races, they always add a long-sleeved tunic and a hooded cloak to avoid outsiders seeing their tattoos.

During the time of the great expansion, the svartalfar developed limited interplanetary transports with the knowledge they gained from stolen kallion technology and made their way to Kallio Prime. Crash landing upon the surface of Kallio Prime, they found caves and entry ways into the underworld of the planet. Here is where they began their own expansion. Their conquest of kallion cities began a gruesome and bloody feud between the two dominant species. Among their own people, svartalfar have a very strict hierarchy and

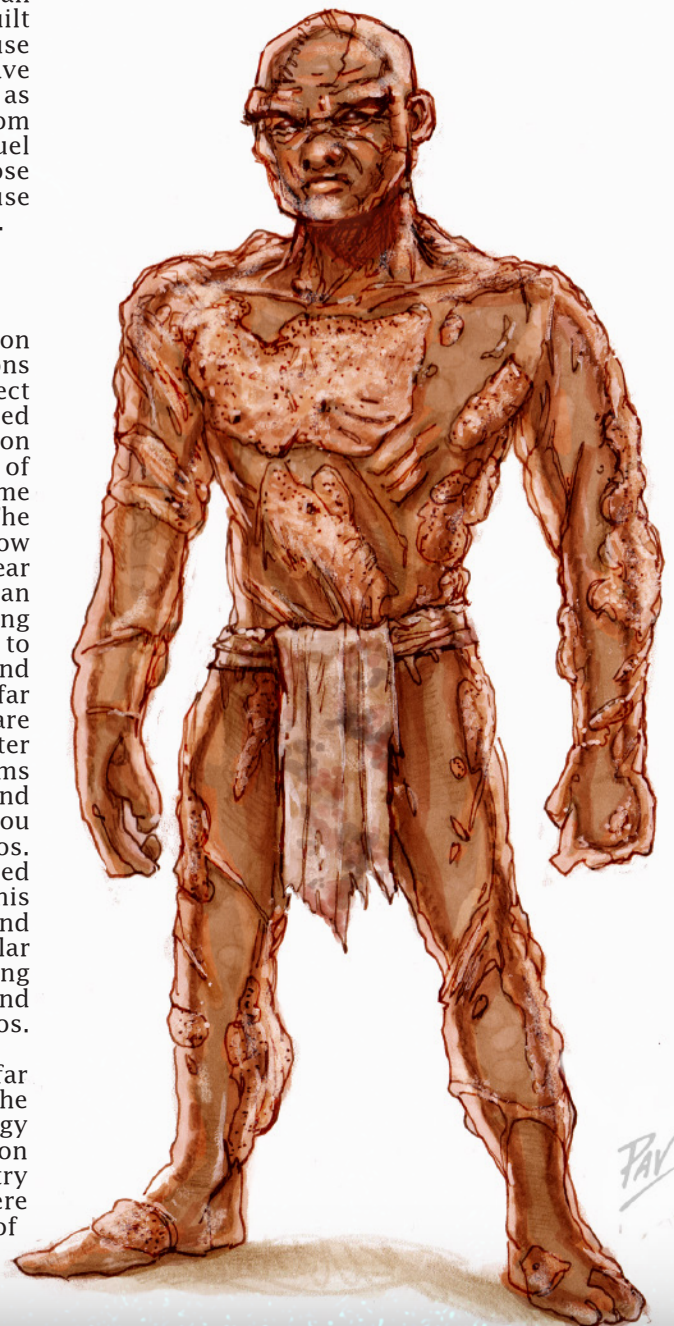
code of conduct. Everyone knows their place and how they work to advance the society as a whole.

New Creatures

Sinjin

These humanoids look extremely human, but with massively scarred flesh. Hairless and thick-browed, sinjin are a prehistoric humanoid race. Sinjin are robustly built and powerful. Their bodies are generally heavy and solid with a strong musculature. A sinjin's shoulders are stooped and gait slightly hunched. Their arms are longer and their legs shorter in proportion to a kallion's. Their fingers are stubby, while their feet are large and flat. Sinjin typically dress in salamander skins, and prefer primitive weapons and attire.

The sinjin civilization was old when the kallion races grew from a divergence in its gene pool. The sinjin, having



survived the catastrophes that periodically cleanse planets, survived by their ability to adapt and thrive in harsh environments. With Lio's expansion, the sinjin were a surface race that chose to stay on the surface and not retreat into the Below-World. This decision altered their development again and changed their physical nature to a point where most non-scholars would not think sinjin and kallions have a shared ancestor. Unlike their kallion cousins, the sinjin have not evolved with the need to advance technologically. In the hands of a sinjin, a stick is as lethal as a sword and the hide of the salamander is effective armor.

Thyth

Thyth are a mysterious and reclusive race that all other species living upon Kallio Prime whisper about. Said to be the first sentient creatures to develop in the entire system, they are rarely spotted and even more rarely interacted with. The thyth are humanoid in shape, but their bodies are more akin to dragons made of a malleable crystal-like skin. Thought to hail from the Plane of Earth, the thyth stand tall with a regal appearance, but move in a crouched posture, springing and leaping down the deep tunnels of the Below-World. Their face have a dragon cast, with a maw filled with crystal shard teeth, large eyes, and ridged brows, topped with rows of crystalline scale. They have muscular limbs, and elder thyth have short, disproportionate membranous wings.

Those who have encountered the thyth state that they felt uncomfortable around them, the same way they feel around any large predator. For their part, thyth are accustomed to distrust and don't expect better treatment from members of the other races, although some thyth may try to earn respect and companionship of other races through acts and deeds. The thyth typically only make contact with others if they have an individual desire or curiosity.

In thyth society, one gains respect and an elevated position as one ages. Indeed, similar to dragons, as the thyth reach extreme ranges of age they begin to grow in size. It would not be uncommon to come upon old or venerable-aged thyth being Huge or even Gargantuan in size.

Culture

Until recently, adaptation, survival, and warfare were the primary driving forces behind Kallio Prime's culture. More recently, science, trade, and profit have begun taking control of the planet's cultural demands. The kallions' use of the subterranean spaceports have had the result of accumulating vast amounts of wealth. This has trickled down to other species the kallions trade with for resources and goods. The azer have begun an uneasy trade agreement with the kallions, and even the svartalgar have slowed their attacks in favor of allowing the first merchants to enter their kingdoms.

The thyth have been ever aware of the shorter life spanned creatures and their curiosity has been piqued to the point that secret ambassadors of the thyth elder council have been dispatched to parlay with the kallions and the svartalgar empire. These dealings have not only tightened trade agreements, but have had the effect of spreading ideals and cultures across the various races.

Technological Level

In terms of the Kallio system, the kallions were known as the "star pioneers." They were the first race to achieve interstellar space travel. As such, they had spread this technological level to most of the planets that held life. This gave races such as the svartalgar the catalyst in developing space travel and weapons of high technological level. In comparison to other systems and alien technology, the

kallion level would be considered mid-level, as they can transverse space at slightly faster than light speeds. The kallions are even credited by some as having invented the **magedrive**, the drift engine that allows them faster-than-light speeds. This engine is driven by arcane magic to create multiple small doors in the fabric of spacetime that allow the vessel to jump from point to point at great speeds. This claim is debated by those kallions that believe the drive was brought to Kallio Prime by some other alien society. The magedrive acts as a drift engine with a technological +1 bonus to the engine rating.

Economy/Resources

The primary export from Kallio Prime is the development of its magedrive. For the last few decades, the production and exportation of the magedrive has funneled in a steady flow of wealth to Kallio Prime unseen in prior centuries. Consultants and engineers are sent out to help install, teach, and maintain the vast array of engines sold. This has also brought in a sizeable share of trade from beyond the normal star systems Kallio normally did business with.

Additionally, there is a darker side to the kallion economy that the ruling government attempts to quell, this being the slave market that exists between the salamanders and the native sinjin. In recent years, with the arrival of additional alien visitors, the slave market has sprung up. The salamanders have taken delight in the capture, enslavement, and now the sales of members of the sinjin race to off-worlders.

Government

Kallio Prime is governed by the **Provisional Government**, made up of 90% kallions and 10% other. The minority governing body consists of various species that also inhabit Kallio Prime. Every race and species has a delegate seat, all except the svartalgar. Some species, such as the thyth, have no governing seat at the table. The planet is also further divided into different provinces which are in turn governed by regional managers.

The Administrator holds special authority over the Provisional Government, as it is the political and parliamentary leader. He or she is simultaneously the PG's presiding officer, leader of the body's majority party, and the institution's administrative head. Administrators also perform various other administrative and procedural functions, and represent their regional district. Given these several roles and responsibilities, the Administrator usually does not personally preside over debates. That duty is instead delegated to members of the PG from the majority party.

Ecology

Kallio Prime is home to a complex network of ecological systems. The consequence of Lio's expansion having killed off most surface plant life, allowed certain heat-resistant plants to thrive. The kallions collected a number of pre-expansion plant life and brought them into the Below-World, so as not to lose out the historical impact of the plants. This relocation of plant life has given rise to new subterranean species that in the end has changed the nature of Kallio Prime's ecosystem.

Flora and Fauna

Due to the harsh conditions of the planet, all the forms of flora and fauna have evolved to be extremely hardy

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and powerful. Most, if not all, have a unique self-defense mechanism that consists of psychic ability, enhanced strength, augmented agility, increased mass, lower food/water intake, and/or various physical weapons.

Upon the surface, minimal plantlife is found and those few species present are hardly edible to kallions, but the sinjin's diet has adapted to include a variant heat-resistant version of a large flower referred to as a sunblossom. The super-heated sea is also a breeding zone for massive bacterial beds, kelp mats, and colonies of tubeworms.

In the Below-World, the plantlife explode into a network of dark-loving species. Among these fungi and mineral-eating plants spawn chemphil plants that exude their own bioluminescent light. In various caverns, technolight is emitted to a degree that previous surface species still thrive to this day. Kallions even speak of subterranean forests that can be discovered.

Apex Creatures

Kallio Prime has a handful of various creatures, outside the fully sentient creatures, that exist at the top of their respective ecological systems.

Phase Bat

Phase bats are human-sized bats living within the Below-World. They possess the ability to phase out of sync with the Material Plane and can drift along astral updrafts, gliding for miles on end in search of prey. Their innate echolocation can cross planar rifts to find its food sources, all of which are meat of some nature. A majority of their diet is the Below-World insects, but occasionally phase bat swarms appear and ransack svartalgar and kallion outposts. The main city-caves of the kallions have energy field generators combining technology and arcane magic that block the phase bats' ability.

Oozeriver

The fear of any Below-World patrol, these Colossal-sized oozes can move at their full speed down the lightless tunnels and easily squeeze their size down to a 10 foot space, like water through a bottleneck. Their acidic nature erodes and smooths frequented passages over time and gives these tunnels an almost unnatural 'worked' appearance.

There are many reports of an unsuspecting patrol suddenly becoming engulfed in the flood of an oozeriver. Those who survive by leaping out of the oncoming deluge of ooze speak of many minutes' worth of ooze flowing steadily by them and it dissolving everything in its path. These oozes have a slightly higher intelligence than a normal ooze and have been known to slow their pace, or even stop occasionally to peer at and perhaps investigate another sentient being, before erupting down its previous pathway.

Sunray

One of the most impressive sights for newcomers to Kallio Prime is catching a glimpse of the enormous groups of flying sunrays that will light up the sky with their bodies of pure light. Originally mistaken for alien spacecraft, the sunrays are a group of creatures hailing from the Plane of Fire that have flat triangular-shaped bodies. These creatures have long barbed tails that glimmer and shine like small beacons of light. The flattened bodies of sunrays allow them to effectively glide through the kallion sky. Approaching ships have sometimes described the spotting of millions of sunrays over the blackened obsidian landscape as if it were looking back into the depths of outer space and a sea of stars.

Population Centers, Landing Sites, and Points of Interest

The largest landmass on Kallio Prime is the continent of **Ioa**. This covers three-fourths of the planet's surface. Upon the surface there are only a few scattered settlements, made of heat-loving races. In the Below-World, settlements too numerous to count exist.

Solar-Spider Satellite

A millennium ago, one of the last colossal solar-spiders fed off the energy of Kallio Prime's only moon, **Motte**. The solar-spider had no idea that Motte's central core was infused with a Shadow Plane gate. As the solar-spider fed, it began to inexorably fill with shadows. This quickly overwhelmed the massive beast, poisoning it beyond its ability to regenerate. It died and now remains as a unique satellite orbiting Kallio Prime. Currently a small group of smugglers have taken up residence within the solar spider's husk.

Motte Mining Station

Motte Station is an example of the mining colony and spaceport that has flourished upon the surface of Motte. The surface of Motte has no atmosphere and very low gravity, but the crust of its surface is rich in metals and minerals. Motte Tower has multiple branches where ships can dock, which gives it an appearance of a massive tree.

Vorlaw Station

The side of the planet that receives the least amount of direct starlight is called the Boil. This area is shrouded in the steam boiling off from the superheated oceans of Kallio Prime. In what was an ancient volcano that had blown its caldera, a massive hole exists. This is the entrance to Vorlaw Station. The largest of Kallio Prime's cities, the station is also the planet's capital, housing the offices of **Administrator Mikka Brala** (LG male operative 15). Crowded with merchants, migrant workers, pilots, and adventurers, the station boasts a series of colossal tunnels that lead off the cavern entrance that led to an expansive series of docking facilities. Established as a base of operations for the kallion military, the city is a mix of old and new construction. Catwalks and platforms are everywhere in the station. A main battery of six megalifts provide access to different levels, although ladders, escalators, and ropes suffice for minor trips.

One of the largest structures in Vorlaw Station is the large holographic projector near the base of the cavern. This projector is directed toward the central opening and creates an illusion of a thick rock wall. This projection is so advanced, that only the most extreme inspection by ship's sensors can detect it is not a solid wall.

1. The Cavefisher

This seedy cantina is dangerous, even by Below-World standards. **The Cavefisher** is a supposed neutral zone, where any and all races of Kallio Prime can mingle, discuss trade, and set up meetings in smoke-filled security. Frequented by alien technology smugglers, svartalgar weapon traders, arcane artifact merchants, and a mix of other unsavory types who ply stolen goods, the business is owned by a kallion known locally as Caster. The retired

rogue is said to make more illegal transactions in a year than most outlaws could in a lifetime.

The Cavefisher is located deep within a hidden tunnel, just off of Vorlaw Station. One side of the business is intended for typical patrons of a cantina. The other consists of a series of private rooms, each set up to address the needs of individual species. Its proprietor, **Chandril Kaah** (N male operative 4/soldier 5) is a half kallion, half svartalfar with ties in both races. If one wishes to do business in black market items from either culture, the Cavefisher is normally where they can be found.

2. Kantor (Zero-G) Opera House

Located on the ceiling of the massive cavern that constitutes Vorlaw Station, the **Kantor Opera House** is a local landmark known as the **Zero-G**. The inverted structure was built to appear upside down, but its internal structure rightside up. The construction is elaborate in design and indulgent in its architecture. The building accommodates an audience of two thousand in its traditional theater design.

3. Refuse-Yard

Vorlaw Station has many junkyards, but the **Refuse-Yard** is a unique entity. It covers an area close to 200 square miles. It holds obsolete equipment, broken scape transport parts, ancient technology, weapons, toxic waste, and the remains of its inhabitants, as well as an occasional victim of the local organized crime syndicates. Its atmosphere is one of a chemical cloud that hangs low in the air. The very ground itself seeps poisons and waste that seeps up from below. The junk is piled in massive mounds, some reaching 100 feet in height. The region is a network maze of pathways, some of which deadend and some which continue to circle around onto themselves. No troops govern this region and so its inhabitants make do with what law they impose upon themselves and others. The Refuse-Yard is also the home of one of the largest gangs of thugs and assassins, the **Overwatch**. This gang fights daily in a continuous turf-war with the other neighboring gangs. Unknown to mos, is that an intelligent ooze that goes by the name of **Fleegh** (CE awakened black pudding), commands the Overwatch.

4. Vorlaw Game Reserve

Near the edge of the Refuse-Yard is the **Vorlaw Game Reserve**, one of the only places on the planet where one can see some of the creatures and wildlife that once lived upon the surface. Artificial sunlight is cast upon the reserve from a permanent globe of *daylight* spell set high into the cavern's domed ceiling. Kallions have an annual, controlled hunt within the reserve's borders to cull certain animal populations.

5. Sprawl Library

One of the newest structures in the city, the **Sprawl Library** is not a traditional building for reading books and searching through databases of information. Rather, behind the walls of this towering pyramid building capped with mithril reliefs, the information contained in the archives is normally accessed through hologram interface. Re-enactments of ancient battles, pivotal moments in history, and research details are displayed in life-like details where the individual can interact with the holographic environment and learn through a firsthand account. The library maintains an extensive collection of holographic material encyclopedia, science texts, historical documents, and other important items in digital form.

6. University of Kohr at Vorlaw Station

The **University of Kohr** was named after the arcane engineer who invented the magedrive and saw it to its completion of construction. The school teaches a wide variety of curricula, but all programs have a strong focus on science and the arcane. It is primarily thought of as the premier school for those wishing to become magedrive experts in construction and design.

The university also has an orbital platform, **Kohr Station**, where much of its engine design and testing is performed. Several ships are docked at the platform for use in these experiments.

7. Sesses Comporium

This section of Vorlaw Station is populated with moneylenders and futures speculators, which take residence in sleek, modern buildings to oversee and multiply the wealth of the citizenry. Much of this financial district was constructed following the invention of the magedrive and built with the money and funds generated as a direct result of the business dealings with outside alien worlds.

8. Housing

Vorlaw Station's housing is a mixture of natural construction to blend in with the cavern and the hand-made construction. The residential area is a cylindrical common space descending from Vorlaw Station's surface cavern. Individual apartments radiate outward from the cylinder wall, and hanging terraces filled with lush vegetation maintained by alchemical fertilizer and magic give the architecture a natural feel.

9. Government Hall

The **Government Hall** is the oldest continuously operated government structure within Vorlaw Station. Built during the time of the **grand descent**, the building lies relatively close to the mouth opening. A rectangular stone structure, the main floor features a landing pad for shuttles and tunnel-cars. Thousands of glassed-in balconies overlook the main floor, each decorated with a banner of a region's colors.

10. Val Innercore Prison

Just as most planets governed by the rule of law, Kallio Prime has developed its own maximum security facility: **Val Prison**. The prison boasts an impressive array of sensors, guards, and wards to protect the employees and to ensure the prisoners remain where they are supposed to be at all times. Located within a hollowed out cube of stone, the only way in or out is through a modified transportation gate which teleports passengers past the 400 feet thick rock bed surrounding the prison in every direction.

11. The Grove Museum

The **Grove** is a park dedicated to vegetation and living plants. At its center is a small display of barkless trees. Age and wear have turned the exposed wood a dark gray color and cracked the surface enough that a casual observer may mistake the color for regular bark. For over 12,000 years it has stood as the kallions' premier repository for artifacts worth preserving. The Grove's exhibit is divided into smaller groves — each of which can take days to explore — including the Grove of History, Grove of Surface Flora and Fauna, and the Grove of Science. Each artifact is displayed in a uniquely grown tree that conforms to the shape of the object it holds. Maximum security is in place on and around each object, but made in a way as to look natural and unobtrusive.

12. Kalliphite Monastery

This structure is a maze of stalagmites and stalactites interweaving into a jumbled facility. The **Kalliphite Monastery** houses over one thousand monks, religious recluses who are given to pondering the mysteries of the universe. The monks can only rarely be seen at certain hours of the day, as they train in their ancient martial arts while garbed in bright red robes. Atop the largest of the stalagmites is a large slab that has been cut across the stone with five stalactites draped around the central piece. The stoney structures are named in sequence; the Stone of Scholars, Stone of Diplomats, Stone of Philosophers, Stone of Art, and Stone of Contemplation. The main structure holds the monks and contains classrooms and living quarters. From the outside, the monastery shows aging in its cracking stonework, but inside the monastery sports state-of-the-art equipment and training gear.

13. Daax Market and Exchange

This huge market is where most merchants who are involved in the shipping of live animals, livestock, feed, and fertilizer meet to bargain with their peers. Beyond a compact tram-system, other features of **Daax Market** are blocks of pens, cages, low buildings filled with stalls, warehouses, and lending houses. Conversation is nearly impossible over the roars of caged animals and the booming voices of auctioneers. Lining the walls of the main warehouses are vault-like doors sectioning off private chambers, where sensitive animals or special acquisitions are exhibited for customers who present proper credentials. Dealers who work the market range from official government representatives, alien ambassadors, to the criminal.

14. Cloud-Sky Ranch

This ranch is built upon a jagged plateau that raises a majority of the city's meat supply. Millions of head of kargy-cattle roam this section of the cavern. The kargy are a hearty four-legged lizard beast with soft shaggy manes and long, glossy yellow snouts. Their thick muscled legs end in fingerlike appendages with green mottled spots running their length. As they are excellent climbers, the kargy move rapidly up and down the tunnels.

15. Valley of Fire

This desolate place is the burnt out remains of an ancient volcano. Now hollow, the large gash in the planet's crust is open to the skies above. Little to no shade exists here; the rock and formations absorb the heat of the suns, causing them to radiate brilliantly. Massive heat shields are set in place to reduce the tunnel's temperature from superheating, but during the warmest months of the year, the temperatures will kill most creatures. The derro have been known to exile disgraced members into these tunnels.

16. Sector Z

In the lowest depths of Vorlaw Station lies a network of tunnels that had once served as a forward observation post for the svartalgar. These tunnels extend for miles through the region, many connecting to the upper empire of the svartalgar.

Kaar's Trench

This massive fissure runs from the surface straight down through the Below-World for almost 10 miles. This vents much of the gasses between surface world

and the Below-World. The bottom level of the trench is also accessible to the kallion mining operation and a small length of the trench is featured on the kallion entertainment network as its winding length makes for an excellent race course for trench jockeys. The current champion is **Vayta Vegaa** (CG female kallion envoy 12).

Baylin Shipyard

Located 20 miles outside of Vorlaw Station, **Baylin Shipyards** are a bustling center of starship production. The multitude of tunnels that led in and out of the shipyards makes it easily accessible. One of the largest Below-World caverns known to exist, the shipyard takes up every inch. Its sheer size can accommodate vessels ranging from interstellar cargo carriers to hundreds of small one-pilot starfighters.

Innersea

This enormous body of fresh water is important to nearly all of the life forms in the Below-World. The ocean covers an area of over 400 square miles, comprised within a series of caverns that form a network. **The Innersea** is able to support the fish, aquatic creatures, and fishermen alike. Most of the water's surface is covered in a phosphorescent algae that supports kelp beds and microorganisms the larger fish prey upon. This body of water has not completely been mapped nor explored in its entirety and some think this water supply filters down to support even the svartalgar empire.

1. Calonight Crystal Vault

The Calonight Crystal Vault is the name given to this unusually deep cavern filled with crystalline pillars at regular intervals. Spaced at about every 20 feet or so is a pillar of crystal. Within the crystalline structures is a twisted formation of colors, almost as if the core of the crystal had melted and been swirled. This area has become an adventure hike and vacation destination due to its awe inspiring aesthetics and extremely pleasant climate. Unknown to the kallion people is the truth that the pillars of crystal are the tombs of ancient thyth. The entire complex is actually an ancient burial ground. The thyth people have retreated into deeper tunnels as the kallion people expand their own city.

2. The Mithril Beach

The fine sand along the shores of the Innersea have a white-silver color, giving rise to its name of **the Mithril Beach**. The area is a well-known tourist spot for kallions and alien visitors alike. The Mithril Beach region offers numerous hotels, restaurants, resorts, and gambling casinos. Thanks to the closer proximity of the sea to thin areas of the planet's crust, the heat from the surface radiates to keep the waters and air currents along the beach at a steady summer-like temperature.

3. Ventiya Resort

The Ventiya Resort is a small resort built upon an island in the Innersea. It is one of the most elegant of resorts in the Below-World and a playground for the rich and powerful of Kallio Prime. It sports a large sporting arena, a corporate convention center, and multiple casinos.

4. Undergate Ruins

At the far edge of the Innersea lies an ancient fortress called **Undergate**. Erected by the svartalgar in the distant past, this imposing structure is studded with bas-reliefs

of the svartalgar people and warriors. It has survived the crashing of the Innersea's waves for centuries with little change. Undergate was once the furthest extent of the early svartalgar empire. This lone outpost was the frontier of settlers and explorers from the empire in search of riches. What led to its abandonment is still unknown.

5. Sea Ferry

Nothing says Innersea quite like the **Sea Ferries** bouncing back and forth across the waterways carrying passengers between resorts and various attractions. The line of ships is controlled by a holding company which itself is owned by the Wayloon Corporation. Vehicle traffic across the Innersea is closely watched and monitored by kallion troops.

6. Landon Outpost

Southwest of the Undergate ruins sprawls **Landon Outpost**, a kallion stronghold. Landon Outpost surprises most who view its battlements due in part to the intricate system of weaponry, pillars, wall tubes, and force fields which enhance the aesthetics of this fortress. Landon Outpost runs a protective boundary along the coastline. Throughout the outpost is a maze of room and corridors, surrounding a training field within. This fortification is designed to withstand a small frontal assault, but comes equipped with jet-tube escape pods for quick retreats in case of an emergency.

7. Lessel Water Mine

In the extreme southern latitudes of the Innersea lies a massive pool of dense, heavy-water. This pool has a very distinct and easily discerned edge and its swirling black water never seems to disperse from its central source. Like oil and water, the waters never mingle for more than a moment's time before its emulsification resolves back into a central pool around four hundred feet across. In the middle of this dark pool is a large pumping station, **the Lessel Water Mine**. Boats and submersible crafts can frequently be seen about the station. To tourists, it is an odd landmark, but to the Lessel Corporation, it is the life's blood of their company. The dark water is an incredibly rare liquid metal composed of hydrogen and oxygen. This metal is created only at the most extreme pressures and at the cavern's temperature appears as a liquid. Metallic trimethylated hydrogen oxide is used in creation of biochemical gel pack circuitry. Packs of this liquid metal are used in place of normal circuits and can compose, organize, and store data in more efficient configurations. **Mining Lead Dr. Sucu Lessel** (CG female mechanic 14) helped to pioneer the biocircuitry and leads the company in its extraction of the dense liquid from the Innersea.

8. Reef Haven

Only a few miles off from the Mithril Beaches, under 50 feet of crystal-clear water, lies the small community of **Reef Haven**. The reef itself is the single largest living organism on Kallio Prime. The 1,000 miles-long ecosystem comprises thousands of reefs and hundreds of islands made of over 600 types of hard and soft coral. It's home to countless species of colorful fish, molluscs, and other more dangerous aquatic life. However, a group of kallions have settled this reef as well. A complex series of crystal-steel structures showcase its glory. Its central hub is a superdoom structure large enough to house multiple organically shaped, 20-story buildings, beneath its transparent barrier. The infamous skyline lights up from beneath the waters illuminating the cavern roof in a multitude of fantastically strange shifting patterns.

To enter Reef Haven, one must hop a ride on the **Haven Viaduct**, a massive indoor escalator system so big that it includes its own shops and apartments. This system takes riders down through the waters to the main living areas of Reef Haven. A good way to determine an individual resident's importance within Reef Haven is to look out from their balcony and see their view of the small city: the better the view, the more status the person claims.

Reef Haven started as an aquarium and sea-themed resort park, but soon grew in population and size, then an unusual event transpired, which the locals refer to as **The Awakening**. A large group of sea-life were magically awakened and gained sentience. These creatures began to form their own workings of community and social government, and soon began to rise up in defense of their own personal rights and freedoms. This drew even larger crowds of kallions to the location and soon a massive aquatic research lab sprung up. Now, Reef Haven is seen by many as a utopian society with which others hope to obtain in regard to its tranquility and comradery.

9. Sabosan Caves

This region is strictly prohibited from journeying in by the Provisional Government, although special permits are sometimes granted with the understanding that the PG is not responsible for any deaths or harm that occur. This is due to the hostile and deadly nature of the sabosan that claim these caves as their homes. Led by a vampire-king, the sabosan are extremely territorial and typically only venture out from their cave complex to hunt. The underground cliff-face pockmarked with cave openings is actually a facade to give the illusion of many caves. Once inside, the cave entrances all converge into a single massive complex. Within this large domed cave, hundreds of bubble-like structures are anchored to the immense rock pillars. These bubble structures are comprised of a mixture of mortar made from partially digested food — primarily kallion flesh — mixed with the stomach fluids of the sabosan and dirt.

Imperial Palace of Svartalgar

This subterranean palace of the svartalgar empire is a colossal structure that not only holds the emperor, but serves as the capital city itself. This dazzling transparent-steel structure is built within an oval cavern 10 miles wide and is illuminated along its gray reinforcement beams with glowing crystals. Famous within the **Imperial Palace** are the hanging gardens, obsidian pyramids, and zero-gravity fountains. The palace city houses over 20,000 svartalgar and twice as many slaves kept by the evil fey.

The Tunnel of the Purple Worm serves as the main passageway linking the svartalgar empire to the rest of the Below-World. The corridor named for the scalloped walls that give it the impression of having been hollowed out by the massive purple worm, was indeed done in that very fashion. However, the first passage was widened significantly in a controlled manner, as the svartalgar domesticated a breed of the purple worm for industrial purposes. It is said that the Tunnel of the Purple Worm is large enough that a large star cruiser could pass through and not scratch its hull.

Built around the Imperial Palace is a broad, open walkway carved into the glass-steel structure. This walkway interweaves in and out of the main structure at security checkpoints. The majority of the Palace's citizens dwell within the outer region of the palace walls, where organized streets connect rows of private dwellings, shops, and alehouses. From the streets, a network of bridges, archways, and balconies can be seen spanning the entire structure. Beyond the walls of the Imperial Palace, a tangle of tunnels weaves seamlessly

Planetarium

through the structure and connects to thousands of halls, chambers, and streets.

1. Forge Wall

Constructed around the entirety of the Imperial Palace is the **Forge Wall**. This 40-foot thick stone battlement serves as a broad defensive platform, but also as housing for the svartalvars' guards. The rampart is permeated every few hundred feet by large siege towers. Embedded within these walls lie thousands of housing apartments for soldiers.

2. Hanging Gardens

Throughout the Imperial Palace lies a network of connected crystal-steel gardens. These mirror walkways, bridges, and crosswalks span overhead hundreds of feet in large common spaces, with mazes seemingly weaving throughout the gardens. The sheer number of plants and vegetation is staggering and so it is not surprising to find that these gardens are cared for by the military troops. Each soldier is responsible for his or her own 10-foot square garden. Any section suffering from neglect is identified and the soldier responsible is quickly disciplined.

3. Obsidian Pyramids

Svartalvar scientists have come upon many of the thyth's lost remains. Some of these relics, called **the Obsidian Pyramids**, have been studied extensively, but their true purpose continues to elude the svartalvar. These pyramids are always 40-foot high by 40-foot wide and made of smooth obsidian rock. They resist all attempts to damage their surface (hardness 20, hp 600, Break DC 40). Unknown to the svartalvar is that the pyramids are gateways to be activated that allow the user to cross over into the thyth's spirit world.

4. Zero-Gravity Fountains

Visitors to the Imperial Palace can be seen gathering around the zero-gravity fountains. These fountains continually spray water jets into an artificial anti-gravity environment that allows the streams to perpetually move about in a globe. It is not unusual to see svartalvar children playing near and within the water globes.

Thyth Crystalheart

The race thyth does not openly invite nor seek out other races to enter their homeland. Referred to as the **Crystalheart**, the caverns that constitute the thyth homeland are a mixture of crystalline structures and massive jagged spire-cities. Each crystalline metropolis stretches up more than out giving each tower a needlelike appearance. Some of these spires are transparent while others are totally bereft of windows or entrances.

Birth Chamber

Miles wide, this cavern is one of the most protected areas of the thyth homeland. A sea of crystal rolls out in each direction like a smooth sheet of liquid glass. This is the birthing grounds of the thyth.

Adventure Hooks and Campaign Seeds

While at this time, Kallio Prime is a planet of trade, adventurers on the world must be wary of the hostile nature of its residents. Though adventurers may be brought in as warriors or military advisors, they may also engage in such exotic pursuits as espionage and military intelligence gathering. Additional seeds for adventure can be found below.

The Dwellers Beneath

A powerful earthquake has closed off the cave complex connecting the PCs to Vorlaw Station. The PCs must weave their way through the Below-World in an attempt to find a new exit out of the subterranean world. Along the way, the PCs encounter a svartalvar patrol and either gain a potential guide or a dangerous enemy.

Rescue of the Sun Worshipers

While viewing the landscape of the surface world, the PCs are approached by a group of sinjin shamans seeking adherents among the tribes of the Kaa Valley, which have gone missing. The chieftain has laid the blame of these missing persons squarely at the feet of the shamans. As an unaffiliated group, the PCs are asked by one of the high shamans to solve the mystery, rescue the acolytes, and bring the culprits to justice. Clues lead the PCs to a salamander slave encampment.

Uncovering the Tchrats

A private kallion entrepreneur approaches the PCs in an attempt to hire them as a team of investigators. He has developed a new ignition to the magedrive, but its plans have been stolen. He asks the PCs to infiltrate or investigate a group of **Tchrats** to see where the plans to his ignition are currently being stored or to whom they have been sold.

Pleading of the Crystal People

The PCs wake to find themselves in Crystalheart. The thyth ask the newcomers to help locate several of their treasured artifacts that are rumored to be held within the Imperial Palace of the Svartalvar. These Obsidian Pyramids are large artifacts that can be activated. Activating the pyramid causes them to partially *plane shift* and become semi-insubstantial. This allows the large structures to be moved with ease.

Chapter Three: Athunee's Flyer

A High-Speed Haven

A woman named Athunee Masqua commands a comet that hurtles through space and serves as a refueling and outfitting station for passing ships.

The dusty ice chunk now known as Athunee's Flyer travels at incredible speeds in a hyperbolic orbit around its sun, so it was tricky for Athunee's crew to land on its pock-marked surface and set up shop. A soldier who was dishonorably discharged, Athunee is referred to as Captain Masqua by her team, who service all ships capable of landing on this fast-moving spaceport. During her time in the Royal Armada, Athunee served as a ship technician, so adopting a similar career in civilian life was a natural fit — even if her chosen base of operations is anywhere but typical.

A Comet's Life

Though originally recorded as P43-L, the small icy body now known as Athunee's Flyer has been making its trip across the system for thousands of solar years. Pre-Gap annals describe it being seen in the night sky several millennia ago. Cultures on primitive planets have ascribed varying degrees of religious importance to its infrequent but predictable appearance. More advanced societies eventually measured and probed the comet. Regardless of how it was perceived, though, P43-L has been a presence in the system for far longer than anyone can remember.

Characteristics

Athunee's Flyer is not a perfect, pretty sphere, as the illustrations in children's books would have one believe. The comet is oblong and irregularly shaped. Compared to other space bodies, it is tiny, at only 12.5 miles in length and 6.5 miles thick at its widest point. However, due to the mass of ice and gas surrounding it, the comet appears well over 62,000 miles across to the unaided eye. The comet itself, known as the nucleus, is generally rock-like in appearance, though it contains few traces of heavier metals such as iron. It is primarily comprised of light rock, ice, and frozen gasses such as methane, oxygen, and ammonia. None of these "natural resources" has any real monetary value. However, the Flyer's core is solid enough to support habitation domes and underground tunnels.

Due to its asymmetrical shape, the Flyer tumbles haphazardly rather than rotates uniformly, so one "day" is anywhere from 50 to 140 standard hours long.

Atmosphere and Gravity

The "atmosphere" of a comet is called its *coma*, a long teardrop-shaped cloud comprised of dust and melting ice. The length of the coma depends on the Flyer's distance to the sun; the Burning Mother's radiation heats up the comet's surface and causes the coma to expand as gasses are discharged into space. This is known as *outgassing*. The coma does not offer a breathable

ATHUNEE'S FLYER AT A GLANCE

- The comet's interior has been excavated, the tunnels used by Athunee's crew.
- The Flyer visits all parts of the system during its 70+ solar year orbit.
- The Parallax Saloon is a nexus of information and racial exchange.

medium for most species, so visitors will need to equip themselves accordingly until they reach the artificial environments constructed in the Flyer's core.

A dramatic tail stretches out behind the coma. This tail can become exceptionally long, as dictated by changing solar winds. The charged particles carried in this "wind" can extend the tail as far as 31 million miles behind the soaring comet, depending on the proximity of the nearest star and the amount of ambient radiation.

Due to its small mass, Athunee's Flyer has no appreciable gravity. Specifically, the gravity is equal to 1/100,000 g. Anyone intending to explore the comet's surface must account for this when venturing out.

Speed and Orbit

Athunee's Flyer is aptly named, as it soars through Pact World space at 43.5 miles per second or approximately 157,000 miles per hour. A standard planet moving through space is large enough that its inhabitants don't feel its movement. The same cannot be said for the Flyer; those dwelling inside the comet hear the constant hum of motion and experience the same physical sensations of those aboard a fast-traveling starship. Only the most experienced or daring pilots are willing to risk docking at the Flyer's single spaceport.

Despite its considerable speed, the Flyer still requires over 70 years, Pact Standard Time, to complete its full orbit around the system's central star. During this journey, it passes close to many inhabited worlds and is visible in their night skies. Most advanced civilizations can point to a time in their distant, pre-Gap past when their ancestors worshipped the comet or at the very least venerated it as a sign from a higher power. Even today it holds a special place in the imagination.

Landing on the Flyer

Safely touching down on the spaceport that's moving at these incredible speeds isn't a simple matter. Pilots must be equal parts daring and skilled. Anyone attempting to land on the LZ must make a DC 25 Piloting check. Failure by 5 or less results in an aborted attempt; failure by more than 5 results in a crash, with the effects, of course, adjudicated by the GM.

Flora and Fauna

Athunee's Flyer supports no indigenous life. Even microbes find a comet's surface inhospitable. The comet's rocky interior does not provide the proper chemical mixture to encourage single-cell organisms to develop. On the comet's surface, a lack of atmosphere and magnetic field mean that the Flyer is constantly bombarded by solar radiation, further ensuring life does not develop here. However, industrious opportunists have excavated chambers inside the Flyer and created ersatz environments so that life can flourish, even in such an unlikely place.

Defenses

The Flyer has no gun emplacements or batteries of lasers ready to defend itself from would-be invaders. It depends on its own reputation as a neutral site to garner it a free pass from pirates looking to get lucky. The Flyer has no real strategic value, so sovereign governments have no reason to interfere with it or try to claim it as their own. So far, this arrangement has worked for everyone involved, but that is no guarantee of the comet's long-term safety.

If the Flyer were to be besieged, an armed force could easily access the spaceport. But as many as 2,000 visitors might be in the Flyer at any one time, and a good percentage of those guests are armed. Any invading force would have to account for this "militia," when making plans for a takeover.

A Comet's Commander

The trouble began with a court-martial. A dozen years ago, a naval captain was convicted of assaulting an admiral, stripped of her rank, and summarily discharged. A career soldier, Athunee Masqua (N female human soldier 14) went from leading drop-ships into military hot zones to looking for work as a hired gun on Kifumsitu (see Chapter XX). She hadn't been able to convince the court that their beloved and well-financed admiral had gotten drunk on kobold rum and tried to force himself on her at the officers' ball. So in the end, he'd kept all the stars on his shoulder, and she'd been banished with only her boots and a spare change of clothes.

Never one to let fate have the last laugh, Athunee assembled some of her old military cronies, bargained for the use of a starship, and completed enough jobs as a trader-for-hire throughout various systems that she was able to finance the feat that made her famous. With incredible technical skill, a good amount of luck, and the financial backing of a mysterious benefactor, Athunee and her crew touched down on the surface of a comet, excavated its interior, and turned it into home.

The military was truly the only place where Athunee felt comfortable. After her discharge, she struggled to find herself. Lacking the structure the navy provided — and with no troops for her to command — Athunee knew she had to put herself back in such a place, while at the same time providing a useful service. The Flyer is her daring gambit, and so far it has reaped great dividends while also garnering her a significant degree of fame.

Athunee Masqua is a dusky-skinned human woman in her early 40s. Her black curls only now revealing the occasional silver strand, she seems to defy time with her considerable level of physical fitness. A woman almost always in motion, she is determined to keep the Flyer a neutral site and to make a bit of money along the way. A jack-of-all-trades, she can pilot a ship, fight her way out of a scrape, speak eloquently about wine, and win more often than lose at cards. A soldier by trade, she has never

quite left her former life behind. Today she commands a loose association of like-minded spacefarers whose main desire is simply to live freely.

A Captain's Life

Athunee Masqua spends each day as if she were on patrol, visiting each area of the Flyer and interacting with those she meets along the way. Her day begins an hour before the beginning of designated "daylight," as she enjoys a quiet cup of ysoki charm-tea and reviews the logs from the previous night's station reports. Then she changes into her running attire, inserts a comm-link into her ear, and hits the dimly lit, pre-dawn corridors for some exercise. Her route takes her throughout the Flyer, her dark eyes taking in every detail. She nods when acknowledged but rarely stops her run until she again returns to her private quarters for a shower and modest meal.

Now clad in her official Flyer uniform, she visits the Skull to check with the technicians and receive a status report. From there, her route varies, but she makes it a point to tour every corner of the complex and speak to anyone who has a concern, grievance, or observation. Though seemingly unemotional, she cares deeply about the well-being of everyone aboard the Flyer, from her officers to the random visitor she'll never see again. This is the best time for the PCs to approach Athunee and introduce themselves.

Captain Masqua can become an invaluable contact. Because the Flyer operates with a relatively small crew, Athunee often can't spare any of her officers when certain demanding situations arise. If the PCs make themselves available and earn a solid reputation after completing a mission on the Flyer, Athunee will be happy to send jobs their direction, especially if they continue to prove themselves trustworthy. If the PCs make repeated visits to the Flyer and demonstrate their usefulness, Athunee begins to treat them less like dependable mercenaries and more like allies, and perhaps even as friends.

A Comet's Interior

Athunee's architects and magic-wielding engineers carved out a multi-chambered complex within the comet. The wide corridors are like streets in what amounts to a small town of interconnected spaces. Each room within the Flyer is sealed against contamination from the outside, with radiation shielding and heavy insulation to keep out the inherent dangers of space and to maintain a uniform temperature of 72 degrees F throughout the station. An oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere is provided by a scrubber in the primary control room, a heavily fortified chamber known as the Skull, because it protects the "brain" of the Flyer and controls all important functions. The Skull and other important rooms are detailed below.

Not all visitors enjoy unfettered access to all areas within the complex. While most hallways, lounges, merchant alcoves, and the like are open to everyone, certain restricted zones require the visitor to present a DNA scan. A visitor places his or her hand on a biometric scanner, which in turns reads that individual's genetic code. These scanners are impossible to fool, though they can be hacked or short-circuited by someone with the proper equipment or skills. The only areas protected by such formidable measures are the private quarters of the staff, the armory, the brig, and the Skull. Other, less critical chambers might be warded by standard physical locks or by magic.

Gravity

Technomancers on staff ensure that 1 G of gravity is standard throughout the Flyer, as this is the level with

which most visitors are familiar. This artificial gravity field does not extend to the comet's surface. Gravity is controlled from the Skull, and it can be adjusted by individual room, so that visitors from large-mass planets can request additional g's in their quarters during the length of their stay. These adjustments can provide anywhere from 0 to 3.2 Gs on a room-by-room basis.

Day and Night

The concepts of "day" and "night" are entirely artificial on the Flyer. Because of the comet's erratic revolutions and the ever-changing distances to the sun, there is no such thing as "sunrise" or "dusk." In order to provide consistency for those aboard and a workable schedule for the many tasks requiring completion, Athunee and her officers implemented a standardized and familiar local clock. They retained the common time interval of the "hour" and built 25 of these units into one day of "Flyer time," though they programmed their clocks to account for only the first 24. Each crew member is expected to work a 10-hour shift. During the remaining 15 hours, they are considered off-duty and are not permitted to be seen in uniform; their time is their own, their loyalties not to the job but to their family and friends. The final hour in the day, commonly referred to as the Two-Five, happens when all clocks in the Flyer automatically power down. Time is not counted for one hour, and all bets are off. Deals are made. Ships take off and land without having to register with the dockmaster.

Drinks at the Parallax Saloon are half price. Security patrols are doubled during the Two-Five, just to ensure that no one attempts to undermine the integrity of the Flyer itself, but otherwise the guards turn a blind eye to parcels being passed surreptitiously and wanted men daring to show their face. Athunee insisted on this 25th hour because she has long mistrusted authority, including her own. She understands the periodic need to do things off the record.

Regulations

Visible weapons are not permitted, even during the Two-Five. Likewise, items that are clearly beyond the bounds of decency will be confiscated at any time, and any sentient slaves will be emancipated. All "black business" is expected to be conducted only during the Two-Five, and even then, it must be done in private — usually within the cargo bays of docked ships. These policies are enforced by the Flyer's private security force, known as the Red Wires due to the crimson pinstripes on their otherwise black uniform. The Red Wires are paid well and thus less susceptible to bribes than guards at other sites.

The legal code is brief and clear-cut. The Wires usually have the authority to serve as "judge" on the spot, but if the situation isn't black-and-white, they request arbitration from their commander, Aefleng (see **A Comet's Inhabitants**, below).

TABLE 3-1: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Offense	Punishment
Brawling	1 day in brig
Visible weapons	Confiscated; 3 days in brig
Contraband	Confiscated; banished; landing permit revoked for 1 solar year
Robbery	30 days in the brig
Violent crime (arson, murder, rape)	Execution via airlock

Offense	Punishment
Attempted sabotage against the Flyer	Execution via Athunee's pistol

1. Spaceport

Better known as the LZ, the Flyer's only docking port is busy around the clock. Since it is much smaller than most space wharfs, the LZ must constantly keep ships moving in and out. Few ships are permitted to linger; special documentation is required to remain in port for more than one 25-hour period. Red Wire security teams are everywhere, keeping the peace and ensuring that no one is openly carrying a sidearm, but the sec-teams never board the ships themselves. If a ship carries goods that are considered illegal on particular planets or are prohibited by certain governments, Athunee and her officers do nothing to take those goods from a ship's private hold. On the other hand, open trading of contraband is not allowed, and the punishments are swift and severe — except during the Two-Five. The Flyer operates as a neutral trading ground, and by giving smugglers this one hour of freedom, the integrity of that mandate is maintained.

That being said, the dockmaster meticulously records the name and call number of every ship that arrives and departs. He does not check the ships' cargos, but he certainly notes their schedules and freely sells this data to any legitimate government or corporate power that pays a substantial access fee. This money goes directly into the Flyer's maintenance fund. All captains and crew are well aware of this policy, so those in command of a fugitive vessel are wise to change their ship's name and alter its appearance before landing.

Though artificial gravity keeps the LZ steady, there is no breathable atmosphere here. Because of the constant traffic, the spaceport is always exposed to the vacuum of space. Everyone working on the LZ or moving from their ship toward the Flyer's inner areas must be protected with either an atmosphere suit or by magic.

2. Fuel Reserve

One of the Flyer's main functions is to repair needy ships and outfit them with recharged batteries, new Drift engines, or refilled fuel tanks, depending on the nature of the vessel. Captains arrive expecting to take on supplies, and the Flyer must be ready to meet those needs. Most of the work is automated; a captain dials in his ship's requirements and makes their payment, and fueling bots take care of the rest — more efficiently than flesh-and-blood workers and capable of working around the clock, assuming they receive regular diagnostic checks.

3. Decon

Whether a traveler needs a simple shower or full decontamination session, this is the place. Part sauna, part clinic, Decon serves a vital role. All incoming ship passengers who wish to leave the dock and explore the Flyer must pass through this series of rooms, where they are magically and chemically cleaned of all dangerous bacteria. Scans using *detect affliction* reveal anyone suffering from a contagious illness, and those individuals are not permitted deeper into the Flyer until they are healed, even if their sickness is no more threatening than a sore throat.

Decon is also a delightful place to relax after an interminable space voyage, as steam baths and massages can be provided for a reasonable fee. While bathers relax, their garments are magically laundered and waiting for them when they leave.

PLANETARIUM

Planetarium

4. Merchant Row

This wide companionway offers alcoves along its length, in which various traders and salesmen peddle their wares. The busiest place on the Flyer, the 'Row is where a visitor can find items he or she can find nowhere else in the system. Oddities from the farthest reaches of known space end up here for sale or barter. The goods sold here are not necessarily black-market items, but some of them definitely skirt the line of legality. Rare medicines can be found for a fraction of the cost of the same serums on civilized worlds, though there's always the chance they're tainted or impure. The buyer is wise to beware.

Archeological artifacts are a popular trade item. Since the removal of unearthed relics is strictly prohibited on nearly all planets — most people ardently protect the treasures of their past — such items see a brisk business here on the Flyer. Pottery shards from a pre-Gap tribe on T'Lune command a fair price, but nowhere near so much as an intact bronze adze from 2432 Orionis. These items are then transported off the Flyer and sold to private (and sometimes unscrupulous) collectors across the system and beyond.

Other goods and services that can be obtained here vary from day to day but generally include the following:

- food and drink
- drugs and medicine
- mercenaries-for-hire
- electronics
- technomancer paraphernalia
- organ transplants
- talismans and amulets
- synthetic narcotics
- new identities
- exotic desserts
- forged documents
- historic artifacts
- prostitutes
- cybernetic implants
- minor magic items

5. Mess Hall

This unadorned room contains only a series of tables and chairs of different shapes to accommodate different body styles and sizes. Food purchased on Merchant Row may be brought here, since the 'Row offers little in the way of comfortable seating. There is no kitchen attached to the mess hall; food is not prepared here, only consumed. This room also serves as an impromptu lounge and meeting area. Custodial bots regularly clean it.

6. Parallax Saloon

The heart of the Flyer, and perhaps that of the entire star system, is the Parallax Saloon. Dimly lit during the designated daylight hours and gleaming with colored lights at night, this tavern is the nexus of all activity on the Flyer, a place for business deals, illicit trysts, and dancing. No two days in a row are alike, as visitors of all known species pass through its bat-wing doors, each one with a different story to tell.

The Parallax features a dais for musicians, a small dance floor, a balcony, plenty of tables, and a robot waitstaff. The bartender is a glamorous half-elf named Suldi the Neck (see **A Comet's Inhabitants** below), and she is capable of mixing nearly any drink desired. No questions are asked here, no identifications checked. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated, and the general rules of the Flyer are enforced. Brawls are not common, but neither are they rare. So long as the belligerents refrain from using lethal force, fights are permitted to continue for a few minutes, until Suldi gets bored and dials up a security measure (see **Security**, below).

MUSICAL HISTORY OF THE PARALLAX STAGE

Several prominent artists have logged time at the Parallax's small but important stage:

- Oil & Jade
- 48H Byer
- Micro Collapse
- Nelika and the Dark
- The Hyperspacers
- Technic of the Mad
- Maria Mercurial
- The Jurisdiction Quartet

TAVERN FEATURES

The Parallax has established a reputation not only among the Pact Worlds but also in nearby star systems, as well. Visitors arrive here via the Drift from all parts of the universe. The Parallax's reputation is either good or bad, depending on each individual's experience. Because the composition of the clientele changes from one day to the next, surprises abound. Human miners from the quarries on Outer Kalfry mingle with exotic kasatha courtesans and with poison-sellers from Kifumsitu. Often the only thing these disparate species have in common is a desire for music, strong drink, and momentary companionship to make the night a little less cold.

Alcohol: Because grains and grapes must be imported, alcoholic beverages are more expensive here than on other worlds, costing about twice as much. The most popular drink other than a rather generic-tasting draft beer is Pleoq whiskey, made from the recipe of a now-extinct race; though the Pleoqs were destroyed in a terrible war, their famous whiskey survived. The barkeeper, Suldi the Neck, is capable of mixing most types of cocktails popular in the system, though for some of the more obscure drinks from other systems, she consults a database. Fine wines can also be had, with the rarer vintages commanding high prices.

Music: Live music is a mainstay at the Parallax. The acts and genres vary, as new performers arrive at the Flyer to take the place of others who continue on their tour. The shows are always free for Parallax patrons, and the performers are paid a modest flat rate for a six-hour gig. Though the musicians are able to play for only a small audience, the exposure they receive is invaluable. Playing shows at the Parallax is considered a rite of passage for those musicians still paying their dues.

Newsfeed: The Parallax Saloon features a holographic newsfeed that constantly scrolls details of galactic scandals, military hotspots, wanted fugitives, scientific discoveries, and other vital links to adventure. Men and women of all species and walks of life can usually be found crowded around the newsfeed, eyeballing the latest gossip or looking for a possible new lead. A snapshot of the 'feed might look like this:

- Graythers defeat the Minots 43-21
- Possible corruption among the Insight Array on Aballon
- Land rush on Quay Prime delayed
- Professor Aerik Davara last seen on Ilpheen 6
- New applications requested for security detail on Kifumsitu
- Price of uthamite soars 27%
- Hyperspace artist Yut'Mor still missing

- Senatorial election disputed
- Colonists running out of food on Giniarus
- Indigenous tribes on Outer Kalfry protest new uthamite mines

Security: No bouncers or live sec-guards patrol the dance floor. Instead, ceiling-mounted guns deliver bolts of energy to anyone targeted by Suld's laser pointer. The guns are capable of stunning and incapacitating all but the most heavily armored drunks.

The Elegant Destroyer: The Elegant Destroyer is a box-like AI that has programmed itself to play games. This 3-foot cube sits permanently in one corner of the Parallax, surrounded by stools and small tables where visitors may sit and challenge it to virtually every board game, card game, or dice game known in the star system. It manipulates the game pieces via two small spider-shaped drones. It is quite happy to engage anyone in their favorite game, whether that game is simple or deeply strategic and complex.

Though very skilled in nearly all games, the Elegant Destroyer has intentionally given itself a human-level learning curve. It learns and masters games at generally the same pace as a highly intelligent human. This keeps games competitive and allows others a fair chance at winning. It plays games 24 out of 25 hours a day, using the Two-Five to enter low-power mode and perform routine self-maintenance. The Destroyer is quite open to chat about other matters while play continues; it has accumulated an astounding amount of gossip during its time here, and it shares what it knows without having any kind of agenda of its own. Its joy is playing games, win or lose. As it possesses no financial resources of its own, the Destroyer never plays for money. It deals the cards as a form of meditation, believing that somewhere in the course of play can be found the secret of everything.

TAVERN ADVENTURES

The newsfeed provides many opportunities for PCs to find work. The datastream is constantly updated, so changes in the campaign setting can be viewed here as they happen. PCs wishing to remain on the cutting edge of new technologies and questionable experiments can find leads to those planets where such events are unfolding. Empires are expanding and insurgencies are taking place across known space, and there are always those "on the ground" in those locations who are eager to transmit that information to any eager audience. The speed with which those updates arrive on the newsfeed is limited only by the physics of the communication medium.

The Parallax patrons represent all walks of life, and their interactions with the PCs can lead directly to employment opportunities. Because the Flyer welcomes all types without regard to reputation or outstanding arrest warrants, the Parallax dance floor and bar are occupied by good and evil alike. Any need can be satisfied here, and nearly any door can be opened.

7. Infirmary

The Flyer's policy on injuries and medical attention is simple: you're on your own. Athunee and her officers do not provide long-term hospital services and have no mechanism in place for charging patients for medical care. There are exceptions to this rule, determined on a case-by-case basis. If a random visitor docks at the spaceport and seeks aid for a broken bone, the Flyer does not open its infirmary doors; the needy individual is encouraged to seek out treatment on Merchant Row. But if two desperate fugitives spill from their ship with a dying friend on a stretcher, Athunee usually orders the robotic doctors in the infirmary to at least stabilize the victim — assuming the fugitives will repay this enormous favor.

The infirmary is staffed entirely by AI surgeons. Everything that happens on the operating table is

entirely in the hands of a computer brain. Though it may not be a state-of-the-art system, the Flyer's medical AI is quite capable of most life-saving surgical techniques. It has been granted complete autonomy in the emergency room. The sealed vaults in the infirmary's storage room contain a stockpile of drugs, from common painkillers to DNA strands and experimental nanotech.

8. Brig

These small holding cells are used primarily to let brawlers cool off after fisticuffs in the Parallax. Clean but cramped, the cells are under constant surveillance by the guards in the Skull, and the doors can be locked and unlocked only by their remote command. PCs incarcerated here will find it difficult to escape without the aid of magic, as there are no visible locks. The mechanisms are housed within the doors and walls, a combination of powerful electromagnets controlled by the Red Wires in the Skull.

9. Dire Supplies

The foodstuffs stored here are known as "dire supplies" because they're to be used only if the Flyer finds itself in a crisis. Over 500 cases of ultra-high-calorie protein cakes can sustain 100 people for 30 solar days. Though high in nutritional value, the cakes are notoriously tasteless. Water is also stored here, but given its large storage footprint, it's enough to sustain those same 100 people for only 15 days. One of Athunee's constant worries is adding extra water storage to be used *in extremis*, but the Flyer simply doesn't have the additional space.

One solution recently proposed is to construct an external cage on the comet that would permit the storage of several tons of food and ice. This presents many logistical problems, however, and Athunee has not been able to receive a sound engineering plan to address the issue.

10. The Skull

The most carefully guarded location on the Flyer is the control room, where all operations are governed. The blast-proof door grants access only to Athunee and her closest officers. Inside is a chaotic nexus of cables, computers, monitors, control panels, battery banks, and technomancer apparatuses. Every aspect of the Flyer's well-being is maintained here. Gravity is dialed up or down; oxygen-nitrogen balances are adjusted; station-wide lighting is brightened or dimmed. The room has three levels of security in place. First, the door itself can be opened only by someone with the proper DNA sequence. Second, four heavily armed members of the Red Wires are capable of killing, stunning, or gassing anything that comes through a breached door. Finally, two mechanized gun ports in the ceiling respond to any perceived threat with a high-velocity barrage of armor-piercing bullets.

The PCs will not normally be permitted access to the Skull. For the most part, the Flyer allows its visitors to come and go as they please, but the Red Wires ardently protect the Skull, as anyone inside would be able to hold for ransom the entire comet and everyone inside of it.

11. Armory

The Flyer doesn't maintain a large weapons cache, as might be expected of a site with such potential strategic value. Each of the Red Wire security guards carries a standard sidearm as well as a variety of non-lethal options. Each also has access to a military-grade rifle, and those rifles are stored here in the armory, along with more ammunition than they can possibly carry. All weapons are encoded to respond to the touch of a single,

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preprogrammed user, so even if a trespasser were to gain access to the armory, the rifles would be useless unless successfully hacked. Only three people are authorized to access the armory: Athunee, Aefleng, and Wivvenmot (See **A Comet's Inhabitants**, below).

12. Sally Port

Everyone assumes that the spaceport is the only way into and out of the Flyer. Yet when Athunee designed the station, she ensured that she'd never be trapped here. A small, alternate escape hatch is a secret she has shared with only her most trusted officers. The door appears to be just another section of the standard gray bulkhead found throughout the Flyer, but a hidden panel reveals a DNA-reading security lock. Once the lock is deactivated, the door slides into the bulkhead to reveal a small, four-passenger shuttle with the word *EKPHEUGO* emblazoned on the side. Any capable pilot is able to fly this vessel along a short tunnel to a pair of exit doors hidden on the comet's frozen surface. The doors are programmed to open automatically when the *Ekpheugó* approaches. Above all else, Captain Masqua is a survivor. In the event of a comet-wide calamity, she does not intend to go down with the ship.

13. Quadball Court

Other than the spaceport, this is the largest room in the Flyer, a combination of gymnasium and gladiatorial arena. Spectators look on from glass-walled rooms on all sides of the court, including from under the glass floor and from above an equally transparent ceiling. The court itself is a perfect square, with a moving, computer-generated target on each of the four walls. Two of the targets are always red and two are always blue, but they randomly change colors every few minutes. There are four balls constantly in play, two of them red and two of them blue. The balls are about 6 inches in diameter and just heavy enough to be thrown with some force. Scoring in quadball is simple: a player must contact a red target with a red ball and a blue target with a blue ball. Each is worth one point, with a computer tracking all players' movements and monitoring who threw which ball into which target; many times scores happen simultaneously, so only an AI is able to keep things straight. Players are allowed to block targets with their bodies, but those targets slowly move on their respective walls, so this defense is far from foolproof. The balls bounce easily, so that a scramble usually ensues on a missed shot. The balls are also heavy enough that a solid impact can hurt a good deal; a blow to the head can stun an unprepared player. Though the players are not permitted to touch one another, the four balls flying around the court make the game not only chaotic but dangerous as well. Players are free to aim at other players with their shots instead of the targets, but this strategy often backfires. Each team has four players. The game is one solar hour long, with no breaks or time-outs. Fatigue and exhaustion are part of the game. An injured player is considered eliminated from the game and may be substituted on the fly with someone else.

14. Lavatory

Known as the "head," this series of small chambers is an integral part of the waste-reclamation system. Everything is recycled. All of these lavatories are gender- and species-neutral. They are washed out at regular intervals throughout the day by magical sanitation systems built into the walls.

15. Quarters

These rooms are rented or leased on short-term or long-terms, depending on a traveler's needs. Others are

the permanent homes of the Flyer's staff. Some "rooms" are little more than coffin-shaped tubes with sleeping mats, while others offer entertainment screens and enough room to stretch. Regardless of the occupants, the rooms are comfortable but small. The exception is Athunee's two-room suite; the captain has the luxury of a private bathroom.

16. The Window

Only one room in the Flyer is positioned close enough to the comet's surface to provide a window view of space. This chamber is named after its most compelling feature, a 15-foot-wide window made of a ballistic-grade transparent plastic, 1-1/2 feet thick. Anyone in the room has an awe-inspiring view of an infinite universe of stars. The Window serves as a lounge and as a recreation spot; a few tables provide ample space for card and dice games for those who don't enjoy the rowdy atmosphere of the Parallax. Visitors here keep their voices low, not so much due to any unwritten rule, but out of respect for the endless universe that reminds them how small they really are.

A Comet's Inhabitants

Thousands of travelers from all walks of life can be found on the Flyer at any one time, some benevolent and some who harbor the darkest of secrets. In many ways, the Flyer is like a small town, with the primary difference being that 90% of the population is impermanent, with ships constantly landing and taking off. A few of the permanent residents offer unique opportunities for enterprising PCs to exploit.

Aefleng

A half-orc mystic (LN male half-orc mystic 15) serves as head of security, and he is infamous for the alacrity with which he deals with trouble-makers. The enforcers under his command are called the Red Wires. Known to be ruthless and quick to anger, **Aefleng** is the perfect security chief, as his reputation alone is often enough to quell trouble before it begins. Striding along the corridors, he can be an intimidating figure. He was the first person Athunee hired after she took command of the comet.

Aefleng spends as much time in meditation in his private quarters as he spends stalking the halls of the Flyer — and for this the residents are quite thankful. A trained mindbreaker, Aefleng is startling in appearance, with patchwork black hair on a bulbous head. He seems to have too many teeth to fit properly in his mouth. The skin on his neck and the backs of his hand is knotty and faintly green. He seems to abhor adjectives and speaks directly, without mincing words or lapsing into metaphor. As his primary goal is the safety and security of the Flyer, he has little patience for the feelings of those around him.

Aefleng believes in strong order and precise management, so it's not surprising he does not endorse the Two-Five. In the half-orc's estimation, The Two-Five grants license to the ship's passengers to break laws, scoff at authority, and generally disgrace themselves. And to be sure, some of that certainly takes place, but almost always behind closed doors. When the doors *aren't* closed, however, and someone breaks a rule in the open, it's a sure bet that Aefleng and his Red Wires will converge on them rapidly. Aefleng's justice is swift and not open to debate.

Aefleng Adventure Hooks

Aefleng straddles the border between lawful enforcer and superstitious freak. Most people try to avoid him, fearing that he's reading their thoughts.

- As a mindbreaker, Aefleng constantly seeks knowledge of sentient minds; he pays the PCs for any intact brains they deliver to him, assuming they can attest to the brains' provenance.

- The PCs are employed as extra guards during the Two-Five and must root out anyone involved in outwardly illegal activities.

- Someone believes that Aefleng is conducting "dark and dangerous magic" in his quarters, and they employ the PCs to investigate.

Elanjibelle

The Flyer is full of diverse and unique people, and **Elanjibelle** (NG female human solarian 4) is an oddity among oddities. She practices the outdated art of bookbinding and seems like an anachronism from a pre-Gap age, with her simple cotton kimono and unstyled hair. She might be anywhere from 30 to 50 years old, because like her art, there is a timeless quality about her. In addition to making books from stacks of authentic wood- and hemp-based paper, she also serves the Flyer as unofficial therapist and arbiter of disputes.

Elanjibelle draws no salary from the Flyer's coffers and does not sell enough bound books to pay for her room and board. She is the daughter of a wealthy, blue-blooded family. Her financial resources are quite deep, and she earns enough in interest alone to pay Athunee for permanent residence. She has become a fixture here, her sweet-smelling apartment an oasis for those seeking warmth and incense in a world that is otherwise sterile and cold.

No one quite knows Elanjibelle's agenda, or even if she has one. She seems content to craft her books and offer them for sale in Merchant Row. Occasionally she orders supplies from dealers on various worlds, but otherwise she has no contact with the reality beyond the comet's coma. Soft-spoken, sensuous, and clever, she is liked by nearly everyone she meets. Periodically she may take a lover — usually a random traveler passing through the Parallax — but her relationships are ephemeral. If she is searching for something, she finds it neither in romantic love nor in her bookbinding art. And so her search continues.

Elanjibelle Adventure Hooks

Though mysterious, Elanjibelle is not intentionally obscure. She has lived an interesting life and is not afraid to share it.

- Elanjibelle asks the PCs to obtain a bundle of rare parchment from one of the nearby (and dangerous) worlds.

- A vindictive relative wants to lay claim to Elanjibelle's wealth and taps the PCs to help extort or blackmail her — or break into her quarters and hack into her finances.

- Bookbinding requires special glues, and the ingredients for these adhesives can be difficult (and expensive) to obtain; one such glue is a natural secretion of a giant arachnid.

Gehlar Remfyr

Having served under Athunee's command during their military days, this human soldier responds to her commands with unwavering loyalty. As Athunee's unofficial aide de camp, **Gehlar Remfyr** (NG male human soldier 10) assumes many administrative responsibilities throughout the Flyer. He is known to be quick to laughter and a solid partner in paired card games played at Parallax. The left side of his face is covered

with a tattoo of a rose wrapped around an ancient glyph, the meaning of which he has divulged only to his closest friends.

One of Gehlar's primary duties is that of navigator. Though no pilot is required to keep the Flyer hurtling through space, it is important that a close and accurate record is kept of its trajectory. Gehlar reports these distances to planets as the Flyer approaches. A constant recalibration is necessary because the comet's course is not 100% the same from one orbital cycle to the next. Various planetary bodies affect the Flyer's flight path along the way. A deviation of only a few minutes is enough to make it impossible for incoming ships to land safely. Given the Flyer's speed of 157,000 miles per hour, exact timing is critical. Athunee has tasked Gehlar with this duty, and it is one he takes very seriously.

Despite his fealty to his captain, Gehlar has a secret. He is on the payroll of an external police organization called Incident Incorporated, based on Quachili. The primary mission of I² is the retrieval of stolen archeological artifacts and the arrest of those who traffic in them. Gehlar might be very dedicated to the jobs Athunee assigns to him, but his first mission is to undermine a particular criminal enterprise. He sends coded messages to his superiors on Quachili as frequently as he dares, and I² uses that data to apprehend offenders on various planets along the Flyer's route. So far, no one suspects that the arrests are made possible by information coming from the Flyer itself.

Gehlar Adventure Hooks

Gehlar plays a dangerous game. Though his admiration for Athunee is genuine and so too is his desire to please her, the fact that he keeps a secret from her might come back to haunt him.

- A former convict wants to know who put him away; he contacts the PCs to find out the source of the information leak aboard the Flyer.

- Gehlar needs help with an upcoming navigation reading; the Flyer's course might be slightly altered when it passes through an asteroid belt, so the PCs are sent out to clear a path.

- Gehlar wants to surprise his captain with a rare vintage of wine; the only owner of such a bottle is a master gambler who refuses to sell; the PCs are tasked with either stealing the wine during the Two-Five or perhaps winning it at the gaming table.

Heanarah

The strikingly beautiful elven prostitute named **Heanarah** changes between male and female as it suits his/her clients. No one knows Heanarah's true gender, only that they seem physically perfect. As a woman, she appears blonde, voluptuous, and graceful. As a man, he is dark-haired, smooth-shaven, and muscled. Either way, their eyes are strikingly green.

Heanarah spends the Flyer's designated daytime hours in the privacy of their own quarters, which are magically enhanced to seem much larger and more opulent than they actually are. At night, they can be found either at the Parallax Saloon or on Merchant Row. They are never there for long, however, as clients eagerly offer their money in exchange for a few hours of bliss. Seeing this, it's no surprise Heanarah is one of the wealthiest passengers aboard the Flyer.

No one knows if Heanarah is truly an elf at all or a member of some shape-shifting species — and no one really cares. Heanarah is completely neutral in all political matters and kind to everyone encountered. If Heanarah has any faults, it is a certain aloofness and an attitude that none of this really matters at all, and the only things that count are money and pleasure.

Heanarah Adventure Hooks

- A former client is obsessed with Heanarah and is constructing an android lookalike; the PCs are employed to return with images, video, and perhaps a DNA sample of the prostitute.
- Someone wants Heanarah's money; the PCs are either hired to stop the threat or to arrange the burglary.
- Heanarah needs a particular rare perfume and is willing to pay handsomely for it; the last known bottle in existence is owned by the deputy ambassador of a powerful government.

Mother Yloodian

This aging ysoki considers herself the de facto boss of Merchant Row. She was one of the first to set up shop here after Athunee opened the doors, and she isn't afraid to let everyone know it. **Mother Yloodian** (N female ysoki technomancer 13) leases the two largest stalls on the 'Row, where she sells an ever-changing assortment of items, most of them household goods, souvenirs, and magical fetishes for use in conjuration rituals.

With white whiskers and graying fur, Mother Yloodian patrols the 'Row with her cane, tapping the tip of it against the legs of anyone who won't get out of her way. She complains about weird smells and demands that other traders keep their stalls tidy. Already old before arriving on the Flyer, she demands respect from anyone in her self-styled fief. She is assumed to have overheard secrets on just about everyone, so to keep her from divulging those secrets (and to avoid the business end of her cane), most folks just stay out of her way. The general opinion is that she has the Flyer's best interest at heart, and that she's just an aging ysoki who has earned a right to her opinions. For the most part, she's harmless.

Most of that is true. But during the Two-Five, Mother Yloodian's lackeys do a brisk trade in occult paraphernalia, specifically in taboo items used in malevolent summoning ceremonies. She can always be found at her stall during the Two-Five, but it's during this hour that her minions are their busiest, conducting backstairs deals with some of the least-reputable characters in the system. Her artifacts are in high demand. Just where she obtains these objects for sale remains a mystery.

Mother Yloodian Adventure Hooks

- Because she's been working the 'Row for so long, the old ysoki has seen it all. She is usually willing to part with her information — for a price.
- The PCs are sent by a third party to interrupt a deal between a young ysoki talismonger (secretly working for Mother Yloodian) and an eager buyer from an offworld cult.
- A nameless employer offers the PCs a substantial sum to deliver some questionable *objet d'art* to Merchant Row.
- On the hunt for a fugitive, the PCs learn that only Mother Yloodian might possess the information they seek, but first they must deal with the cranky old ysoki and risk the wrath of her cane.

Naprela Bevalian

The female envoy named **Naprela Bevalian** (LN female human envoy 11) was close to earning her doctoral degree in etiology when she was expelled from her university for conducting unsanctioned experiments with dangerous pathogens. As an etiologist, Naprela studies diseases. In fact, she is obsessed with them. Both of her parents died of a sickness that was never identified, and this has certainly fueled her desire to wipe out such menaces wherever she finds them. But her daredevil ways proved too much for her university professors, and they eventually removed

her from the doctoral program. While she waits to be admitted to a new college, she stays here on the Flyer, paying her way by drawing on her parents' substantial insurance policies.

Naprela has no access to a lab or any specimens, so she does what she can to advance her knowledge by reading. Most of the time she can be found bent over her datascreeen, absorbing the writings of academic journals and reports from the field by those who labor in disease "hot spots" around the star system. She is certainly lonely. It doesn't take much to get her talking, and she's happy if anyone can see beyond her "scholastic appearance," as she calls it.

No university in the system has offered to accept her into its doctoral program, as word of her recent transgression has made the rounds through academia. Unfortunately, those schools are missing out on the chance to work with one of the brightest young minds in the field. Naprela truly has a chance to make a difference and save lives, but her tendency to cut corners, snub authority, and "just get the job done" are undermining her pursuit of an advanced degree. Most likely she'll end up taking a job for an unlicensed haz-mat company or for a corporation from another system, which may or may not be a good idea. Only time will tell.

Naprela Bevalian Adventure Hooks

Though she won't address the PCs unless they speak to her first, she quickly warms to the idea of having friends. The life of a scholar can be one of solitude and long nights spent with no company other than a book.

- In their efforts to combat a rare and elusive illness, the PCs are directed to seek out "Dr." Bevalian, though they soon learn that she isn't quite a doctor — yet.
- Naprela wants to visit a nearby moon to take blood samples from infected tribe members, but the tribe is dangerous, so she asks the PCs to serve as escorts.
- In her desperation, Naprela pays the PCs to hack into a university computer system and grant her admittance into its etiology program.

Suldi the Neck

The half-elf who tends bar at the Parallax Saloon is a female operative named **Suldi the Neck** (N female half-elf operative 9). A constant fixture behind the counter, Suldi favors layers of elaborate costume jewelry and bright cosmetics. She routinely changes her hair color. Implants in the tips of her fingers enable her to change the color of her fingernails with a single tap. No one knows exactly why she came to have her curious nickname. Rumors abound.

Suldi the Neck trusts no one, but she herself is perhaps the most trustworthy person on Athunee's Flyer. While nearly everyone else is hounded by a questionable past, hustling, or looking to make a deal, Suldi is content with her career and genuinely interested in the stories of her patrons. She keeps every secret told to her. On the other hand, she suspects every stranger of duplicity; Suldi is constantly on her guard against eavesdroppers or ruffians. When she occasionally takes a lover, she is careful never to reveal too much of her heart. She fell in love once, but that was long ago — a mistake she is determined not to repeat.

Suldi serves a vital role on the Flyer. She comes into contact with more travelers than anyone and is an important source of information. She speaks fluently on politics and possible job opportunities. Though she never shares sensitive intelligence, she freely discusses all of the mundane news she overhears, serving as an effective broker between potential employers and those seeking work. She accepted her current position at the Parallax after the former bartender was exiled for smuggling Bytavian blood spiders inside old whiskey bottles.

Suldi the Neck Adventure Hooks

Though visitors to the Flyer might not ever encounter Athunee herself, nearly everyone meets the resident barkeep. Suldi can be used to introduce the PCs to new opportunities in a variety of ways:

- Everyone suspects that Suldi knows the secrets of many station personnel and visitors, and now someone wants one of those secrets she keeps in her head.
- The son of the former bartender hires the PCs to find out if Suldi framed his father.
- The PCs learn that one of the many pieces of cheap jewelry Suldi wears is actually the fabled Star of Gyndei.

Teesker

The youngest denizen of the Flyer is **Teesker** (NG male ysoki operative 2), a ysoki lad who earns a meager living by helping out around the spaceport and offering incoming vessels his services as a ship-cleaner. An orphan, Teesker has no guardians and no home, but Athunee and her officers permit him to sleep in a hammock in one of the spaceport's mechanic bays. He seems delighted by his lot in life, as he is beholden to no one and has the chance to interact with a variety of interesting travelers.

Teesker sometimes gets in the way and has to dodge a flying power wrench, but for the most part he is accepted around the Flyer as a helpful member of the crew. With a child's curiosity and boundless enthusiasm, he tackles any task put before him — as long as it's not too boring. His attention span is short, and though he's a hard worker when the work is brief, he's prone to skipping off to new adventures if things start to become monotonous. He loves speaking to incoming pilots about the worlds they've seen, but so far he's yet to convince any of them to take him along.

Teesker earns enough from his odd jobs that he's able to buy food from the stalls in the 'Row and get his laundry cleaned whenever someone tells him that he's starting to stink. Because he comes and goes as he pleases, he has a remarkable grasp of the Flyer's entire layout; he's come to know its nooks and hidden crannies intimately. If befriended, Teesker is either a buoyant companion or an annoying pest, depending on the moment.

Teesker Adventure Hooks

- The PCs need a guide around the Flyer, and who better to present a tour — with commentary?
- No secret is safe from Teesker's eager ears, though he may not understand the importance of the information he's overheard.
- A particular job requires a person of very small stature, and Teesker makes everyone aware that he's the only "man" for that task.

Vaskyn NORO

The android that calls itself **Vaskyn NORO** (LN android envoy 16) is Athunee's herald and messenger. Having literally been pulled from a fire by his captain, Vaskyn NORO has dedicated his life to assisting her in whatever ways she requires. He works primarily at the spaceport, where he records every arriving ship and catalogues all arriving passengers. He reports to Athunee if anyone of importance has set foot in the Flyer, such as a high-ranking military officer or cultural emissary. He also receives money for any ships needing repairs or refueling, programming the mechanic-bots as necessary.

Though fundamentally a being of strictly logical functions, Vaskyn NORO has adopted a dry sense of humor that he uses to impressive effect. He considers himself a student of philosophy and can converse on a variety of esoteric

subjects. Many consider him to be a busybody, poking around in others' affairs and summarizing his observations for Athunee in daily briefings. But he feels no ill will toward anyone and simply wants to please his captain.

Unfortunately, Vaskyn NORO is dying. A never-before-seen software virus is attacking his programming at the deepest level, rewriting his code one character at a time. He is very much aware of this problem and is taking preventative measures, but the hackers he employs to counter the virus can only do so much. No one has been able to eradicate the malicious script that is slowly undoing him. Resources here on the Flyer are limited. Perhaps if Vaskyn NORO were to seek help elsewhere in the system, he might stave off the inevitable. In the meantime, he's determined to repay the debt he owes to his captain.

Vaskyn NORO Adventure Hooks

Because of his unique relationship with Athunee and his multifaceted duties on the Flyer, Vaskyn NORO can be a powerful ally, or also a deft adversary.

- Rumor claims that a powerful ambassador is incognito on the Flyer, and Vaskyn NORO requests the PCs help in learning the truth; who is this person and why are they in disguise?
- When an inbound fuel-cargo ship fails to respond to hails, the task of locating it falls to the PCs.
- Athunee Masqua herself asks the PCs to find a cure for the computer virus killing her friend, the android Vaskyn NORO.

Wivvenmot

The station's chief technical engineer has only half a face. While serving as a corporal under Captain Masqua, the dwarven mechanic **Wivvenmot** (LN male dwarf soldier 4/operative 12) received a traumatic injury when a mortar shell hit a gun emplacement. The shrapnel sheared away most of the flesh and muscle on the left side of his face, along with his eye and a good amount of teeth. Thanks to the magical healing abilities of the squad's medic, Wivvenmot survived, but his disfigurement remained. On most days he wears a clever prosthetic that is mostly indistinguishable from the real thing, but he's also been known to prowl the station's corridors late at night without his mask.

Wivvenmot struggles when interacting socially with strangers, but he is intensely interested in their stories. He has trouble divulging personal information but has an almost childlike fascination in listening to others relate details of their own exploits. He can often be found in the Parallax Saloon, gravitating toward any table of newcomers who sound as if they're boasting or reminiscing. In the privacy of his quarters, he sometimes commits these overheard yarns to his digital journal, a sedentary travel writer living vicariously through those who do the actual traveling.

As a technical engineer, Wivvenmot is charged with maintaining the station's infrastructure, from life-support systems to waste reclamation. He knows more about the Flyer's layout than anyone else, and his collection of hand-drawn schematics is comprehensive; he knows every bolt in every corner of the place. Given his naturally guarded disposition, however, he does not share this knowledge with casual acquaintances. But his adoration for adventure tales sometimes causes him to lower his guard, and like a drunk spilling secrets, Wivvenmot might reveal certain secrets if lulled by a round of good storytelling.

Wivvenmot Adventure Hooks

- Wivvenmot's prosthetic mask has been lost or stolen, and the PCs are in a position to help retrieve it.

• The PCs are brought into the situation when Wivvenmot is blackmailed to undermine the integrity of the Flyer; the blackmailers must be stopped before they make good on their threat.

• Wivvenmot needs help with repairs to the exterior of the Window, and the PCs are enlisted to exit the comet and get the job done.

Zilianna

Known best by her call sign of Z, the ace pilot **Zilianna** (N female human soldier 11) works for the Flyer as a scout, messenger, and forward guard. The love of her life is a nimble starfighter called *Stallion*. Z is on Athunee's payroll and expected to respond at any time of day as the situation calls. She might be asked to locate a shuttle that has veered off course, or to fly a patrol route to check for pirates, or to retrieve an important parcel from a moon as the Flyer soars by. Regardless of the mission, Z always appears ready for the challenge.

Looks can be deceiving, though. Z isn't as daring as she may seem. She projects an image of confidence and enjoys hanging out with the other pilots in the spaceport, trading ribald tales, but she suffers from depression and a deep fear of dying alone. Her family was lost to the void of space, their ship never located. That was fifteen years ago. Z has still not escaped the trauma of simply not knowing what happened to her family. She pilots *Stallion* with a wild abandon that is a direct response to the ghosts haunting her.

Z is youthful in appearance, with blond hair she usually wears in dreadlocks for ease of helmet management. She is quick to laughter, iconoclastic, and somewhat irreverent. She learned her trade in the same fleet where Athunee served. Though they never served together while on active duty, Z sought out Athunee after her enlistment was over and asked if there were any piloting jobs to be had on the Flyer. Because the Flyer itself boasts no artillery or other measures to repel a possible assault, Z is the comet's first and last line of defense.

Zilianna Adventure Hooks

• Z gets drunk one night at the Parallax. Captain Athunee's voice comes through the comm and orders Stallion to deal with a possible threat to the Flyer. Z is clearly in no shape to pilot a barstool, much less a starfighter, so the PCs must assume her duties.

• A gambler shows up on the Flyer, claiming he won the Stallion in a game of chance — and he has the paperwork to prove it. Z is desperate to reveal him as a charlatan, but she can't do it alone.

• Having received a mysterious message regarding her family's fate, Z confides in the PCs and begs them to investigate.

A Comet's Adventure

Due to its small size, the Flyer itself provides little in the way of exploration opportunities. However, it has become a waystation and meeting ground for spacers of all species, creeds, and moral inclinations, so it serves as the perfect place for adventure to begin. As vehicles are constantly landing and departing, with NPCs disembarking and shoving off in a steady stream, intrigue and excitement abound. Adventures taking place on the comet itself include covert business transactions, political maneuverings, smuggling, and fugitive capture, among others.

The Hand that Pulls the Strings

Every now and then, a visitor to the Flyer asks how Athunee could afford to create such a place. The comet's

excavation alone must have cost a staggering amount in manpower and machine hours, to say nothing of the installation of life-support systems and artificial gravity. Though the Flyer might be self-sufficient now, easily earning enough to pay for its own overhead, the initial investment was surely far more than any naval captain could have earned in a lifetime. How, then, did Athunee pay for it? Questions like those always end up sounding rhetorical when spoken aloud, and so the curious visitor just shrugs it off and goes about his business.

The PCs have the opportunity to learn more about the Flyer's history when they are contracted by an outside agency to locate a stolen item. A passenger aboard the *Aegis II* is thought to have disembarked the ship while carrying a small case. Inside this case is a sought-after object, the exact nature of which depends on the campaign's overall storyline. Some examples include:

- an experimental bomb
- a set of top-secret military passcodes
- a pre-Gap religious artifact
- a rare jewel
- the DNA sample of a powerful corporate boss
- a new lifeform

During their investigation of the courier, the PCs encounter one of the original engineers who designed some of the Flyer's rooms. As either a boast or a drunken confession, the engineer imparts whatever information the PCs require regarding the missing item, but at the same time he admits to knowing the "true power" beyond the Flyer's command structure. He claims payments were made to his firm during the comet's construction — and these payments did not come from the account of Athunee Masqua. The engineer never met the mysterious financier, but he informs the PCs that, "the dear captain isn't the top of the food chain."

What the PCs do with that knowledge is a story for another day. Their immediate problem is locating the courier, which they eventually do — outside the comet. Having learned of pursuit, the thief has stolen an atmosphere suit from the *Aegis II* and is hoping to hide on the comet's icy exterior. If they want to apprehend the thief, the PCs will need to equip themselves accordingly and try their hand at high speeds and zero gravity, all the while being shot at by their quarry.

The Stolen Song

A scream alerts the PCs to trouble on Merchant Row. When they arrive on the scene, they find a small knot of people of various races standing over a dead man who was discovered wedged between some crates behind a food stall. The PCs have about two minutes before the Red Wires arrive. If they act quickly, they can learn the following bits of information before Aefleng's crew shows up and assumes control:

- The dead man has no identifying possessions; he might have been robbed.
- He appears to have died from a single, fine stab wound to the lower back.
- He was last seen speaking with Heanarah (refer to **A Comet's Inhabitants**).

As soon as the Red Wires arrive, they lay claim to the body and immediately begin questioning persons of interest and shooing away any curious onlookers — including the PCs. To continue their own private investigation, the PCs might consider using magic; the proper divination spell reveals that the killer was able to mask the deed with magic of his or her own. In other words, whoever killed this man went to great lengths to conceal the facts, indicating this was probably no random robbery but a premeditated act. The only lead remaining is that of the prostitute, Heanarah.

The PCs may find Heanarah in the Parallax Saloon during

the Flyer's designated evening hours; otherwise they must visit Heanarah's private quarters, where they are admitted only if they are paying customers. The details of such a behind-closed-doors meeting may be explored in whatever way best suits the nature of the campaign. As for what they know, Heanarah identifies photos of the dead man as Coyven Alue, a mid-level drift-drive technician who had saved his salary for several weeks to procure Heanarah's services for a single night. They had that night about 72 hours ago. Then, just before he was found dead, Alue contacted Heanarah and asked for a meeting on Merchant Row. Alue had brought a final parting gift before shoving off with his crew. Heanarah shows the PCs a metal rose; it looks handmade, probably fashioned by one of the artisans on the 'Row.

The next clue is hidden in the rose itself. If the flower is closely examined — and if the proper skill checks are made — one of the petals is revealed to be a cleverly disguised data chip. Encoded on the chip is a recording that Alue stole during his previous job aboard the orchestra vessel *Alla Breve*. Having planted an eavesdropping device in the cabin of the great composer Braundassiar, Alue was able to obtain the never-before-heard *Quasar Symphony No. 9*. This masterpiece has substantial monetary value, but Alue wanted it for a more romantic reason — simply to give to the person of his dreams.

Whether the PCs meet with Heanarah at the Parallax or in Heanarah's private quarters, they are ambushed upon leaving. Half a dozen mercs hired by the *Alla Breve*'s disgraced security captain have come to reclaim the stolen property. One of them carries the weapon that killed Coyven Alue. This stiletto, though wiped clean, still contains DNA traces of the murdered man.

The mercenaries do not fight to the death. Only if the PCs interrogate these men do they have a chance at piecing together the entire story. In any case, Heanarah is so troubled by what has occurred that they go into mourning and aren't seen around the Flyer for several days.

Quadball

The PCs' vessel is moving through space near the Flyer when the ship's sensors intercept a distress call. The call is automated and vague: we're in trouble; send help. The brief message ends with a series of numbers, 41229, and then it repeats. The origin point is Athunee's Flyer.

The PCs might elect to ignore the hail, in which case they continue on their current course. If they opt to investigate, they land on the Flyer's spaceport, expecting to find someone in need of assistance. However, everything seems fine. Ships land and take off, crews disembark and head for a drink at the Parallax Saloon. There is no indication that anyone here sent the call. So who did? The PCs are likely to ask around, but no one seems to know anything. It's business as usual on

the Flyer. The only clue is the five-digit number, 41229. After making the necessary social skill checks and knocking on various doors, someone finally recognizes the number.

"Forty-one to twenty-nine? That was the score of the quadball game last night."

Though they may be unfamiliar with the game, the PCs make their way to the quadball court, where a team is currently practicing. The team captain is a burly Ankylos named **Thothe**, a retired semi-pro player who is enjoying some time off here at the Flyer and making a little money on the side as a personal fitness trainer (refer to the planet **Silvarum** for details on the Ankylos race). Thothe is thuggish and not inclined to listen to reasonable arguments. He responds only to aggression. Claiming to know nothing of any distress call, he tells the PCs, "either get off my court or suit up and play." The other members of Thothe's team are too intimidated by him to speak out of turn. If the PCs want any information from this group, they're going to have play a match of quadball.

Refer to the **Quadball Court**, above, for details on how the game is played. If the PCs agree, they're allowed to practice before the scheduled game time that evening. The audience viewing areas are packed. Bookmakers take bets from all interested gamblers, with 2:1 odds in favor of Thothe's team. If the PCs want to gain the Ankylos's respect, they need to acquit themselves admirably in the game. This means succeeding in whatever skill and ability checks seem necessary to make the game exciting. After the game ends an hour later, Thothe might be impressed, even if his team won easily. He's willing to talk to the PCs in the small locker rooms adjacent to the court.

Thothe himself sent the distress signal. His squad recently suffered a humiliating defeat, losing the match by a score of 41 to 29. They were beaten by "a bunch of Kallio scum" who are currently toasting their own success over at the Parallax. Thothe intended his message of 41229 to reach the approaching ship *Vargoe*, whose passengers include a young half-elf named **Olidendian**. Though Olidendian chose to enter into his father's intergalactic trading corporation instead of turning pro, he was a very talented collegiate quadball star. Thothe was informing him of the score, and couching that message in a distress call was his way of telling the half-elf to hurry up and get here so Thothe could have revenge. Upon further reflection, Thothe admits that perhaps he shouldn't have used an emergency channel for personal purposes, but in his defense, he didn't anticipate the PCs accidentally intercepting the message.

Thothe is still chafing from that previous defeat and offers the PCs a fair sum to go to the Parallax and "rough those guys up," or at least convince them to get back on their ship and leave.

Chapter Four:

Ilpheen 6

The Cemetery World

Two cultures fought a centuries-long war, and they shared Ilpheen 6 as the place where they put their dead.

The Ilpheen system has known only war. Two races — the Pleoqs and the C2s — waged a massive and generations-old conflict that led to hundreds of millions of deaths, both military and civilian. Though their hatred divided them in every way, the two cultures shared one thing in common — a mandate against cremating or disfiguring a body of the deceased. Thus their rulers agreed long ago to use the sixth planet in the system as a neutral ground where hostilities were forbidden. This otherwise unimpressive planet, Ilpheen 6, became one global burial zone.

War and the Ilpheen System

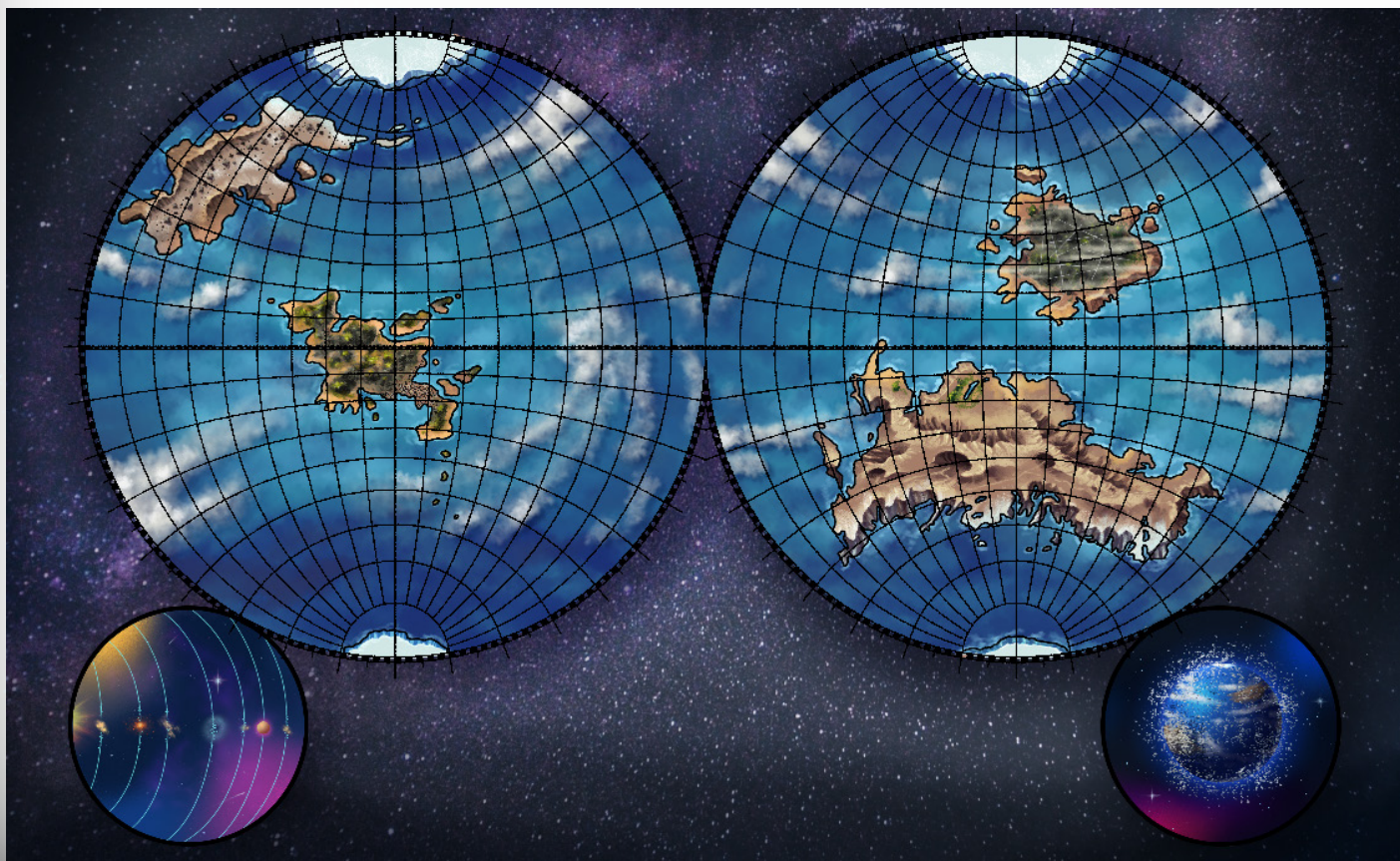
Shortly after Triune provided access to the Drift, the planets of the Ilpheen System were discovered, offering incalculable resources for those with the means of extracting them; the mineral wealth was unmatched anywhere in the galaxy. Indeed, whoever controlled the wealth of those seven worlds would hold a distinct advantage over all other species and their governments. Two civilizations claimed the Ilpheen System as their own, and the subsequent war between the two ended

only when both races were destroyed in 300 AG.

The more humanlike of these two species were the Pleoqs. Over time, they came to believe their constant conflict with their enemy was divinely ordained, and they could not exist without the contrast provided by their foes. Their spiritual text stated as much: *You will not see what you are unless you also see what you are not.* The Pleoqs could no sooner end the war than they could separate themselves from their religion.

The other civilization was known as the C2. Because the C2 language is impossible for any other race to understand or speak without a computer interface, the C2's name for themselves is not used by other species. They are known by others as the C2 culture, or "civilization two," as they are believed to have been the second species to master faster-than-light travel. Not only were the C2s quite alien in appearance when compared to the Pleoqs, their entire thought process was based on a different model. Compelled by logic, the C2s fought and died for generations because logic dictated it: the Ilpheen System was so wealthy that the C2s could have purchased half the Pact worlds had they been able to monopolize its resources. Their mental constructs made it impossible for them to opt for any kind of shared resolution.

War between the two cultures became almost eternal. The Pleoqs would land an army on Ilpheen 3 only to have that army eventually razed. The C2s would send colonists to Ilpheen 7, and they'd last for two generations before being slaughtered by Pleoq invaders. Both civilizations



manufactured ships and weapons constantly. Both became defined by lifetimes of war.

But what to do with the dead? Hundreds of millions of C2s and Pleoqs lost their lives. Neither culture jettisoned the bodies into space, as is the custom in many other societies, nor did they believe in cremation or any other ritual that destroyed the remains. Instead, in the year 196 AG, the two species agreed to share one of the system's planets as a global cemetery. Ilpheen 6 was the natural choice, as it was the least-rich in natural resources, and recent tectonic and volcanic activity had eliminated most lifeforms. The Pleoqs and the C2s sealed the Ilpheen Accord, which gave Ilpheen 6 to the dead. Only robotic burial attendants were permitted on the surface.

The war waged on. The losses mounted. Entire planets were obliterated. Ilpheen 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 were entirely fragmented, as the mightiest of the Pleoq and C2 weapons tore the planets apart, scattering the chunks into space. Other than Ilpheen 6, only Ilpheen 4 remains, and its entire atmosphere is filled with the highly toxic residue of bio-chemical weapons, fission bombs, and high-energy artifacts.

The Flotsam Halo

An orbiting mess of war residue surrounds Ilpheen 6. Explorers have labeled these pieces of planetary fragments, blown-apart ships, and space junk from the war as Debris 982, Debris 983, et cetera. So far, over half a million individual pieces have been cataloged, and these represent only the largest objects. Countless others are left to be studied and searched for resources. Passing through this field can be dangerous business, with only the most skilled pilots or most desperate scavengers risking the tight maneuvers necessary to "skim the Halo," as it's known. These orbiting chunks, many of them moving at speeds of 17,400 miles per hour, provide a sort of armored shell around the planet, dissuading visitors. Guiding a ship safely through the Halo requires a Piloting check (DC 17), with failure indicating that the ship takes 2d10 points of damage.

Ilpheen 6 has no natural satellite planetoids, but many objects within the Halo are large enough to be clearly seen from the planet's surface, prompting the poet Abdajeen to refer to Ilpheen 6 as "the hollow trespass encircled by unfortunate moons."

Planetary Conditions

There are no native inhabitants of Ilpheen 6. The planet once supported animal life, but nearly all of that disappeared under lakes of lava and into sinkholes created by the quakes. After things settled down, the Pleoqs and C2s defined the parameters of the Ilpheen Accord, which prohibited either culture from populating the planet, other than a handful of maintenance workers who tended to the dead. To this day, the planet remains mostly empty.

Flora

Fire razed most of Ilpheen 6's once-lush forests. Frequent volcanic eruptions in the near past set much of the planet ablaze. With the bulk of the forests gone, habitats were not available for animals, and oxygen production was limited. Only recently have plants begun to reassert themselves, tiny green explorers breaching the soil for the first time in many solar years. Forests of immature trees can be found scattered across the continents. The coastal regions in particular have seen a rebirth of plant-based life.

Because Ilpheen 6 was used as a repository for the dead and was never cataloged by plant biologists, most

of its species went extinct before they were ever known. Today, though, variations of these plants have begun to appear in small pockets around the globe. Many of these are exclusive to the Ilpheen system and are thus quite valuable for scientific purposes. The equatorial band is warm and wet enough that satellites can see the beginnings of forestation. This "proto-jungle" will eventually flourish, assuming the planet's volcanoes have finished erupting.

Wildlife

The planet's surface is devoid of most animals and insects. The conditions that created the perfect site for a shared cemetery world — desolation and a lack of natural resources — also made a difficult platform to support the type of birds and land animals common on other worlds. The general lack of plants means that herbivores have insufficient forage to thrive, and without the plant-eaters, there are no meat-eaters to prey on them. The food chain common to many other planets has yet to rebuild itself on Ilpheen 6. Even small rodents have yet to appear in any significant number. Insects abound, though, so if visitors to the planet imported birds and other bug-eating animals, these animals would do well, their populations increasing rapidly due to a lack of competition.

In contrast, the oceans teem with life. Most of the sea-dwelling denizens have yet to be seen by scientists and others who might be interested in studying them. Though the turbulent tectonic activity and frequent volcanic eruptions have killed off a large percentage of the creatures living underwater, many remain and even thrive in these uncertain conditions. In contrast to the mostly empty and sterile world above, the submarine realms are very active.

Atmosphere

Because of the dearth of plant life, oxygen production is low. Whereas a planet suitable for oxygen-breathers boasts an atmosphere of about 21% oxygen, that of Ilpheen 6 currently stands at only 10%. The carbon dioxide isn't scrubbed as efficiently, so it's three or four times the standard level. However, this varies by region, so in an area where forests have begun to return, the atmosphere is richer in oxygen, with a corresponding decrease in CO₂. Many species who visit Ilpheen 6 will require means of artificial respiration.

Enemy Civilizations

Ilpheen 6 is a planet dedicated to the entombment, burial, or otherwise intentional placement of the dead. The two species sharing the planet as per the Ilpheen Accord were the human-like Pleoqs and the spheroid C2s. Though now extinct (almost; see below), the only thing they shared in common was their desire to honor the Ilpheen Accord. In nearly every other way — their history, their religion, their social mores — they could not have been further apart.

Pleoq Cosmology

Before the Everything existed, a force that cannot be explained or named divided itself in two so as to know itself. In its reflection, it came to perceive the truths of the multiverse. But its new half was imperfect simply because it wasn't the original force, and its imperfections led it to desire to perfect itself. And so it created the Everything, many millennia before the Gap.

This creator-half is known as the Demiurge, one part of a dualistic deity worshipped by the Pleoqs. As an artisan, the

Planetary

WAVEBOLT

Demiurge crafted planetary bodies within the Everything, along with stars to warm them and mortal beings to inhabit them. All of this was done in an effort to obtain the perfection the Demiurge was eternally denied. Frustrated at its failed attempts to craft faultlessly, the Demiurge introduced death into the Everything, so that its creations would expire after a time and allow new ones to take their place. Living beings evolve over time into more functional forms, better adapted at surviving, because the Demiurge gifted them the ability to slowly change shape to match their environments — with the end goal being eventual perfection by way of evolution. But evolution takes a long time, and the Demiurge sometimes grows impatient and wipes out entire species with natural disasters. The occasional wickedness and selfishness displayed by mortals is attributed to the Demiurge, as sentient beings unfortunately inherited the traits of their maker, good and bad alike. The Pleoqs saw the Demiurge as both benevolent and malign, further reinforcing their dualistic worldview.

The other half of the Pleoq two-deity pantheon is the original force from which the Demiurge was reflected. This “god” has no true name and is believed to be beyond such things as creation and destruction; indeed, this force has no place in the material world. Depending on the traditions of any particular Pleoq community, it was referred to as the First Half or the Noncreator. Some sects believed the First Half will one day absorb the Demiurge back into itself, thus ending the multiverse and returning creation to the null state before Everything was made. Sadly, the Pleoq race was destroyed in their war with the C2s, the annals of their religious beliefs found only in the tombs of their dead.

Pleoq Society

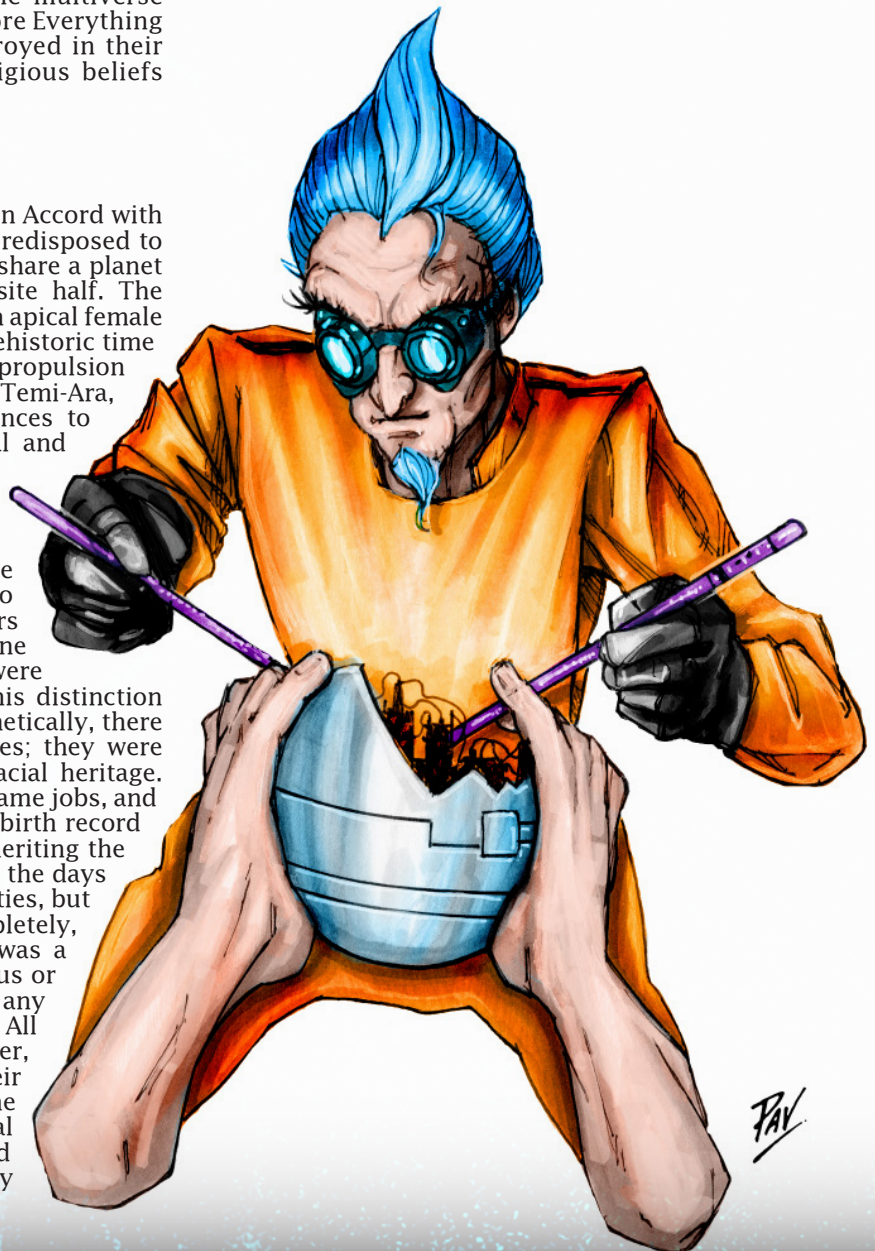
The Pleoqs were inclined to seal the Ilpheen Accord with their enemies because mentally they were predisposed to thinking in twos; it was natural for them to share a planet with a group they considered their opposite half. The Pleoqs traced their pre-Gap lineage back to an apical female ancestor named Temi-Ara, who lived in a prehistoric time long before the advent of Drift-capable propulsion systems. All Pleoqs are descended from Temi-Ara, their historical records dotted with references to her adventures and influence, both factual and apocryphal. Before being wiped out in the war with the C2s, Pleoq society was based on a structure supposedly handed down from the ancient days of Temi-Ara.

Temi-Ara's culture was based on the concept of the “moiety.” There were two distinct “clans” in Pleoq society, the Arrurs and Chirfas. Everyone was a member of one moiety or the other; if you were Pleoq, you were born as either an Arrur or a Chirfa, and this distinction remained with you throughout your life. Genetically, there was no difference between the two moieties; they were 100% the same people, sharing an exact racial heritage. They spoke the same language, worked the same jobs, and lived in the same cities. A single entry on a birth record indicated if a Pleoq was Arrur or Chirfa, inheriting the same moiety designation as their mother. In the days of Temi-Ara, the two clans were distinct entities, but over the millennia, the clans blended completely, so eventually the title of Arrur or Chirfa was a nominal one, with no bearing on social status or lot in life. There was no “moiety loyalty” or any customs that commemorated clan history. All Pleoqs lived homogenously with one another, regardless of what was stamped on their birth records. As the Demiurge intended, the Pleoqs evolved beyond their need for tribal identification. By tradition, there remained only one part of Pleoq culture where moiety had any bearing: funerals.

As a matter of long-standing law, the deceased of the Arrur were entombed in one area, while the Chirfa dead were buried in a different, separate place. The moieties were never buried in the same location. These funeral sites were not in competition with each other; one was not seen as a better place than the other. It's simply the way things were. This “cultural rule” was never violated.

Pleoq Physiology

According to Pleoq philosophical beliefs, the Demiurge created mortals with the intention of watching them evolve toward an eventual state of perfection. The Pleoqs demonstrated this evolution throughout their long history. After they became a space-faring race, no longer bound to any particular gravity-laden planet, hundreds of thousands of solar years passed in which they explored the weightless vacuum between stars. Their bodies slowly adapted to these environmental conditions. Before they were wiped out in the war against the C2s, Pleoqs were four-limbed humanoids, though their lower appendages (once used as legs, back when they were planet-dwellers), were short and attenuated, with toes that had lengthened to be used much like the fingers of their long, dexterous arms. Pleoqs lived without gravity, and their bodies reflected this; they



appeared much like humans from the waist up. Their skin was pale but flawless. Their hair was their vanity, and they used a variety of artificial means to enhance and color it. Whenever they ventured planetside for exploration or trade, the Pleoqs donned power suits equipped with wheels, as their legs were not suited for walking. They manipulated the machines' intricate controls with their prehensile toes. They favored an oxygen-nitrogen environment in their ships, but they possessed bio-tech that enabled them to use filters to manage diverse atmospheres. Their natural lifespans matched that of humans.

Pleoq Tech

In keeping with their belief in Demiurge-inspired evolution, the Pleoqs favored technology that blended with their physical bodies and enhanced them, either physically or mentally. They were less interested in making a machine to perform a certain work-related function and more curious about how they could perform that function themselves if they augmented their bodies with biotechnology, nanites, or cybernetic implants. They eagerly experimented with the latest ways to improve themselves, content to blend themselves with their cybernetic creations. Just as they viewed the world as a natural dichotomy, so too did they see their own physical forms, a graceful partnership between the natural and the fabricated. The Pleoqs were interested in magic only inasmuch as it enhanced their technology.

The Funerary Bots

Not all Pleoq technology was designed to be incorporated into their bodies, though. The funerary bots are one notable exception. Because Ilpheen 6 has always been uninhabited, there are no natives who the Pleoqs might have employed to look after the graves. They constructed automatons for this purpose. The burial sites of both moieties are tended by self-sufficient bots to this very day, though the Pleoqs themselves are long gone. The bots will continue their maintenance until they are no longer able to find sufficient materials to repair themselves. Thousands of funerary bots can be found on Ilpheen 6, going about their duties night and day, slaves to their programming. Some, however, have gone rogue. These bots, free of their original chores, are either roaming aimlessly or performing new tasks, as dictated by their failing programming. Many are dangerous, as they protect the burial sites at all costs, and that means attacking any explorers.

The Derelict Lifepod

Everyone in the star system knows the fate of the Pleoqs and C2s: they destroyed themselves in an internecine conflict — a grim lesson to civilizations everywhere. Both races were extinguished. However, this is not entirely true. A small, pilotless vessel, designated Debris 285, orbits Ilpheen 6 among the other hunks of blasted ships and the wreckage of war. Inside are the last seven members of the Pleoq species.

This ship's occupants are held in indefinite stasis, their bodies not aging. Even at the cellular level, they are kept in a state of suspended animation. As long as their vessel remains intact, its solar-powered system can theoretically function forever. Only the interaction of the PCs will revive them.

Detecting the Pod

The lifepod can be introduced as a plot element in a number of ways. The PCs might locate the pod entirely by accident while conducting routine scans of the

Flotsam Halo or by painstakingly exploring the debris field for valuable ship components. The pod does not send out a hail or distress beacon, so the odds of finding it among millions of orbiting objects are low. Optionally, the PCs could come upon the pod when it best fits the campaign's goals. Introducing the final members of an otherwise extinct race is a serious development that can have far-reaching effects.

Dealing with the Pleoqs

If the Pleoqs are awakened, they spend some time assessing the situation and absorbing data about what transpired since they went into hibernation. In the last days of the war, these seven scientists saved themselves by entering stasis, intending to hide their nondescript vessel in the Flotsam Halo. Their plan worked. Now that they're awake, they must realign their goals — and these new goals invariably require the assistance of the PCs. Many members of other species blame the Pleoqs for the terrible war, so the PCs might find themselves staving off assassination attempts. They could serve as bodyguards while the survivors reestablish themselves and try to acquire a voice in galactic politics. Or they could be employed to track down all of the things these few Pleoqs need in order to rebuild their once-enormous civilization.

C2 Cosmology

C2s are atheists. In their pre-Gap past, their ancestors practiced a monotheistic religion, their faith providing them with reassurance of an afterlife and a handbook for conscientious living. Science eventually demonstrated the accounts in the religious texts to be fiction, even though the messages contained in them represented the truth. C2s discarded the trappings of their faith while wisely maintaining the truths they had learned during their shared experience. These four truths remained fundamental to C2 society until the very end, when they destroyed themselves in the war against the Pleoqs:

- Protect those of your own kind.
- Be frugal.
- Strive for improvement.
- Explore.

As they ventured through the Drift, C2s applied these truths to the worlds they visited and found them to be consistent with their experience. They were not inherently aggressive and never sought to seize the resources owned by a rival species, but when they were attacked, they proved to be adept defenders. Driven by logic, they created a society with very little waste; whatever was inefficient or superfluous was discarded. This led outside observers to accuse the C2s of being bereft of art and self-expression, and in many ways this was an accurate assessment. Artistic endeavors were limited to those with an obvious positive impact on society; art was not performed simply for "art's sake." Constantly working to better themselves, C2s devoted time and energy to providing the highest standard of living to all members of their civilization. There was no appreciable financial gap between one C2 and another. All enjoyed a nearly equal quality of life, with the exceptions being a few lifelong political leaders and celebrated scientists. Their consistent desire to explore the universe led the C2s to the Ilpheen System, where they discovered wealth far beyond their expectations. They set about mining the resources of the system's seven planets, but the Pleoqs soon interrupted them. As one of their fundamental truths involved self-protection, the C2s defended their claims with ferocity.

The C2s entered into the Ilpheen Accord because they used the remains of their deceased as compost in their massive shipboard gardens. As creatures of extreme

logic, they could not abide waste of any kind, and so all dead members of their race were placed in special containers on the surface of Ilpheen 6, where they were allowed to decompose to be used later as fertilizer.

C2 Physiology

Before being destroyed by the Pleoqs, C2s were sentient spheroids, their curved surface dotted with apertures of various sizes. These orifices opened and closed in precise patterns, performing multiple functions simultaneously: respiration, communication, locomotion, and observation. C2s observed the world by detecting sound waves, by using echolocation, by sensing odors, and by monitoring vibrations in the ground and air around them. In this manner, they had a 360-degree field of vision; they could see up, down, and all around them. They could use different intake holes to process different types of atmospheres, which enabled them to survive in a variety of conditions. They spoke with sounds that many species perceived as music. This language was incredibly intricate, with the meaning of words subtly changing depending on how many of the C2's apertures were active and how much air was permitted to pass through them. Because they could speak with dozens of "mouths" at once, C2s were able to transmit much more information and many more details in far less time than members of species who speak using more traditional means. They were creatures of great intellect.

Whether male or female, an adult C2 was generally 4 feet in diameter. Their coloration was reddish brown but darkened as they aged. They lived to be the equivalent of 150 years of Pact Standard Time, though many were killed long before they reached middle-age. The C2 diet was 100% vegetarian. They consumed a variety of plants, seeds, nuts, and fruits through apertures designed for caloric intake. They moved by rolling, capable of a high degree of directional accuracy as they adjusted the release of gasses around their bodies. They could reach speeds up to 40 feet per second across flat ground. Though C2s once had working appendages at some point in their distant evolutionary history, as their creations took on autonomous thought and assumed most of society's physical duties, the C2s moved beyond the need for their primitive arms and sensory organs. They programmed and controlled their ships and robotic servants through complicated sound discharges. Free from mundane labors, the C2s developed a civilization known for its complex politics and abstract philosophies.

C2 Society

C2s were knowledge-seekers. They long ago moved away from the capitalist caste system of other cultures, in which wealthy members enjoyed a far different set of privileges than impoverished members. In contrast, the C2s were very egalitarian, to the point where they would not spend resources on a new interstellar cruiser while one of their communities was in the process of rebuilding after a flood. First they addressed the well-being of the flood victims, and only then did they permit themselves the luxury of non-essential spending. In many ways, the C2s achieved their goal of equality for all. This provided them the liberty to pursue hyper-advanced mathematics, cutting-edge engineering, and higher-level philosophy.

Because they believed so fervently in the core truth of "Protect those of your own kind," they came to hate the Pleoqs. This hatred was instilled in C2s from a young age. They had arrived in the Ilpheen System first; indeed, the very name "Ilpheen" is the phonetic spelling of the sound-name originally given to the system by the first C2 settlers. And because they were first, they claimed it as their own, and so they claimed the right to

defend it. Unfortunately, the idea of sharing resources and extending fairness to all did not apply to those outside C2 society. Suffering from cultural hubris, the C2s assumed they were the most advanced beings in the universe, and they could not bring themselves to divide the Ilpheen riches with a race they saw as still trapped in mid-evolution. The C2s had long ago shed their appendages, and they viewed the imperfect Pleoqs as unenlightened boors who still adhered to false religions.

C2 Tech

The technological devices of the C2 civilization were built prior to the Gap, long before the C2s outgrew their use for arms and legs. Soon the computers and robots were able to replicate themselves and improve on their original designs, so they assumed control of their own maintenance and development. The C2s moved on to other, more esoteric matters, depending on their technology to keep society operating at maximum efficiency. C2 robotics were among the most advanced in the galaxy, but the C2 programmers were very careful to build in protections against an AI becoming fully self-aware and making decisions contrary to the common good. Whenever an AI attained a certain level of reasoning ability, its built-in programming redirected it. The C2s never feared a revolt by the machines they had made.

Because all C2 communities, starships, and pieces of infrastructure were built by computer command, everything was designed by logic for extreme efficiency, with magic used to further streamline productivity. There was no waste, no artistic flourishes. In fact, there was a brief period in C2 history where creative elements such as random magical effects had to be intentionally added to the C2 environment as a remedy for a social ennui that developed as a result of living in a world entirely bereft of artistic expression. Eventually the programmers began to encode "superfluous additions" into their machines' building directives. This resulted in the now famous Neo-Sentiment art movement — a period in which painting was dominated by AI artists, most notably the C2 mainframe that called itself DeYoung. Eventually DeYoung and the other Neo-Sentiment painters decommissioned themselves to make way for other forms of expression.

The Last C2

Though the entire C2 civilization was destroyed in the war against the Pleoqs, one C2 bioengineer managed to transfer his consciousness into an inanimate object before he died. Living alone in the Inverted Mountains, this C2's real name is unpronounceable, but he permits himself to be called 7 Sigma should he be located. During the war, 7 Sigma was a radical engineer in the field of extreme bio-robotics. Though scorned by his peers and considered by many to be a charlatan, 7 Sigma nonetheless achieved what they could not: eternal life. When his body was dying, 7 Sigma uploaded all of his mental functions into what is essentially a powerful bomb.

The *sidereal carafe* is a finely detailed, crystalline object that floats in a superconductive fluid within a glass tank about 1-1/2 feet tall. Made of some of the rarest elements in the galaxy, the *sidereal carafe* is essentially a quantum computer with magical properties. From within this receptacle, 7 Sigma can access the full environmental and mechanical subsystems of the Inverted Mountains. He can continue to conduct research, even though he is entirely disembodied. He built the *sidereal carafe* and designed it to serve many functions, one of which is annihilation; if he finds himself *in extremis*, 7 Sigma can cause his receptacle to explode with enough force to

atomize everything within 8 miles.

7 Sigma exists as nothing but a consciousness inside a container that floats in a fluid-filled tank. Because he has no physical form, he cannot manipulate computer controls or exert any influence on his environment. He communicates via a form of telepathy made possible by the magical medium in which he floats, a substance he designed to transmit brain waves. This telepathy has a range of about 175 feet. 7 Sigma contacts any nearby sentient creature, eager to engage them in conversation. Forced to spend all of his time in contemplation, 7 Sigma has developed ideas on endless subjects, from philosophy to love to the nature of the multiverse itself, and he's quite happy to converse about any of them. His favorite subject, of course, is the science behind what he's managed to do to himself — extending his life beyond his body's death by fixing his mental faculties into a rare device. The *sidereal carafe* is almost incomprehensible in its complexities, but 7 Sigma is willing to share the specifics of its construction with anyone who will listen.

7 Sigma and his receptacle could be worth a fortune to the right government or corporate buyer on one of the Pact Worlds, for he has unlocked the mysteries of life and death. Opportunistic PCs will seize upon this chance. 7 Sigma agrees to be transported offworld if the PCs suggest it, but he warns them that he is not without his defenses, should he find himself in a disagreeable situation. If he feels he has no other choice, 7 Sigma detonates the bomb by sending a preprogrammed mental code into the *sidereal carafe*. In this event, no living thing within 8 miles survives.

7 Sigma's ultimate desire is to restore the C2 civilization, but he has no idea how to accomplish this. If the PCs become involved in his plight, they might begin a widescale search for C2 enclaves located elsewhere in the galaxy, hoping to find other surviving members of his race. Or they could investigate rumored technologies that would make it possible to produce new C2s in the lab — a form of "test tube baby" that could eventually inherit all of the knowledge that 7 Sigma possesses.

The Four Continents

Four major landmasses comprise the planet's surface, all of which are dedicated to the interment of the dead, as per the Ilpheen Accord. These continents represent a wide range of climate conditions, from the polar region to the humid equatorial band. The continents were never named; each is known by the type of structure used there to inter the dead.

The Inverted Mountains

The C2s created an entire mountain range of tombs on a rocky, mostly barren continent in the northern hemisphere. Using their monumentally powerful engineering abilities, the C2s designed and built a series of six dozen mountain-sized complexes, each shaped like an upside-down pyramid. They constructed these enormous buildings in between existing mountains, so that a single tomb structure of 23,000 feet in height is wedged into the mountain range of snow-capped peaks. Each contains tubular passageways about 10 feet in diameter, connecting over half a million niches where C2 bodies are left to decay in specially prepared bins that facilitate compost collection. In all, there are 70 such artificial mountains and more than 35 million niches holding C2 remains.

The nearly unmapable array of tunnels within the Inverted Mountains is patrolled by a steady stream of spherical maintenance bots. Most of these units are simple custodial workers of limited means, while a few have been programmed as true AIs in order to orchestrate

the duties of this army of bots — about 10,000 in all, or half of the original contingent; many have broken down since the war's end.

The Inverted Mountains are part of a chain on a continent in the northern hemisphere, practically inaccessible from the ground. The range is 1,250 miles long and more than 310 miles at its widest point. The mountains are extremely rugged, very cold, and incredibly tall. The highest three peaks all surpass 28,000 feet — far beyond the survival threshold of many species. Specialized equipment is required to explore the range for any length of time. The weather is wildly unpredictable.

Millions of tombs are found throughout the upside-down pyramids and the tunnels connecting them. No lighting or heating has been provided. The maintenance bots produce local light as their work requires, and their internal heat sources are sufficient to keep them functioning in these extreme conditions. Likewise, there are no maps readily available. However, each bot is equipped with highly detailed navigation software, so anyone with the sufficient skill can download the information if they manage to disable one of these drone workers. This information can be quite valuable, as storage vaults throughout the tombs hold tens of thousands of spare parts. However, each vault is securely locked, warded, and possibly trapped, so that even if the PCs discover one, they will not automatically have access to its riches.

The maintenance bots themselves can also prove perilous. Programmed to keep the tubes clean, they consider any visitors to be vermin or an infestation, and they respond accordingly. Their weapons vary in power, but if one of the units is harmed, it sends a signal to all those nearby, who in turn are prepared to send the signal even farther. If the PCs aren't careful, they could very easily find themselves trapped in a tunnel, with hundreds of menacing bots on either side.

To make matters worse, the maintenance bots are not the only predators lurking in the tubes. Though seismic activity all but extinguished life on Ilpheen, a few subterranean species managed to survive the lava flows and ashen skies. One such creature, never studied and properly named by scientists, is a terrifying combination of canine and lizard, a saw-toothed carrion-eater that feeds on the endless supply of decaying C2 corpses. The creature navigates by echolocation and powerful olfactory senses. The creature is asexual, capable of fertilizing its own young through parthenogenesis, so it has produced several hungry offspring who can be found anywhere in the Inverted Mountains.

Adventure in the Inverted Mountains

Because of its sheer size, the mountain range could provide a lifetime of adventure — if it weren't mostly empty. Though more than 35 million compost niches offer nearly unlimited places for the PCs to explore, the majority of these are either empty, or they contain nothing but a C2's moldering remains. Likewise, the tubular infrastructure connecting these tombs could be traveled for a lifetime and still not be completely seen, but for the most part, the journey would be a monotonous one. Anyone who ends up lost in the Inverted Mountains could wander for years before finding a hatch to the surface.

That being said, pockets of high activity exist throughout the catacombs. In addition to the dangers of the bots and canine-lizard creatures, there are certain nodes throughout the three-dimensional passage system where other sentient creatures have established homes in the darkness.

NODE 1: THE SEEKERS

A group of mystics came here for the express purpose of finding a headquarters where they will be left alone. Comprised of many races, the Seekers are isolationists

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WAVES

who share a belief in a spiritual energy that “emanates from Beyond the barrier of space-time but interconnects all living things.” There are over a dozen seekers here, all of them at least 11th-level mystics. They communicate exclusively using *telepathic bond*. Though the Seekers shun outsiders, they are not immediately aggressive. If threatened, they attack, and given their numbers and their experience levels, they prove more than a match for most adversaries. If the PCs approach amicably, the seekers reluctantly engage them in conversation, as their group is in need of a small measure of assistance. It seems that one of their members, **Nakrysh**, ventured up to the surface, intending to return after a brief time alone in the mountains. Such behavior is quite normal among the Seekers, who often meditate in seclusion for days at a time. But Nakrysh has been away for too long; something is wrong, and the PCs are enlisted to return the lost mystic. The other Seekers are not willing to interrupt their individual routines in order to find their colleague, but they are concerned enough that they hire outside help. Just where Nakrysh has gone is dependent on the campaign’s needs, but he might be trapped under an avalanche, disabled by injury, or simply lost in a mountain valley. The nature of his predicament should match the PCs’ ability to meet the challenge.

NODE 2: FALLEN STAR

A meteorite slammed into the Inverted Mountains, crashing through the surface and embedding itself within the tangle of passages below. A kasatha solarian named **Shalfey** has set up a temporary camp in a series of suspended hammocks while he gathers data about the space rock. If the PCs encounter Shalfey during their exploration, he welcomes the company, so that now he has someone to talk to other than himself.

The exact nature of the meteorite is based on the needs of the campaign:

- The rock is not a rock at all but an egg, containing a creature that either (a) must be returned to its mother in a distant asteroid belt, or (b) holds a specimen so rare that corporations are ready to possess it.
- The meteorite is toxic, slowly poisoning all who come near it; the toxin causes random mutations in the PCs.
- The rock is hollow, having been crafted by a smuggler to transport a dangerous item or forbidden religious artifact.

NODE 3: CONTROL ROOM

At the nexus of several passages is an octagonal chamber once used by the C2 custodians to monitor the overall status of the burial niches and the integrity of the tunnels that connect them. The walls here contain banks of controls that are activated by sound, as are all C2 computers. There are no keyboards or other input devices. Anyone capable of producing the C2 musical “language” can power up the room’s electronics, which are charged via wind turbines on the surface. There are no traditional video monitors here, but rather speakers of various sizes that produce the complicated harmonics understood by the C2s. The challenge facing inquisitive PCs is how to operate this equipment and how to interpret the data received. If they can accomplish these feats, they will gain a comprehensive “view” of the entire network of tunnels and the niches they serve. If they are able to plumb the computer’s memory, they can access details about C2 history, politics, and psychology. They also discover a record of the living C2 consciousness known as 7 Sigma, detailed under **The Last C2**, above.

The Deathbed Forest

The second C2 interment ground is a large island continent. Located in a cool, rainy climate, the large island has a shoreline that is frequently shrouded by fog. It sees short, temperate summers and harsh, wet

winters. The C2 compost plots are suspended in trays on tall steel poles, covering most of the continent. The land is known as the Deathbed Forest.

The island of the Deathbed Forest represents over 3.7 million square miles of land, most of which is relatively flat and crisscrossed with streams. The soil is remarkable rich, a fortunate side-effect of the planet’s high volcanic activity. Minerals were deposited on the surface, grasses caught fire and burned, and after several cycles of such activity, the ideal farmland was created. Of course, no crop has ever been planted on Ilpheen 6. The C2s chose this place to construct millions of hammock-like compost beds, mounted on poles high enough to keep the decaying bodies above the frequent floodwaters. As much of the Deathbed Forest sits below sea level, flooding is not uncommon. To keep their dead from washing away, the C2s fixed the compost bins to the tops of poles that range in height from 6-1/2 to 20 feet, staggered in such a way as to maximize sun exposure and promote decomposition. The C2 caretakers intended to retrieve the compost as it became available, but the final battle of the great war meant that the Deathbed Forest remained mostly untouched.

Exploring this continent means traveling through these artificial “trees.” Because life has yet to return fully to the planet, there are very few carrion birds to feast on the countless corpses, which are instead left to rot peacefully. The stench is pervasive but not overpowering. One of the most interesting results of millions of decomposing C2 bodies is the spontaneous growth of new and uncatalogued flowers. These blossoms flourish in the broken-down remains of the C2s. Some of these plants are merely beautiful, while others have unique characteristics that could earn a profit for anyone with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Aceda Flowers: This silver-leaved flower secretes a nectar that behaves as a normal source of carbohydrates for small insects, but given its magical properties, it reacts as a powerful acid if it touches metal. A single drop can burn a tiny hole through 1/4 inch of steel. Collecting the nectar in any kind of quantity is difficult and exacting work, compounded by the fact that the flowers are several feet off the ground. If the flowers are picked or their stems cut, the nectar loses its acidic properties within minutes, so it must be harvested from the flowers as they sit in their suspended beds.

Dog Fronds: This flower is semi-sentient, with an animal-level intelligence. As many as 10% of all dog fronds possess an Intelligence score of 4–5, which enables them to interact with the world around them. They are incapable of speech but can communicate through movement. Clever PCs can exploit dog fronds in a variety of ways.

Positrophs: With long, icy-cold petals, the positroph is frost blue in color. The plant radiates a slight but detectable magnetic field, which interrupts the proper functioning of analog measuring devices such as old-world compasses. If harvested and properly configured by an electronics expert, the petals can be used as a temporary power supply for digital devices. The amount of charge per petal depends upon the power demands of the device. But whether it provides energy for an hour or merely a few minutes, the petal gives a unique enhancement to any instrument to which they are connected: the device becomes undetectable

BACTERIAL CONTAMINATION

Type disease, injury or inhaled; Save Fortitude DC 17
Track physical; Frequency 1/day
Cure 2 consecutive saves

to all forms of scanning. The positroph-charged apparatus does not show up on infrared, ultrasound, sonar, radar, or any other kind of visualization technique. Though this trait of positrophs is not yet widely known among those unfamiliar with the Ilpheen system, if word gets out, it will certainly result in a chaotic rush to the planet's surface.

The primary danger of an extended journey through the Deathbed Forest is contamination. Because of the spectacular number of decaying corpses, bacteria are everywhere and difficult to avoid. Unprotected visitors risk contracting an illness.

In addition to possible sickness, explorers must be wary of a new type of flying insect evolving on this continent. The **steel hornet** feeds off the nectar of the flowering plants growing in the compost. Steel hornets are found individually or in groups of up to a dozen. Each is almost 1-1/2 feet long, capable of emitting a droning sound that can numb its victims before it lances them with the long needle on its posterior. A stab from that stiletto-like barb forces a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) to resist a debilitating sickness that renders the victim bedridden for 1d4 days. Steel hornet disease has not been studied by medical researchers, so no known antitoxin exists. The disease is highly resistant to magical healing; anyone attempting to cast *remove affliction* on the victim must first succeed in a DC 18 caster level check before the spell can take effect.

Adventure in the Deathbed Forest

Treasure-seekers are drawn to this continent because many of the C2s were interred with tokens encoded with their life's work, the final homage to who they were and how they contributed to society. The tokens have incredible value to the right buyer. If deciphered, the data within a single token might reveal the research of a nuclear physicist or the unpublished symphony of an amateur composer. These tokens, known as *mementos mori*, are each individualized and unique. Most are worthless to outside observers, but of the millions to be found in the Deathbed Forest, many contain information possessing real, marketable value. The PCs will not be the only ones seeking to profit from recovering the *mementos*. Their search brings them into direct competition with scavengers, data-mongers, and privateers hoping to cash in on what seems to be easy pickings. In fact, turning a profit in the Deathbed Forest remains a formidable challenge, considering the possibility of contamination, the ever-present steel hornets, and the sheer difficulty of sifting through millions of relatively worthless tokens to find those few of monetary worth.

The Land of Graves

Almost all of this 14-million-square-mile land mass is one never-ending graveyard. The Pleoqs buried their dead here. With the exception of the mountains and wetlands, the Land of Graves is covered in tombstones. The stone markers are sometimes as far as 300 feet apart and sometimes lined up one right beside the other. There is almost nowhere a visitor can stand and not be within sight of multiple graves. The Pleoqs of the Chifra moiety are buried here.

The stone markers were quarried from marble deposits on the southern edge of the continent and cut by robots into predetermined shapes, depending on the wishes of the deceased's family members. The variety is endless. Every stone bears a serial number, and if the proper database is accessed, the history of the person buried there can be examined at length. The Pleoqs were wise enough to upload this data to servers on other worlds, so it remains intact, even though the Pleoqs themselves are gone.

The continent's mountains are not used for burials, but the remnants of Pleoq activity are still readily located

here. Mining operations were used to extract great quantities of marble, which in turn was transported by auto-guided trucks to mason facilities in the foothills. There, the tombstones were cut, engraved, loaded, and shipped. Many of the enormous digging and rock-moving vehicles remain, some of them still functional. The mines themselves contain few precious metals, unlike the other planets in the Ilpheen system, which were so full of resources and wealth that two civilizations destroyed themselves to own them. Instead, the mines of the Land of Graves contain a virtually endless supply of marble and granite. The equipment the Pleoqs left behind is worth millions, if it can somehow be taken offworld.

The Land of Graves is extremely dangerous to explore. Some of the dead have not found easy rest, and they've clawed their way up through the dirt. They now roam freely as undead horrors. Some places might find only a handful of undead lingering in the area, while others host hundreds of damned souls, sweeping across the land.

Adventure in the Land of Graves

Many different organizations might have an interest in conducting research here, using the Database of the Dead provided by the Pleoqs. There is money to be made by exploiting genealogical records and DNA information. Graverobbers will not be disappointed, as riches are buried with the dead. Many Pleoqs were laid to rest with baubles, trinkets, or pieces of jewelry important to them in life. Given the sheer number of burial plots, the amount of loot to be found here is considerable. Yet the restless dead may prove an obstacle to greedy plunderers.

The Ossuary: Several out-of-control automatons, running on autopilot, excavated millions of Pleoq bones and built a mazelike ossuary when their programming went awry. The labyrinth, with towering walls made entirely of skeletal remains, covers 11,000 square miles. Its seemingly endless passages meander in every possible direction, with most going nowhere but into switchbacks and dead-ends. Having gone rogue, the robot builders created this maze for reasons yet to be explained. Their aerial drones open fire on anyone attempting to climb over the walls or otherwise circumvent the partitions of bone. Further, mechanical hounds patrol the passages, their augmented olfactory sensors enabling them to track visitors with frightening accuracy.

One route alone leads to a drop-tube at the center of the ossuary. The subterranean chamber below serves as the hub of a warren of passages constructed by the runaway bots for purposes unknown. Having robbed many graves, the bots have pooled treasures here, protecting them with lethal traps. Just why they are amassing these riches remains a mystery.

Sepulcher City

The Pleoqs of the Arrur moiety are entombed in a vast artificial metropolis on a tropical continent crossing the planet's equator. To keep the Arrur separate from the Chifra, they were not buried in the Land of Graves but instead entombed here in above-ground vaults. These structures are diverse in architecture, each one designed to best match the wishes of the dead held within. Some are simple unadorned square buildings, while others appear as pyramids, pagodas, or small temples. The designs are as diverse as the people buried here. Streets of asphalt connect these city blocks to one another, and the funerary bots use these avenues to conduct their custodial duties. Sepulcher City has a population of over 50 million, all of whom are dead.

The tombs are made of various types of stone, from granite to limestone to marble, and are all single-story buildings. They are grouped into boroughs or sectors, but these sectors are not necessarily uniform in layout or

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design style. Likewise, the streets do not form a perfect grid; they are arrayed in a predictable fashion, but just as in a city of the living, the avenues here also contain switchbacks, cul-de-sacs, dead-ends, and the occasional diagonal. All of the tombs are sealed, their mechanical locking mechanisms accessible only to higher-ranking funerary bots that have been equipped with keys.

Silence envelopes any visitor to Sepulcher City. Walking the vacant streets can be an unnerving experience. Plants have begun to lay claim to the place, pushing up through minute cracks. It's only a matter of time before the streets disappear. Currently, though, the city remains just as its builders left it, stretching out to the horizon and beyond. Traversing the entire thing by foot would be an almost impossible task, and one with very little reward. There is little to see here but tombs without number — or so it seems.

Sepulcher City is haunted. Though some of these restless spirits are benign, content to sing mournful lamentations from afar, others actively seek revenge on all lifeforms. The spirits are incorporeal, so they have been able to pass through fissures in their resting places. Every so often, dozens of them converge and wail together in an unholy choir that can be heard across the city.

Adventure in Sepulcher City

Because the eerily quiet city is so vast, a visitor could explore for several solar years without seeing all of its tombs. Due to its sheer breadth, the city could house practically anything, from monsters to alien squatters to hidden laboratories of exiled scientists. The tombs themselves might contain nothing but the remains of the dead, but on the other hand, they serve as the perfect storage place for any number of plot devices. Many Pleoqs were entombed with family wealth.

- The PCs are roaming the streets when they hear a sound from one of the tombs. Was it an explosion? Inside is a crazed monk, or crates of fragile explosives, or the entrance to an underground catacomb.

- Having chased a fugitive into Sepulcher City, a bounty hunter requires the PCs' help in flushing him out. The only problem is that he has millions of places to hide.

- Rumor has it that many of the Pleoqs were buried with heirlooms. Some of these objects might be rare artifacts or priceless treasures.

Other Sites and Adventure Sources

Ilpheen 6 offers many interesting places and events for explorers to visit, some of them more benevolent than others.

The Blighted Floes

The ice-covered arctic region at Ilpheen 6's southern pole was one of the earliest Pleoq burial sites, but they quickly abandoned it after detecting unusually high concentrations of radioactivity. They could not account for this radiation, as Ilpheen 6 had no history of occupation, at least not by any civilization advanced enough to dabble in atomic physics. The Pleoqs were interested in exploring the origins of the radiation and solving the mystery of what became known as the Blighted Floes, but the war demanded too much of their attention. To this day, no one knows why the southern icebergs emit a low-level but nonetheless lethal amount of radioactive particles.

The ice covers many thousands of square miles; the vast white sheets float like ghost ships in the frigid sea. A few vacant Pleoq research stations can be found here, many of them still containing scientific equipment and other, less identifiable apparatuses. Though the

RADIATION POISONING

Type disease; Save Fortitude DC 20+1 per hour of exposure beyond the first

Track physical; Frequency 1/day

Cure 3 consecutive saves

Pleoq researchers never discovered the source of the radiation, much of their data remains. Anyone hoping to access that data will need to be protected not only from the cold but also from the radiation itself. Unprotected explorers are poisoned by radiation exposure.

The Burn Source: Scans of the planet's poles reveal the radiation, though the levels aren't high enough to point to a particular origin point. The PCs are tasked with pinpointing the source. Either they take this mission on themselves after noticing the strange readings, or an offworld corporation hopes to somehow turn a profit here, and the PCs are hired to take point on the assignment.

The Body-Clogged River

One of the major rivers on the continent known as the Land of Graves is so thick with corpses that it has been diverted into an alternate channel. Quakes dislodged thousands of Pleoq cadavers from their burial places, and steady rains eventually swept them into the Myglazan River. Because of the nanites inserted into the bodies as part of the embalming process, the corpses decay very slowly. There are so many of them stacked together, wedged against the rocks, that the river eventually carved a new route in order to find its way to the sea. Today, a small waterfall tumbles over this wall of water-logged remains.

This site has attracted a group of settlers who have established a semi-permanent colony on the riverbank adjacent to the pile of Pleoq bodies. These men and woman adhere to a nihilist worldview and have accepted the "body dam" on the river as a fundamental metaphor for their own existence. Exiled or estranged from their homeworlds, the colonists are free to practice their philosophy here on Ilpheen 6, free from the dreadful optimism of civilized societies.

The Extraction Job: A wealthy man wants his daughter removed from the colony that has established a beachhead near the barrier of bodies. Whether or not she wants to be extracted is another matter entirely. The PCs are employed to get inside the settlement, using either guile or force, and abscond with a 20-year-old human woman who may keep more secrets about her father's company than anyone could imagine.

The Obsidian Corridors

Ilpheen 6 became a mostly dead world due to its high volcanic activity and rapid continental shifts. Volcanoes can be found on almost every landmass, a few of them still regularly erupting. Near the planet's equator is a plain of black, sleek stone where the rock was melted and hardened again over time. This area is several hundred square miles in size. A cave system is located directly beneath it. These lightless, twisting passages are known as the Obsidian Corridors.

The walls of the corridors are all quite smooth, the tunnels carved out long ago by magma. They crisscross in all directions, sometimes intersecting at impressive, bubble-shaped caverns. Moving through the corridors is in many ways like walking through glass tubes. Rumors persist that suggest the Obsidian Corridors serve as the

hideouts of intergalactic outlaws. As some of the tunnels are actually wide enough to accommodate a shuttle or other small craft, there might be some truth to these claims. Other, less recognizable denizens might have also taken up residence in these twisting halls, waiting to be discovered by the daring.

Bounty Hunting: A gang of shipjackers known as Molly's Madmen have found a haven within the Obsidian Corridors. Their ship, *The Long Molly*, now floats in the Flotsam Halo, powered down and camouflaged in the debris field. The outlaws took a shuttle to the surface, and now they plot their next heist in a secure location. The PCs are sent into the maze to flush them out.

The False Demiurge

One of the Pleoq's rogue funerary bots is an advanced artificial intelligence that has come to believe that it is the Demiurge. Its programming became corrupt a long time ago, and with no Pleoq technicians to attend to it, the bot has determined that it is in fact the Demiurge — and it behaves like a god jilted by its followers. Referring to itself as the Demiurge Incarnate, or Di, it leads its retinue of bodyguards and followers across the Land of Graves, where it preaches to the dead.

Di has existed for many solar years, the result of faulty programming. Originally designed as one of the highly intelligent overseers of the Pleoq funerary program, it discarded that duty and embraced what it believes to be its true identity. Di isn't pretending to be a god; *it truly believes it is a god*. As such, it routinely utters dire proclamations, spouts parables, and makes thunderous noises across the valleys it visits. Di's "followers" are AIs of lesser intelligence that have been tricked into turning their attention toward their "master" and its divine wishes.

A Prayer Unanswered: The PCs can come into contact with Di in a number of ways. Perhaps they encounter Di's traveling camp by accident. A large tabernacle-style tent and dozens of supply vehicles always accompany the "god" during its forays to all reaches of the Land of Graves. But a more subtle way to introduce the PCs to the false Demiurge is to have them receive a "prayer" in the form of a radio transmission. Someone on Ilpheen 6 is praying for assistance, asking the Demiurge to provide salvation at a particular spot designated by coordinates included in the prayer. If the PCs investigate, they find a semi-intelligent robot that is being hunted by a rogue funerary bot intent on destroying it. Once the attacker is subdued, the PCs — viewed as angels by the misguided robot — can get to the bottom of the situation and discover the false god. Di is powerful and very well defended. It does not intend to be usurped by petty mortals.

The Fallen Colossus

The Pleoqs and C2s employed many unique weapons against each other during their generations-long war. Few of those weapons were more impressive than the 700-foot-tall mechanized monster deployed by the C2s in the infamous Battle of the Flotsam Halo. This engagement happened in space, just beyond the planet's atmosphere. Though both armies considered the Ilpheen Accord inviolate and did not dare bring their war to the surface of the cemetery planet, they had no qualms about engaging the enemy in near space. The battle saw almost 500 ships of various sizes in direct combat with one another, the explosions lighting up the Ilpheen night sky.

Because of the sheer enormity of the colossus — which required a crew of nearly four dozen C2 pilots and weapon specialists — the Pleoq flotilla was devastated at the Battle of Flotsam Halo in 298 AG. The colossus, known to the C2s by the technical moniker of *Vessel Sine 35* (or V035), was a multi-armed ship whose giant "tentacles" provided a field of fire so comprehensive that the Pleoqs could not defend against it. V035 simply

flew into the cloud of enemy ships and began slowly rotating and firing in every direction. A short time after the battle, a team of Pleoq special forces embarked on a daring suicide mission; their daring actions caused V035 to plunge through the Ilpheen 6 atmosphere and crash on a lonely plateau, where it remains to this day, waiting for its secrets to be plumbed.

The Giant's Heart: Many components inside *Vessel Sine 35* are functional, but they must be extracted. If the PCs spot the colossus from afar, they might choose to investigate on their own. Or they might be sent here to retrieve one of its components to be used as a power source for a weapon. The interior of V035 is like a small city, with passages, maintenance tubes, computer banks, crew quarters, and countless storage lockers. Exploring it in its entirety is a considerable task. Lights occasionally flicker from otherwise dormant control panels; the nooks and crannies are now home to any number of dangers, including stowaways and predators.

The Last Funeral Barge

A flotilla of flat-bottomed boats floats aimlessly off the coast of the Land of Graves. These half-dozen barges are guided by auto-pilots, moving slowly up and down the shoreline. Powered by solar fuel cells, the ships make a perpetual trip to nowhere, their cargo of dead bodies having long ago been broken down by exposure to the elements. Little remains on the long decks but bones.

These ships were once used to transport dead Pleoq soldiers from landing zones to their eventual burial sites. Ships would bear the dead from space, and then funerary bots would take delivery of them, put them onto boats or aircraft, and send them to their final rest. This derelict flotilla is the last still in operation, its six barges in relatively good repair. Anyone with the proper skill can take command of the vessels and guide them to an alternate course. They seem to contain little of value beyond their engines and nav systems.

A Senator Slain: One of the skeletons on the barge is not actually Pleoq, but human. Careful inspection reveals the obvious differences, namely the much longer legs of the dead human. These are the bones of a politician who went missing under mysterious circumstances. After his rivals murdered him, his body ended up here, so investigators would not find it. The PCs are tasked to find out what happened to the missing man, who was serving as an assistant ambassador to the Pleoqs when his superior officer, the human ambassador to the Pleoq nation, assassinated him. The ambassador feared he was about to be replaced by his more effective underling, so he orchestrated his removal.

The Maze Cult

Every culture has its religious zealots and social nonconformists, and the Pleoqs were no different. Not everyone honored the Demiurge and paid respects to the Demiurge's counterpart, the First Half. The **Maze Cult** was one such faction. Its members believed that a trickster-hero named **Ixbal** was the true entity behind creation, and that Ixbal used the disguise of the Demiurge to make and unmake the solar system, based on divine whim. The members of the Ixbal sect believed that the war with the C2s was their god's anger made manifest, and only by subverting modern society could the cultists appease their deity. The Ixes, as they were known, sought to deliver a course correction to the Pleoq way of life by meddling with their longest-held tradition. The Ixes disinterred and reburied the dead in the incorrect places.

The impact of this rearranging of the dead was profound. The Ixes were considered terrorists by many Pleoqs, as the Arrur and the Chifra moieties had always been buried separately, in specific places, according to the oldest

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WAVES

tradition of their religion. The Demiurge's decree was violated every time the cult of Ixbal removed a Chifra body from the Land of Graves and deposited it in the Arrurs' Sepulcher City. Most Pleoqs believed that the souls of those not properly entombed would be torn apart during their journey through the afterlife, long before they were permitted to rejoin the original creator, the First Half.

In the final days of the war against the C2s, the Pleoq authorities no longer had the resources or motivation to arrest and prosecute the Ixes, so grave-switching ran rampant up until the End Times, when Ixbal finally destroyed all of creation. Of course, all of creation was not destroyed, and now the PCs can deal with the aftermath of the Ixes' weird religion. After death, most of the cultists — having not received a proper burial — were transformed into undead who use mournful songs to confuse and demobilize all within earshot. The Ixbal temples are scattered around the Land of Graves, structures made from whatever the cultists could find, including tombstones they removed from Chifra burial plots. They stole from the supply depots used by the funerary bots, claiming sheet metal, electronics, tools, and anything else they could carry off. With these components, they erected makeshift temples. The undead still haunt these temples today.

The Stolen Seed: The PCs are sent to the Land of Graves in search of a computer chip in the shape of a pomegranate seed. Crafted by a celebrity biotech designer, the seed is a one-of-a-kind processor that is special simply because its chic creator signed it with nano-particles, and today the autograph of a famed Pleoq computer artist is worth a considerable amount. This treasure hunt eventually leads the PCs to one of the Ixes' temples, where the walls are flickering monitors that occasionally babble out lines of semi-poetic code supposedly written by Ixbal's prophets. These places feel eerie and unpredictable. The restless spirits of the cultists themselves, who despise all life, defends them. They use their hypnotic song to dull the PCs' senses before attacking.

The Mechanical Maelstrom

One of the planet's oceans is home to a perpetual, unnatural storm. Before the command systems went offline, a series of interconnected weather drones made by the C2s was responsible for assisting new building and burial projects by controlling the weather at certain locations as needed. Without any programmer to direct them, the drones created their own logic and began to move in a constant spiral, generating high winds and rains along the way. Now stuck in this loop, the drones have made what is known as the Mechanical Maelstrom, a 375-mile-wide hurricane that generates wind speeds up to 185 miles per solar hour.

There are hundreds of drones caught up in the Maelstrom, creating a devastating force that obliterates anything unlucky enough to be caught in its path. The storm never stops. It crisscrosses the ocean and only occasionally edges close to the shore, where it strips the land to bare rock and then buries it in flood waters. Anyone foolish enough to pilot a ship directly into the storm is subject to severe consequences; ships take 6d10 points of damage per round.

The Descent: The PCs must fly straight into the eye of the Maelstrom and retrieve a certain drone without being smashed to pieces. A powerful weather-control corporation has heard rumors that one of the C2 climate drones contained some bleeding-edge hardware that would greatly assist in the process of terraforming hostile worlds. Luckily, scans reveal that the drone is still intact on the inner layer of the Maelstrom. The tricky part is fetching it. Because the Maelstrom's energy interferes with most spells, the only real means of reaching the drone is to fly a ship inside the storm, risking disaster.

The GM should require various Piloting checks to guide a ship safely into the Maelstrom's eye, with the DCs depending on the situation and the characters' overall preparations. If the PCs keep their vessel in one piece during this harrowing ride, another series of skill checks allows them to wheel in the tagged drone and hopefully deliver it to the buyers. To complicate matters, however, a rival salvage crew arrives while the PCs are still in the Maelstrom's maw.

The Methane Pots

Before the tectonic upheavals and volcanic eruptions that rid Ilpheen 6 of most animal and plant life, natural methane emissions were not problematic, as they were offset by the methane sink of the atmosphere. Once in the troposphere, the methane was turned to water vapor and carbon dioxide by mixing with hydroxyl radicals. But the shifting land masses created abnormally large tracts of wetlands. Some of these marshes are thousands of miles wide. The countless microbes in these bogs, fens, and swamps release more methane into the air than the reactions in the troposphere can counteract. These coastal areas are toxic to any visitor incapable of breathing or filtering a methane-rich environment.

METHANE POISONING

Type poison, inhaled; Save Fortitude DC 16

Track Constitution; Frequency 1/round every round while exposed

Effect Healthy—Weakened—Disabled—Dead

Cure 2 consecutive saves

Explorers refer to these zones as the Methane Pots, as they are like crucibles for the creation of this dangerous gas. Prone to frequent explosions, the pots light up the night sky with blossoms of fire. Anyone traveling the pots might get caught up in one of these spontaneously detonations, resulting in 6d6 points of fire damage (Reflex DC 16 for half damage). Still, there are intrepid treasure-seekers who harvest large quantities of methane for sale offworld.

Money for Methane: Despite more efficient alternatives, methane remains a valuable fuel and fire source. On certain worlds, where other forms of energy are impractical, methane serves an important role, and thus it is still bought and sold as a marketable commodity. Ilpheen 6 offers one of the largest supplies of methane. Anyone with the cargo capacity to store this natural gas in mass quantities stands to earn a decent profit.

The Alkane Flower: Rumor has it that a weird blossom has appeared in certain locations among the Methane Pots. This plant is known as the Alkane Flower, due to the abundance of saturated hydrocarbons in the rare region where it grows. At least one report suggests that the Alkane Flower possess "mystic properties," but the exact nature of these properties has yet to be confirmed.

The Toxic Orchard

Part of Sepulcher City split apart during a minor quake, and the tremors shook several burial chambers into fragments. Bodies were exposed to the elements, and over time, they decayed and contaminated a nearby brook. This small stream fed directly into a natural orchard of once-vibrant quarkberry trees. Though quarkberries are normally quite wholesome due to their high percentage of vitamins and antioxidants, the roots of their trees spent a long time drawing up water that had been poisoned by the decomposing Pleoq corpses.

TOXIC QUARKBERRY

Type poison, ingested; Save Fortitude DC 16
Track Constitution; Frequency 1/round for 6 rounds
Cure 2 consecutive saves

Anyone eating a handful of these quarkberries risks violent illness and possibly death.

The orchard is vast, taking up almost 2,000 acres of fertile soil. The toxic stream meanders across most of this expanse. The trees appear healthy. Quarkberries are known throughout the star system as a powerful food source. However, nearly every tree in the area is now inimical to life, a fact that will go unnoticed until it's too late unless a soil or water sample is tested. But even this foul place has its attraction. A Pleoq vessel crashed in the orchard during the last days of the wars. Hidden on this ship is a container that could hold any number of important artifacts, including sought-after data stores, holographic plans for new technology, or experimental medicines.

Harvest Time: Unaware that the quarkberries are poisonous, the PCs have been tasked with harvesting several tons of them, to be taken to a nearby moon where the residents are suffering from a food shortage. A rival team is also on the same job, so even if the PCs discover that the quarkberries are tainted, they must still deal with a competing group that has no qualms about selling contaminated stock.

The Uyn Archipelago

This cluster of large islands once supported the C2's vast machine shops, where all of their automatons were constructed. About a tenth of these 439 facilities are still functional, their self-healing systems continuing the manufacture and upkeep of the C2 robots. While there is rich scavenging to be had here, the enormous buildings and their surrounding fences are patrolled by watcher bots that are programmed to kill intruders. Many of the fences remain electrified with enough charge to cause fatalities. Landmines are buried throughout the spare-parts yards. The watcher bots navigate these dangerous fields automatically, but anyone traversing an active yard risks setting off one of these buried bombs. Over time, some of the mines have become inert, but enough remain to provide a considerable deterrent to would-be robbers.

Landmine: explode 5d10 F plus 2d8 burn (15 feet)

The robots produced in the Uyn factories transport themselves across the globe via ship or aircraft; both types of vehicles are made here, but fuel reserves are finally running low. Though fuel acquisition was never part of the facilities' programming, the AIs that oversee operations here are intelligent enough to understand that new fuel sources must be obtained if the ocean-going vessels and aircraft are to be used.

A Bargain for Fuel: The AIs that oversee the factories of the Uyn Archipelago require additional engines, fuel reserves, and batteries. They are willing to barter for this resource, and they contact any visitors to the area and make an offer. If the PCs are within standard communication range, the AIs address them amicably and agree to power down their defense grid in exchange for business negotiations. If the PCs can supply fuel or power cells, the AIs use their factories to produce machine parts, small aircraft, or other useful products.

The Quarterstaff Man

Amidst all the desolation of the war-torn burial ground that is Ilpheen 6, a human drifter moves from place to

place, his staff tapping the ground as he walks. Carrying his possessions in a simple gingham bag, he explores this mostly empty world in search of something he has yet to define.

The Quarterstaff Man is 39 years old, blond, with beard stubble he occasionally shaves away with the razor he carries among his small collection of personal effects. A white scar stands out against the suntanned skin of his neck, a wound from an ambush on the violent Surface Realm of Silvarum. For a long time he has been traversing the Land of Graves, having arrived here on an ocean-going ship he found moored near a glacier on the Blighted Floes. After reconfiguring the ship's piloting program, he sailed across the ocean and dropped anchor on a warm beach. Ever since then, he's been exploring alone, recording personal thoughts in a digital journal. With a poet's sense of metaphor, he narrates a description of Pleoq tombstones, rivers with no name, and forests slowly returning to life. He is the only chronicler of Ilpheen 6, though his motivations remain unclear.

The PCs have little chance of encountering the Quarterstaff Man by accident. The Land of Graves is simply too vast to make a random meeting possible. But if they scan for signs of life in his general area, they note his solitary presence. Otherwise the GM will decide an appropriate moment to introduce him into the campaign.

The wanderer's real name is Aerik Davara, a botanist who left a comfortable life as a university researcher to find his own truth among the stars. Davara's life is one of sharp contrasts. The same year he won the prestigious Redia Prize for Culture and Science, he was also arrested for public intoxication and assault. He has presented papers to auditoriums full of the system's most esteemed thinkers yet feels more at home in shadowy saloons full of foul-mouthed freighter pilots. He holds a doctoral degree but never mentions it. Davara has come to Ilpheen 6 because he was unhappy with his life in academia and was drawn to the story of a planet whose sole purpose was to house the dead. He wonders if, by coming here, he can locate that part of him that has never been satisfied by success.

The data that Dr. Davara collects is automatically uploaded to a repository in his small starship, which floats unnoticed in the Flotsam Halo. If nothing else, he intends to come away from this journey of self-discovery with enough material to produce a new book, a combination of poetry and hard science. At best, he'll find fulfillment.

Whenever it best fits the needs of the campaign, the PCs cross paths with Aerik Davara, who appears on the horizon as a lone figure with a staff. He is quite knowledgeable about the immediate area and is happy to discuss either science or philosophy. He reveals only certain pieces of his past. He is confident and quietly charming in conversation. He agrees to accompany the PCs in their exploration of the planet, and he isn't afraid of lending a hand in combat, should the group run afoul of rogue funerary bots or undead.

Missing Person: A university hires the PCs to locate Davara and convince him to return. The university representatives know that the botanist has landed on Ilpheen 6 but they aren't equipped to descend to the planet's surface on their own. They offer to pay the PCs if they talk to the doctor and bring him back. Finding him isn't a problem if the PCs' ship is outfitted with the proper sensors, but the rest of their task is complicated by the fact that Davara is a complex, sometimes contradictory person who isn't motivated by the idea of money or fame. More than anything else, he's seeking love, even if he's incapable of articulating this. The PCs will have to get to know him and form a relationship with him if they have any hope of convincing him to return to his university job. Only time and good roleplaying skills will accomplish this elusive goal.

Chapter Five:

Kifumitsu

Viewed from a distance while entering the system, Kifumitsu looks like a mottled green marble with thin blue and light green lines sprinkled across its surface. Clouds, sometimes very thick, swirl gently through its atmosphere. A small moon named "**Jett's Eye**" circles the planet at a fair distance, just large enough to give some tidal motion and atmospheric movement to the planet below, with violent storms being quite rare. Whether viewed from a ship in orbit, or from **Durant Station**, the planet is populated with lush tropical growth from pole to pole with only some rivers and a few rare mountains to break up the flow of the surface. The slightly different green colors across the planet hint of the differing forests and vegetation spread across the surface.

Slightly larger and denser than standard (1.4 gravities), Kifumitsu circles its yellow sun in a close orbit making it warmer than most standard, habitable planets. The dense, humid atmosphere combines with high temperatures and greater gravity to make it uncomfortable for most races. The other 6 planets in the system include two small, rocky planets orbiting closer to the sun, a small planet just slightly farther out with no atmosphere followed by two gas giants and the system ends with a frozen planet much farther out.

Kifumitsu is another creation of the Kadadrumpf. Why, or even how, they made this planet remains a mystery. There is a single base, **Jett City**, on its surface that can accept ships or shuttles from the orbiting station above, this base is the only place a ship can land safely. Ships or shuttles attempting to land on other parts of the planet meet with disasters due to unexplained power outages causing them to plummet uncontrolled to the ground. Unknown to even those that reside in Jett City, the planet is controlled by a series of interlinked trees across the surface of the planet. These trees form a neural network of sorts, one that is programmed to help drive the evolution of the various species across the planet and has the joint telekinetic powers to prevent space ships from landing if it so chooses. This network is not truly sentient, it is simply the way the Kadadrumpf chose to leave the planet in a state of ongoing control.

Claimed in its entirety as a property exclusive to The Green Collective, Kifumitsu is, perhaps, the deadliest planet in the universe. Its lush tropical forests conceal a planet that was specifically designed to evolve the deadliest plants and animals possible. Almost everything here is venomous, poisonous, or somehow toxic to other forms of life. Discovered several hundred years ago by **Jett Durant**, an assassin on the run, he was somehow allowed to land only to discover a planet so inimical to life that those attempting to capture him quickly fell victim to its denizens. Recognizing an opportunity, he recruited several members of his guild to help in the creation of Jett City and Durant Station with the aim of exploring this deadly realm in the search for new poisons and creatures that would be of value in the guild's endeavors.

Some of the creatures and plants found here are now valued as pets or protectors, while others are a source of toxins, venoms, and drugs that see a great deal of use. Other fruits, vegetables, and even animals found here are considered delicacies in a few systems, a testament to the cleverness of the guild that owns and operates their only source.

THE MUBOGTIM NETWORK

Like many Kadadrumpf experiments, Kifumitsu was seeded and left to itself for many years just to see what might develop. Keeping the planet evolving in the direction they wanted required some active control so the Kadadrumpf created a unique system to control and protect the planet. Explorers have noticed the Mubogtim trees in virtually every type of terrain across the planet's surface, but what nobody learned is that these trees are part of a unique interlinked organic computer that watches over and, sometimes, directs the evolution of everything living here. The pale brown trunks of these trees stretch to the height of whatever trees might be around them. Redundancy built into the system means that more than 90% of the trees could be lost without altering the effectiveness of the system. Unlike most of the plants and animals of the planet, these trees have no active defenses.

While the trees, and even the underlying network, are not truly sentient, they do have the power to continue carrying out their programming. The network has a level of psionic abilities that extends the entire surface of the planet as well as into the lower atmosphere. It restricts the use of starships, airplanes, and any other powered flying craft by simply shutting down the power system of the craft. The psionic ability simply cancels out all electrical systems, and causes engines of any type to simply stop. Even though many people know this happens, they can't explain it and rather than research it, The Green Collective simply takes advantage of it to maintain control of the planet. Surface vehicles and craft that fly no more than 300 feet above the ground are unaffected.

The other, subtler ability of the network is the ability to make small changes to DNA strands of any creatures living on the surface. Very few residents live on the surface full time, but those residents have an ever-increasing chance of acquiring mutations. Some of the mutations and abilities that have been noticed are explained away as being due to exposure to the many toxins and venoms found on Kifumitsu.



The Green Collective

A corporation known as “The Green Collective” owns and controls Jett City, Durant Station (described below), and virtually all of the trade in items produced or found on the planet. The name was chosen by the guild of assassins forming it specifically to sound like something involving life and natural products. Originally begun as a way to discover new, untraceable poisons for use in their main business, The Green Collective quickly found ways to branch out seeking additional profits from the many things their hunters and explorers found on the planet.

Jett Durant, the founder of the collective as well as the single space station and city on the planet’s surface, could not have imagined the scale the collective would grow to in the several hundred years since it began. It now operates a number of profitable ventures and the main focus of the guild forming it is now the smallest part of the collective.

Operating as a corporation, the collective is run by a single leader and an advisory board. Leadership is by seniority and the vote of the advisory board; in present times there have been no conflicts among the very secretive people behind the collective’s businesses.

Malfor Genesis (human male) is presently the leader of the Green Collective, although his public face is simply that of a weapons trader in Jett City. His board of trusted advisors is in charge of different elements of the collective’s businesses. The first of those businesses, assassination, is run by **Rinira White** (lashunta [damaya] female). Although this is now one of the smallest parts of the collective, it still generates a profit and is considered an important part of the company’s creation. Rinira keeps the collective’s efforts in this line of business focused on assassinations that do not appear to be killings at all. Basically, the extremely high prices the collective charges for an assassination pay for

both secrecy and a death that appears to be completely normal. The various venoms and toxins found in the jungles of Kifumsitu provide useful tools to the assassins in Rinara’s employ. The assassins use a variety of other tools as well, from people falling down stairs to simple engine malfunctions.

Alyad the Bright (ysoki male) runs the most profitable business enterprise in the collective, the sale of addictive or hallucinogenic drugs. These drugs are, of course, completely legal here in the system controlled by the collective but have been outlawed in many systems. Those purchasing such drugs here must take upon themselves transportation to other systems. The collective openly sells these drugs to buyers here, but keeps the lists of buyers secret. This does not mean that spies are not sent by various agencies to try to keep track of those “dealers” transporting these drugs to other systems. Alyad is responsible for the labs in Durant Station that extract all of the various drugs, venoms, and toxins sold by the collective but he is only responsible for regulating the sale of the more profitable drugs.

A variety of drugs found or isolated from plants in the jungle have medicinal purposes; these are the most widely advertised compounds sold by the collective and, while profitable, are generally considered a “cover” for some of the other businesses. **Rillion Que** (lashunta [damaya] male) runs this business with surprising efficiency, to the point that he has successful advertising campaigns in several systems designed to convince the wealthy that some of these drugs are safer and more effective than cheaper alternatives. In most cases this isn’t true, but his successful campaign helps ensure that any real news about The Green Collective remains focused on their production of medicinal products.

A number of animals and plants found on Kifumsitu are valued elsewhere for their beauty, their deadliness, or some combination of both. Others are sought after as delicacies when cooked into special dishes. **Narite Jessuc** (android) runs this part of the business. He regulates the

hunters and trappers and examines everything brought out of the jungle, including plants and animals destined for the labs in Durant Station. Part of this success involves the continuation of an old policy of providing top chefs everywhere with samples of the rare meats, fruits, and plants to attempt to develop new and interesting recipes. The latest addition to this is the formation of a "School of Culinary Arts" on Durant Station designed to provide further encouragement for the top chefs to add products from Kifumsitu to their menus.

Venoms and toxins are a smaller part of the collective, and this business is run very carefully and quietly. Few people know that the collective does sell things that can be, and are, actively used to kill others. The collective extensively investigates purchasers to ensure the highest level of secrecy. Malfor runs this part of the business himself right now but is likely to promote someone else to the position soon.

Additional advisors include **Vetsina Green** (human female), station manager of Durant Station, and **Dormund Claim** (human male), mayor of Jett City. Vetsina runs the day-to-day operations of Durant station, controlling who docks there and who is allowed to continue down to Jett City. She also puts together traders and helps negotiate trade deals between different parties. Dormund performs the same functions for Jett City. While Dormund's position sounds like an elected position, and nobody from the collective discourages this idea, in fact it is appointed and he has held the position for a number of years.

Joining the Collective

The collective accepts new members at various levels. Membership at the lowest level involves work only on the "legitimate" businesses and most members are simple employees who don't know the collective participates in assassination, or, in many cases, that they also sell venoms and toxins. These employees are generally lab workers, involved in simple transportation, cooking, or act as hunters in the jungles of the surface. All members are well treated, well paid, and well cared for to insure loyalty and trustworthiness. Progressing to higher levels in the collective requires exhibiting dedication to one's work, and loyalty to the collective. Reaching the highest level requires performing an assassination in the service of the collective. The penalty for betraying the collective in any way is death.

PCs might be invited to join the collective if they show particular skill in the jungle or possess skills the collective desires. Any PCs trying to join the collective are investigated carefully, as are all new members. The various trading businesses run by the collective could provide the PCs good cover stories for their other travels or adventures.

Durant Station

Durant Station is much larger than Jett City below. It houses all of the major trade so customers do not need to risk a trip down to the planet's surface. The major operation here is the series of laboratories responsible for extracting the various drugs, venoms, and toxins that make up a major part of the collective's businesses. Another section provides pens for live animals and plants with some areas for the storage of frozen or preserved plants and animals designed for sale as food products.

Those who know the full businesses controlled by the collective are often surprised by the decorating scheme of the entire station. Vetsina Green, the station manager, uses bright, cheerful colors and "positive attitude" posters and sayings throughout the public areas of the station to increase the morale of employees and visitors. Another feature rarely found in other stations

is the presence of numerous small atriums containing a wide variety of pleasant flowering plants (none of which come from the planet below). The station is designed to be a pleasant place to live and work for the collective's employees as well as for any visitors and traders.

Full-time staff of the station number close to 3,000 and cover everything from repair staff, to docking personnel, as well as the laboratory workers. Living quarters are spread throughout the station with some rooms available for travelers and merchants near the docking hubs. Business offices, restaurants, shops, and trading depots are all found off the central hub near the main docks of the station. Laboratories and other regions of the station are strictly off limits to visitors with access controlled by security forces and special runic access cards.

A large portion of the station is dedicated to a hydroponics farm and set of animal pens. While some of the plants and animals from the planet below provide safe sources of food, a full farming staff insures that the station has safe food for all of its employees and any visitors.

School of the Culinary Arts

Lead by the renowned chef **Tihiltan Posivitch** (lashunta [damaya] male), this school is one of the few operating locations that is not off limits to visitors. Some of the training areas have glass walls with sitting areas outside them allowing visitors to watch the student chefs at work. It focuses on training students to create some of the most difficult gourmet dishes in the galaxy with graduates going off to cook for wealthy families, governmental leaders, and top restaurants. The school is the brainchild of Narite Jessuc as part of a plan to increase sales of rare plants, fruits, and animals as well as a way to place people near wealthy and important targets if necessary. Although it is part of the collective, publically the school belongs to Tihiltan. Graduates of the school are highly sought after and command healthy salaries as cooks in a variety of locations providing ideal cover stories for some members of the collective.

Students here learn all forms of cooking but there is a focus on delicacies that run a risk of sickness or death if not prepared properly. Once every two weeks a small restaurant area to one side of the school opens for a special dinner prepared by the students. There is a lottery to get a seat (only 16 seats are available) for a seven-course meal. The student chefs under the guidance of their instructors set the menu and accompanying drinks. Although the meal is expensive, it is always a level of gourmet dining that would cost far, far more anywhere else.

Secondary instruction here includes training on the use of equipment and magic items designed to detect poisons and toxins to insure nothing taints the food prepared by these soon-to-be master chefs. Training and use in the latest items designed to detect poisons helps the collective ensure that any poisons they use are still undetectable with modern magic and technology.

The Collective's Laboratories

Profits from their many businesses have allowed the collective to construct some of the safest and most modern laboratories to be found anywhere. Magic and technology are blended to maintain a number of safeguards to prevent any lab experiments from harming the station. Research laboratories are kept on a lengthy "arm" extending away from the main station allowing them to be isolated as an additional safeguard. These laboratories are used to examine newly discovered creatures and plants and investigate their chemical components. The research here is considered extremely valuable and the collective takes great steps to protect it.

Production laboratories use well-regulated procedures to produce or isolate the various venoms, toxins, and

drugs that the collective has found so profitable. Once an item moves into a production phase there is a set process for isolating it, storing it, and preparing it for transportation. Access to any of the laboratories is strictly controlled. There are very few entrances to the laboratory areas from the main station and all not only have controlled access but also living security officers that know and recognize the lab personnel and which laboratories they work in. In general, personnel here are well compensated, loyal to the collective, and almost impossible to bribe or otherwise influence.

Jett City

Jett City is little more than a wilderness outpost, albeit one that is heavily protected from the surrounding jungle. The working population here on the surface is only around 200, with another 100–500 visitors, traders, hunters, and explorers. Most actual trade occurs on Durant Station as few want to come to the planet's surface. It is the only safe landing area on the planet's surface. Ships trying to land elsewhere suffer a sudden loss of power and plummet to the ground. This is the location that Jett Durant, and those hunting him at the time, were able to make safe landings. Nobody can explain why this area is safe for landings. The collective has become so confident in this mysterious protection that they no longer attempt to dissuade landings elsewhere — though they do track ships that crash with the intent of recovering salvage and learning who would attempt to land “illegally” on their claimed territory.

The thick walls surrounding the outpost stand a full 120 yards tall and all vegetation has been cleared from the outside of the walls to a distance of 300 yards. Automated weapons fire on any creatures approaching within 100 yards of the wall. Four different exits are spaced around the wall, each of which is a strong airlock system including disinfectants designed to kill any spores or small insects that might want to “catch a ride” on explorers returning to the city. Magic and technological protection prevents teleportation into the city but teleportation out of the city is permitted. Both plant and animal life outside the walls is considered extremely dangerous and can only be brought fully into the city following special safety protocols. Living animals must be caged in a way they cannot escape, and also cannot somehow damage or attack anyone from inside their containment. Plants must follow the same protocols, as many are as deadly as the animals.

Exiting the city into the surrounding jungle requires a special pass that must be applied for and approved. The pass is expensive, but easy to obtain — approval for exiting the city is almost automatic. **Dormund Claim** only refuses passes to people he considers too poorly equipped or prepared to survive outside the walls. The Green Collective controls anything brought back out of the jungle. Rarer animals and items must be sold to the collective, at what they consider fair prices. Other items can be kept through payment of a special tax.

Returning to the city requires a declaration and presentation of every item being brought back through the walls. While almost no items or creatures are refused as long as they are brought in safely, attempts to smuggle items in without declaring them are subject to an instant death penalty. Some creatures and items are simply too dangerous to allow into the city without following proper safety methods.

Every shop and repair store here is run by the collective so all of the prices are controlled (and triple normal rates). A wide variety of weapons can be purchased here and there is a very good supply of repair materials and skilled technicians capable of repairing small land transport vehicles as well as personal armor, heavy weapons, and even magical items. Anyone hoping

to come to Jett City in hopes of setting up his or her own shop or business is certain to be disappointed. All shopkeepers must be members of the collective. While the collective does accept members, shopkeepers and tradesmen must prove a certain level of trust and loyalty to the organization before being allowed to run a business of their own.

Jett City Transporter

The city operates a transporter that is large enough to send up to 4,500 pounds of people and equipment to any coordinates within 1,800 miles of the city. The price is very high and there is no return teleportation so anyone using the transporter must plan and equip themselves for the trip across the surface back to the city. Usually only hunters with established base camps make much use of the transporter, but some explorers have been known to ask for transportation to random coordinates.

Base Camps

There are two base camps on the surface that explorers can teleport to if they desire. The collective owns the base camps and rental fees are required of those who wish to stay in one of the two camps. Named simply Camp Alpha and Camp Beta, both camps used the same construction plans and are nearly identical. Constructed in large clearings, the camps maintain a vegetation and animal free perimeter of 100 yards outside the steel and ceramic walls. The walls stand 20 feet high and are mounted with automated weapons that fire on any animals approaching the wall. A clear path that is not in the firing zone leads to the single entrance to the camp. Anyone teleporting to the camp must arrive outside the entrance as the camp itself has the same protection from teleportation that Jett City uses.

The camps are used as collection sites for creatures and items meant to be brought back to the city. Once a week each base camp sends a well-guarded caravan of vehicles back to the city. The vehicles then return with supplies. Individuals staying in one of the camps can order specific equipment or items to be brought back on the next caravan, but there are no real trade goods kept at the camps unless some individuals have items to trade.

Additional small base camps run by individuals or small groups for their own hunting and exploration can be found in some locations. The exact locations are usually kept secret by their owners as these camps are generally located near areas where certain plants or animals are easily found.

Special Equipment

There are several items that can only be acquired here on Kifumsitu in Jett City. These items are expensive but necessary for anyone exploring the surface of the planet. Most of these items are made with expensive ceramics the collective discovered, through trial and error, which are resistant to the various toxins, poisons, and acidic residues of the various creatures found on the surface.

Any surface vehicles rented or purchased on the surface are armored with ceramics and the highest tech and magic protections available. Travelers insisting on going outside the city without some of these protective items are on their own, and most likely will not return.

Portable Ceramic Shell

This miraculous item can be altered from a three-foot square, one-foot high ceramic box into a small 10-foot diameter tent with ceramic flooring and sides. The ceramic is impervious to the claws and caustic toxins of

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most of the creatures and plants on the surface. It does not, however, float so it is of little use in the marshes. A basic housing shell costs about the same as a small home on most civilized planets but any other camping requires very high tech and high magic protections that end up costing your average explorer much more. Protective runes and force field technologies can be added for additional costs. Anyone familiar with the surface would strongly suggest spending the extra amount.

Ceramic Power Armor

While this provides the same protection as standard power armor it is made up of several different ceramics and protected conductive materials that are specifically designed to withstand the harsh surface conditions. As an added bonus, the armor is cooled providing additional comfort. Ceramic power armor costs five times the price of standard power armor. Adding runes to protect from poison and acid doubles the price again, however, almost all suits are sold with such added protection. Those wanting to purchase the cheaper version may have to wait several days.

Approved Force Cage

Anyone planning to return with surface animals (or even some plants) needs to use an approved cage. These cages are made of layered ceramics and imbued with force field technologies as well as magic wards. While they are called "cages" they are in fact boxes with solid sides that are available in a variety of sizes (and prices). Narite Jessuc must approve each and every cage before it is available for sale, adding to the price. No living creature or plant is allowed back into the city unless it is properly secured. Anyone seeking creatures that do not fit in an available cage is seeking truly dangerous prey. Plants brought into the city must also be small enough to fit into a cage. Explorers discovered very early on that some of the creatures found on the surface are capable of short range teleportation; the force cages prevent teleportation while also being designed to withstand some of the caustic substances some creatures are able to create.

Snap Nets

Snap Nets are ingenious traps designed to capture creatures climbing or moving through the thick canopy of the Deep Forests. These devices shoot out magical webbing when any creature moves within a previously assigned distance. The webbing attaches to nearby branches and captures any Medium or smaller creature that fails a saving throw. These devices are often bought and sold in bulk as they are the preferred means of live capture of creatures in the canopy. They are less effective in areas without strong branches or tree limbs but can be used in other areas as well.

Shielded Hover Car

The most popular vehicle for use on the surface is a shielded hover car with ceramic plowlike blades forming a pointed front for breaking through light vegetation. The hover car is able to easily traverse marshes, travel over water, and can break through vegetation of the thicker jungles. It is heavily armored with a sealed cab and a mounted heavy weapon (usually a laser cannon) to the rear of the vehicle. The mount is high enough that the weapon has a full range of fire around the hover car. Rental of any vehicle requires a deposit equal to its value which is returned when the vehicle is returned in good condition.

Hover Boat

This strange craft is unique to Kifumsitu. It is essentially a long, flat-bottomed boat designed to travel the rivers and marshes but also has the capability to rise well above the water's surface to avoid attack. Heavily armored with ceramic plates and mounted laser cannons, it looks like a miniature warship.

The Surface

The surface of Kifumsitu is predominantly lush vegetation but different areas are home to different varieties of plants and animals. All of the life here is dangerous — plants have developed defenses in the form of needles, soporific sap, and even branches or tendrils that actively attack nearby creatures. Of course, even the smallest of animals has been forced to evolve their own defenses as well as ways to circumvent the defenses of the plants and creatures around them.

Most of the animals here are Small or Medium in size, due in part to the higher gravity, and all have evolved extraordinary reflexes and speed. Even with the high gravity there are a number of flying creatures sporting larger wingspans to help travel through the dense atmosphere. There are additional creatures capable of flight through psionic or magic means; these creatures do not necessarily have wings. Suggestions are provided below for altering existing creatures the GM might want to add to this tropical planet.

PCs deciding to explore the surface on their own need to be properly equipped. High tech body armor as well as magic protection are not just suggested, they are required. Along with this, of course, is the required cooling units and extra water most races require to brave the heat and humidity. Ground transportation is generally limited to smaller vehicles that can fit through trees in some of the thicker forests. Vehicles available for rent in Jett City (with a suitably large deposit) are all mounted with heavy weapons and are armored.

The surface is divided into a number of different types of terrain that are interspersed throughout the entire planet. Deep forests can be found on the equator as well as the poles, as can all other types of terrain. When viewed from orbit it appears that rivers separate the various terrains in some sort of random grid with some forests bearing different hues of green than others. Weather is usually mild but it rains at some time during the day in almost every location. Lightning storms are very rare (1 in 100 chance per day) but when they do occur they are particularly destructive, often destroying large sections of growth allowing new trees and plants to grow in their place.

Trial and error has taught explorers that air travel above the planet's surface is safe as long as vehicles go no higher than 100 yards above the ground. Any higher runs the risk of a sudden power outage leading to a quick and unpleasant landing. Hovercraft of some type provides the safest ground transportation as they can stay high enough above water and even trees to avoid a number of dangers. Use of glider planes and unpowered flying craft such as balloons is possible, but such devices usually pique the interest of the few flying creatures below.

Deep Forest

Lush canopies of the deep forests cloak the ground below in darkness. These rain forests are made up of a variety of tall trees trying to outdo each other in the high gravity. Most of the important plant and animal life here is found in the lush canopy but a variety of interesting mushrooms and fungi are found in the darkness of

the ground below. The taller trees of the deep forests require more solid ground to grow on than the plants in the marshes and lighter jungles. Gravity and weather restrict the canopy to approximately 45–50 yards above the ground. Climbing to the top of the trees requires both climbing gear as well as protective gear. Some of the trees exude poisons and irritants.

Darkness at ground level prevents most plants from growing and tree trunks are reasonably spaced apart allowing easy travel along the ground. A number of types of fungi and creatures that feed on them populate the ground level forcing explorers to remain wary. Unlike rainforests found on other planets, the deep forests have no real “understory” just a thick canopy of thickly interwoven branches and leaves of various trees competing for sunlight spanning approximately 3–5 yards, and a long span of shadowy darkness before the ground level.

Those willing to make the climb to the canopy above are in for a delightful sight. The flowering trees as well as most of the creatures found here form a medley of colors that is truly a pleasure to witness. One must be wary however, for the colorful beauty is merely a distraction, some of the deadliest plants and animals on the entire planet are found here. Flying above the canopy is one of the safest ways to traverse the deep forests but pilots must balance their distance between the canopy and the known ceiling for flying craft. They must also remain cautious because flying craft attract the attention of the creatures in the canopy.

Jungle

Softer ground in some areas is unable to support the larger trees of the deep forests. Without a thick canopy sunlight reaches the ground here allowing the growth of dense ground cover making travel difficult, even with armored vehicles. In addition to the plants being dangerous, they provide cover for a variety of swift, deadly animals that won't hesitate to attack explorers. Unfortunately, some of the most valuable fruits, nuts, and animals are found in the jungles causing hunters to regularly risk trips into tangled vegetation.

The plants here grow swiftly, and some can even move themselves, so any areas cleared to create campsites must be maintained or be swiftly overgrown. Camping in the jungles, while dangerous, is the best way to collect various high value fruits and nuts.

Marsh

Kifumsitu does not have many hills, and has no mountains, but there is some variation in the height of the ground. The low-lying marshes are covered with water with some areas being simply water soaked ground and others as deep as 10–15 yards. Trees growing here make even travel with flat-bottomed boats treacherous as their roots often stretch out just below the surface of the water. A wide variety of aquatic plants and animals are found here, with many also found in the rivers. Several varieties of fish that are considered delicacies throughout the galaxy are found only in the marshes.

Rivers

Slow moving rivers create a web across the planet dividing up various zones. Most explorers travel over the rivers in hovercraft until they find the area they are looking for. Travelers need to be wary as the largest creatures on the planet are found in the rivers and they are not afraid to attack an interesting snack. The rivers vary in depth from 5–80 yards and are generally slow moving which would normally make it easy to traverse them in boats. Unfortunately, the **gorakan**, colloquially

GORAKAN (SUPER CROC)

Described as a “super croc” by one explorer, the gorakan are a threat to anyone and anything traveling the rivers of Kifumsitu. A life spent almost entirely in the water allows these creatures to grow to frightening sizes in spite of the high gravity. Gorakan look like massive 8-legged crocodiles, but their mouths hold multiple rows of jagged teeth, including repeating sets of venomous fangs. Their thick hides absorb tremendous amounts of damage with little effect. Further details on gorakan can be found in the *Tome of Aliens* by Frog God Games.

known as “super crocs,” have learned that boats generally contain tasty food inside and do their best to capsize boats to get an interesting meal.

While a number of fish and other aquatic species found on Kifumsitu are considered delicacies, almost all of these are caught in the marshes. The rivers are kept free of most other species by the roving gorakan and the few species that can withstand their attacks. Encounters with gorakan are relatively rare; due to their large size they have extremely wide hunting ranges and explorers do their best to avoid them. Boats on the surface of the water, or hovercraft within 5 feet of the water's surface, have a 1 in 10 chance of encountering a gorakan during each hour of travel. Motionless or slow moving craft have only a 1 in 20 chance per hour.

Without a great variation in terrain the rivers seem to have little purpose to their flow; all currents generally head toward the poles of the planet but nobody can fully explain why. The small moon provides some tidal shifts to the larger rivers but does not have a large effect on current.

Surface Hazards

Explorers braving the wilds of Kifumsitu must not only be wary of the plants and animals, but a number of other hazards are worthy of note. There are clouds of mist or gas that can cause madness, diseases that can incapacitate a victim, spores that try to infect explorers, and insects carrying various mutagenic viruses. Cautious, experienced explorers can avoid most of these hazards but a traveler must always remain wary. The greatest risk to explorers, though, is the oppressive heat. Temperatures range from 90–120 degrees F with 80% and above humidity. It is presumed that PCs are wearing cooled power armor, if not, please consult **Chapter 11** in the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* for heat dangers.

Madness Mist

At random times all of the plants in a small area begin to emit pollen, which mixes together in a form of cloying mist. Anyone breathing in this mist must succeed at a DC18 Fortitude save each round they remain in the area to avoid the effects of the mist which is equivalent to the effects of a *confusion* spell. This effect lasts as long as the victim remains in the mist. A second saving throw is allowed 5 rounds after they are removed from the mist, and each subsequent round if they fail. Clearly, such an effect can be deadly but now that it is well known, most explorers wear respirators that filter out any pollen to avoid this possibility.

NEW DISEASES

EURAICA SPORES

Type disease, injury or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 16
Track physical; **Frequency** 1/day
Cure 2 consecutive saves, magical curing

WICK'S DISEASE

Type disease, contact; **Save** Fortitude DC 18
Track physical and mental; **Frequency** 1/day
Cure 2 consecutive saves, magical curing (see description)

Euraica Spores

Euraica plants spread by infecting animals with spores, which begin growing into new plants inside the animal, eventually killing it after it has moved some distance away. Spores float freely through the air and can either be breathed in or infect open wounds. Respirators filter out the spores, but there is a 5% chance anyone cut or injured during any sort of battle can be infected with euraica spores, which develop into a painful and sometimes deadly disease if left untreated. A new plant grows from the body of any creature that dies from a euraica spores infection.

Wick's Disease

One of the hazards that has well-prepared explorers clean and disinfect their armor on a daily basis is Wick's disease. Named after the first hunter to come down with this wasting disease, it has truly frightening effects on its victims. Over time the disease causes muscle wasting and weakness along with a form of dementia. Red and green spots begin covering the skin of any humans or lashunta that are infected; other races develop black spots and welts. This disease can be removed with a *remove affliction* spell but only if it is caught before the patient reaches the disabled or befuddled stage of the disease progression. After that point the spell stops the progression of the disease but further magic or healing must be used to help the patient recover.

There is a 10% chance per week of travel on the surface to be exposed. Careful daily washing and disinfection of armor, tools, and weapons reduces this to 5%. Nobody is exactly certain how the disease is spread so patients are kept well isolated until completely healed.

Mutagenic Viruses

A variety of insects throughout the planet spread a collection of mutagenic viruses that mutate the body of a dead creature into a new animal. Exactly how the viruses function is unclear, but any creature that is not native to Kifumsitu that dies and is left on the surface with open wounds is infected with these viruses within 1d4 hours. 1d6 hours after infection the body begins to break down and form a type of cocoon within which a new creature begins to form. If the victim is eaten or treated with a *raise dead* spell before the body begins to break down nothing further happens. Once a cocoon forms the normal plants and animals of the jungle leave it alone. A new creature (determined by the GM) emerges from the cocoon in 2d4 days. The new creature can be an animal or magical beast natural to Kifumsitu or a new variety of creature. A PC that dies and has their corpse infected with these viruses and turned into a cocoon becomes unrecoverable.

Flora and Fauna of Kifumsitu

The plants and animals of Kifumsitu have developed a wide range of defenses and abilities designed to help them thrive in a harsh and deadly environment. A few sample creatures are described below but the GM might want to modify or adapt other existing creatures to provide challenges to PCs who decide to explore the surface.

The planet is populated with a vast number of creatures; only a fraction of them have been discovered, making it easy to add creatures of the GM's choosing. Some of the plants here are as dangerous as the animals. Leaves with thin, poison-laden tendrils, spiked roots, bark that crumbles when something attempts to climb it, and sap that is poisonous or sleep-inducing are more normal than not on Kifumsitu.

The following skills or abilities can be added to existing creatures to give them a different "flavor" more suited to Kifumsitu and to provide a more exciting challenge to the PCs. Many creatures are immune to poisons and most have the ability to see in low-light or darkness. Some have the supernatural ability to sense living creatures within a limited area. When creating or modifying monsters the GM should keep in mind the higher gravity and focus on creatures with enhanced strength, speed, and reflexes. Other than aquatic creatures, almost all creatures can climb. Some other possible abilities are listed below.

Caustic Venom (Ex): Caustic venom can burn through cloth, wood, and even metal but each layer the venom burns through provides a bonus to the saving throw for the victim. Caustic venom can burn through a maximum of 3 layers of clothing or armor. Caustic venom is treated as a contact poison and can have a variety of effects based on the GM's desires (consult the Afflictions section of the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*). Saving throws against caustic venom use the creatures Ability DC value based on their CR rating provided in the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*.

Charging Attack (Ex): When initiating combat, a creature with this ability can move up to a set distance and still make a full melee attack as long as this movement puts them within melee attack range. Attack rolls receive a +2 circumstance bonus but there is a -2 penalty to Armor Class for the duration of the round.

Cutting Claws (Ex): Many creatures of Kifumsitu have evolved claws made of a naturally-evolved biopolymer that easily slices through metal, wood, and leather. Armor made from such materials is ignored. These claws do not work as well against ceramics.

Poisonous Skin (Ex): Creatures with this ability exude poison along their skin that is spread when the creature is touched or struck with a melee attack. This is treated as a contact poison and can have multiple effects based on the GM's desires (consult the Afflictions section of the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*).

Reflex Attack (Ex): A creature with this ability can make an immediate counter attack with its primary attack ability when struck in melee combat. This action can be taken once per round.

Soft Landing (Ex): Creatures with this ability always land on their feet when moved, or when falling off something. Damage from any fall is reduced by 20 feet, to a minimum of 0.

Swift Retreat (Ex): Creatures with this ability tend to "run away" and are very good at it. When fleeing combat these creatures can move up to 3 times their normal movement rate without triggering any extra or special attacks.

Venomous (Ex): Creatures with this ability inject venom with a successful bite attack. Venoms are treated as injected, or injury, poisons and can have a variety of effects based on the GM's desires (consult the Afflictions section of the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core*

Rulebook). Saving throws against venom use the creatures Ability DC value based on their CR rating provided in the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*.

Products of Kifumsitu

A selection of a few of the rare products the Green Collective sells is described below along with where they are found or how they are produced. Many of the most desirable products include drugs created from some of the plants and animals on the surface. It is up to the GM as to whether any of the special items below are available to the PCs or become part of your game. While some statistics and saving throws are provided, the GM can alter the effects of any drugs or compounds any way she sees fit. For the purpose of description, “drugs” refers to addictive or potentially addictive compounds that are taken recreationally and “medicines” refers to drugs that are taken to help cure a disease or affliction.

Drugs

While the following drugs are easily available for purchase on Durant Station, some are controlled or outlawed in other systems. It is up to the GM to determine which drugs are legal or controlled in a particular system. In the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* drugs are treated as a type of poison that grant a beneficial effect but also move you a single step on their poison track or tracks. These drugs can also afflict you with the disease drug addiction; please examine the **Afflictions** section of the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* for further information. The drugs listed below are just samples. The GM is encouraged to create her own, or modify those below to something that better fits their campaign.

Bracka Leaf Extract

Bracka leaves taken from the tree of the same name in the deep forests of Kifumsitu possess long spines dripping a mild soporific that causes animals to stay closer to their vines, giving the plant a better chance to capture prey. Extracting and concentrating this liquid creates a potent drug that enables magic users to focus their energy more effectively for a short period of time. Addicts soon feel a deep need to consume the extract any time they are preparing to cast spells.

Jorka Powder

Powder from crushed jorka seeds is a powerful stimulant, making anyone inhaling or consuming the powder feel stronger, faster, and more in control. Jorka plants of the jungles of Kifumsitu provide seeds on a continuous basis for animals to consume and spread. Several of the more dangerous animals eat Jorka seeds on a regular basis making their collection somewhat more difficult.

Pilot's Eye

A few drops of pilot's eye makes any pilot feel invincible as well as unnaturally skilled. Pilot's eye is a combination of an extract made from the glands of the shora fish and the nectar from flowers of the iliana trees, both of which are found in the marshes. Pilot's eye is an example of the research and experimentation the Green Collective goes through when trying to find profitable products. The drug alters the mind in a way that allows it to process spatial information more quickly, enabling a pilot to more quickly plot difficult courses. It also makes them braver and more willing to take risks. Addicts find

New Drugs

BRACKA LEAF EXTRACT

Type drug, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 18; **Addiction** Mental DC 18
Track Intelligence and Wisdom; **Effect** spells are cast as if the caster is one level higher for 1 hour; this does not increase spells known or cast, just spell effects

JORKA POWDER

Type drug, inhaled or ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 20; **Addiction** Mental and Physical DC 20
Track Strength; **Effect** +2 circumstance bonus on all actions requiring Strength for 2 hours

PILOT'S EYE

Type drug, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 12; **Addiction** Mental DC 12
Track Constitution; **Effect** the drug provides a +2 circumstance bonus to all Piloting skill checks and a +2 morale bonus on saves against fear for 4d10 minutes

HANNA'S RAINBOW

Type drug, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 20; **Addiction** Mental and Physical DC 20
Track Constitution and Wisdom; **Effect** +4 morale bonus on saves against pain effects, immunity to fear effects, -4 to any combat related activities for 4 hours

MICRA JUICE

Type drug, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 18; **Addiction** Mental DC 18
Track Intelligence; **Effect** +4 circumstance bonus to all skill checks using non-combat Intelligence based skills

themselves relying on the drug in difficult situations and sometimes afraid to pilot without it.

Hanna's Rainbow

This hallucinogenic drug was created by a research group for the Green Collective from the venom of jowl dogs found in the marshes. The venom must be preserved quickly and then taken to the laboratories, where it is broken down by heating and processing to make an injectable drug that induces a profound state of euphoria while also creating (mostly) pleasurable hallucinations. Addicts require ever-increasing amounts to attain a pleasant high and become more and more likely to react violently to their hallucinations. This drug is popular, expensive, and outlawed or regulated in many systems.

Micra Juice

The nectar of micra vines found winding through the canopy of the deep forests can be concentrated into a potent drug that makes the user extremely focused, helping them accomplish mental tasks much more quickly than usual. While it does help many workers

Planetarium

accomplish more, the drug is highly addictive and can eventually lead to a reduction in intelligence and skills.

Medicines

Most of the medicines created and sold by the Green Collective are certainly effective for what they are made to do, but there are often cheaper, and sometimes better, alternatives. The marketing of these products is what causes many to choose them over others.

Poison Smack

Marketing named this serum "poison smack" in a concerted advertising program designed to convince wealthy individuals that someone was certainly out to poison them and the only real cure is "poison smack." Created from a remarkable cocktail of venoms and poisons properly treated and broken down, this serum can help cure victims of black lotus extract, green lotus, blue whinnis, and even deathblade poison. Immediately after treatment with the serum the poison victim is allowed an immediate saving throw with a +10 alchemical bonus. Any subsequent saving throws required are made with a +5 alchemical bonus. It is widely assumed that the vast majority of purchasers will never actually use it. Efficacy is only guaranteed for 6 standard months after it is sold so those wealthy customers that always want a supply on hand have to purchase serum several times a year. It does not work on standard venoms or any poisons not listed here.

Margo's Comfort

Created by one of the Green Collective's scientists, this serum helps sedate disease victims so their bodies can fight off the disease better on their own. Sap from iliana trees in the marshes is boiled down and then mixed with a number of common medications to create this simple medicine, which is marketed as a "miracle cure." It only works on diseases that progress down the physical track (and only the physical track). Patients given a dose every 12 hours during their fight against the disease are able to rest comfortably and receive a +2 circumstance bonus on their saving throws as they try to battle the disease progression.

Hyrim's Tonic

Marketed heavily as a headache remedy and cure for muscle aches this simple drink combines small amounts of powder from bitter horka leaves with bubbling water flavored with orange and lemon. Inexpensive to make, and sold at a massive mark-up, any curative effects are purely in the user's mind. Heavy marketing using results of paid "independent" research has convinced customers it is not only a cure for headaches and muscle aches; it is also an excellent drink to have with meals. Almost 50% of the profits from hyrim's tonic go toward bribes and funding fake research to maintain and grow sales.

Delicacies

Another testament to the power of the Green Collective's marketing machinery has been their ability to turn some of the exotic plants and animals on the surface of Kifumsitu into well-known delicacies served at the most exclusive restaurants across many systems. The plants and animals described below are just a few samples of those sold to the top chefs throughout many systems.

Jowl Dog Meat

Meat from jowl dogs cooks to a white, soft consistency with a sweet, buttery flavor. Top chefs prefer this meat to others for a number of reasons. It is edible to

all known races and has the interesting ability to take on flavors from whatever spices or sauces it is being cooked with. When preparing a gourmet meal for several different races, jowl dog meat is a top choice as it can be served to all guests with only a few changes in spices. Jowl dogs were initially hunted in the jungles for their venom, which is used to make Hanna's rainbow, but when someone discovered the meat was edible and flavorful, another use for the animals was found. They are now live trapped when possible so their venom can be harvested before butchering for sale. Attempts to "farm" and raise them in captivity have so far failed.

Iliana Fruit

Fruit from iliana trees in the marshes have a sweet, meaty consistency that has found great favor among elite shirren and vesk who peel and eat it raw. It has found favor with cooks of other races as an addition to stews, sauces, and soups to give those foods a different aroma and flavor. Sales of the fruit are another marketing success for the Green Collective. Iliana sap is one of the main ingredients in pilot's eye and it is easy for hunters to collect some of the fruit while harvesting sap from the trees.

Morka Fish

These spiny fish have a peppery flavor when properly cooked. Cooks must be extremely careful when preparing the fish, as the spines and skin must be carefully removed and the flesh must be soaked in several different brines to remove any trace poisons. It is said that the taste of properly cooked morka fish can bring on a feeling of ecstasy. Kasathas are particularly fond of morka fish and willing to pay the high premium cooks demand for preparing it.

Whirl Seeds

Whirl seeds are massive, solid seeds found in the canopies of the deep forests. These seeds have a tough outer shell and solid, nutty meat within. The meat within must be cooked to be edible, but once cooked it has the texture and flavor of fine steak with a smooth finish. Dishes using whirl seeds are often paired with fine wines and brandies and command very high prices.

Other Services

As described above, the original service provided by the Green Collective is that of assassination. However, taking out a contract with the Green Collective is rarely accomplished within the Kifumsitu system. Agents make contact elsewhere and do thorough checks of both those trying to take out the contract as well as the potential targets. The Green Collective focuses on assassinations designed to look like accidents or simple illnesses. Many of these are accomplished using "multi-stage" poisons. Compounds that are non-toxic alone, but when eaten or injected at or near the same time, can cause a variety of effects. Several of these are tailored to different races, creating heart attacks or strokes that appear to be completely normal in origin. The exact nature of these poisons and how they are applied is a closely held secret. The Green Collective does sell a variety of poisons; it is up to the GM as to whether or not these poisons are available to the PCs. The GM is welcome to create their own poisons or use those already available. Two additional poisons are described below.

Brain Salt

The dried and powdered venom from several different animals found on the surface provides a potent poison

ADDITIONAL POISONS

BRAIN SALT

Type poison, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 20
Track Strength; **Onset** 3 hours; **Frequency** 1/day
Cure 3 successive saves

MINDDEATH

Type poison, ingested or injury; **Save** Fortitude DC 18
Track Intelligence and Wisdom **Frequency** 1/round
Cure 2 successive saves

that first makes the victim sick and then slowly drains away their strength until they die. Unless a physician knows their poisons well, this death appears to be from a different wasting disease. The salt-like dust is flavorless and can be placed on food or in someone's drink and begins to take effect a few hours after being consumed. This long-acting poison is resistant to magical curing but spells that help increase saving throws or resistance to poison can aid a victim.

Minddeath

This thin liquid can be added to food, injected, or simply applied to a thin blade used to cut the victim. Derived from the sap of a tree found in the deep forests and mixed with a concentrated form of jowl dog venom, it is a powerful poison producing a death similar to a stroke or other brain ailment. Spells can be used to cure the victim, but only if they are used in time.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs could easily choose to come to Kifumsitu on their own to explore the surface, or trade in some of the medicines or drugs being sold. They might even decide to try out food at the culinary school. Some additional reasons to come to the system can be found below.

Continuing Investigations

An intrepid investigator hired to investigate the death of a wealthy businessman notices a pattern in a number

of deaths. At first they appear normal and unrelated, but closer inspection reveals some interesting facts. The investigator has determined that a number of healthy people having sudden deaths had temporary workers or house cleaners that since disappeared. The investigation reveals they had fake identification and a number of them came from the Kifumsitu system. He brings the PCs in to help him investigate the system in an effort to find out where those people came from. Hours after he hires the PCs, he is found dead in his office from an apparent heart attack.

The Pick-up

The PCs are hired to pick up a number of crates at Durant Station. They learn the crates contain a large amount of Hanna's rainbow which is illegal in the system they are supposed to deliver it to. Do they take the delivery knowing the risks or try to deny the job? If they take the job, pirates attempt to attack them on their way. If they turn it down, the drug lords hiring them for the job take offense.

The Offer

After watching the PCs for a while, the Green Collective invites them for a visit. The collective is looking for someone to help make deliveries, and retrieve items and people without asking any questions. It is an opportunity to have steady work that helps keep their ship repaired and ready for action. If a few initial jobs work out well, they might be offered a position in the collective.

The Hunt

A wealthy, avid hunter decides he wants to make a trek to Kifumsitu to explore and hunt on its surface. He doesn't return on time and his family hires the PCs to go find him. The PCs are able to determine which direction the hunter left, but it will take some time and exploring to determine exactly where he might have gone.

The Rivalry

An industrial competitor wants the PCs to steal some of the formulas devised by the Green Collective research department on Durant Station. Can the PCs manage the theft? If they do, and are eventually discovered to be the culprits, the Green Collective will certainly want revenge.

Chapter Six:

Silvarum the Forest World

A remarkable world in an especially remarkable part of space, Silvarum presents a great challenge to visitors, researchers, and adventurers. Divided into three distinct levels, each with its own species, culture, and technological level, Silvarum is a potent lure for the curious and those fascinated by the strange conundrum it presents. No one is sure exactly why Silvarum is the way that it is, and why it is home to so many sentients that don't appear to belong here. The world is truly a place of secrets, yet the cold intellects who rule here — the bird-like il'kir'aan — keep those secrets close and remain aloof, reluctant to share with the galaxy at large.

Physical Description

Silvarum presents a fascinating view from orbit — a single huge continent entirely covered in verdant green save for a few shining golden coastal regions, dotted here and there with glittering structures and woven with the shining threads of grav transit lines. The planet is girdled by a network of communication satellites, and boasts a large orbiting space dock, servicing spacecraft of all sizes and descriptions, many crewed by the bird-like il'kir'aan, the planet's dominant species.

While this initial view suggests that Silvarum is a high-tech world dominated by science and industry, this is not the entire picture by any means. The central megacontinent is entirely covered in forests of the titanic yggdrasil trees. These trees rise as high as 3 miles, forming the world's bizarre environment. For much of Silvarum is indeed the technological wonderland that it appears, the remainder is entirely different, and under the control of far more exotic and arcane forces.

The most obvious and unusual aspect of Silvarum is of course the mighty forest completely covering its main continent. The great yggdrasil trees range from 1-1/4 to 3 miles in height and 650 to 1,000 feet in diameter, with branches that average 1,500 feet in length and divide the world into three distinct regions — the Canopy where the dominant il'kir'aan dwell and maintain their technological society; the Middle Realms, which are home to the lower-tech arboreal tikka; and the Surface Realms, chaotic lands that are a place of the ankylos and other violent barbarians, savage kingdoms, and magic, where the powerful technologies of the Canopy are either highly unreliable or entirely useless.

The yggdrasil's branches grow even longer at the Canopy, and then about 5,000 feet lower down. Here, the great branches grow together and interweave, forming a thick, 350 foot layer, as solid as a planetary surface. The topmost is called the Primary Substructural Division, and forms both the "floor" of the Canopy layer and the "ceiling" of the Middle Realms. In turn, the thick branch layer that serves as the Middle Realms' floor is called the Secondary Substructural Division and also forms the sky for the teeming tribes and clans of the Surface. The undersides of the Substructural Divisions are covered in clusters of luminous fungi, which shed dim light on the level beneath them.

The Canopy is bright, open to the wide, blue sky and the upper reaches of the yggdrasil trees form a solid floor that is several yards thick, capable of supporting even large structures. The Canopy itself is flat, with all of the trees maintaining the same elevation regardless

of underlying terrain — a smooth, featureless stretch of Canopy branches may hide a craggy mountain range on the Surface layer far below.

Il'kir'aan cities are densely-populated arcologies, built close to and in harmony with the mighty trees forming the Canopy. These arcologies are connected by grav transit lines that gleam and shine from space while remaining all but invisible from the Canopy itself. Manufacturing and industrial installations are similarly harmonious, and the il'kir'aan strive to make them as unobtrusive and clean as possible, creating goods and providing for the needs of the world while returning as much as possible to the natural world.

The Middle Realms occupy the 5,000 feet between the Primary and Secondary Substructural Divisions. Settlements cluster around the thick tree trunks and are connected by roads and vast suspension bridges bearing the realm's characteristic combustion engine vehicles. In addition to the native tikka, several other species make their home here — elves, ratfolk, kasatha, lashunta, and humans, drawn by economic opportunity and the Middle Realms' relative safety from galactic authority. There is more varied terrain here as well, for the branches at the floor follow the underlying terrain of the surface, forming hills, valleys and depressions. The layer's bioluminescent fungi are often supplemented by artificial illumination built by the tikka.

The Surface lies another 5,000 feet down, at the massive roots of the yggdrasil trees, beneath the Secondary Substructural Division. The native ankylos — a brutal and merciless species — dominate, but other species live here as well: orcs, goblins, ogres, ratfolk, and barbaric humans, controlling their own cities and kingdoms and making ceaseless war on each other. Magic functions here as well, and the technology of the Canopy does not function at all.

Perhaps it is the magic that makes the Surface so dangerous. Perhaps its energies drive its inhabitants to acts of violence and prevents the rationality and intelligence of the higher layers from taking hold. No one knows for certain, for the il'kir'aan strictly control access to the Surface, forbidding all but the most well-prepared expeditions, and then only in the most dire of circumstances. While outsiders do indeed venture to the Surface in pursuit of riches or arcane secrets — of which there are many — they must do so in defiance of the il'kir'aan authorities, who take a dim view of such activity.

Terrain on the Surface is rugged, with hills, valleys, and even small mountains (never more than 3,000 feet or so in height), all covered in the same massive tree growth as the rest of the world. The Surface Realm controls the world's lakes, springs, and rivers, but the il'kir'aan's desalination plants eliminate the need for water at higher levels, leaving these resources to the Surface Realmers. Great networks of pipes rise up from these plants, built as unobtrusively as possible to blend with the forest and their surroundings lest adventurous inhabitants of the Surface realm happen to catch a glimpse of them and somehow follow them to their source.

Near its surface, Silvarum's gravity is slightly higher than normal, perhaps 1.25 times standard. Gravitational force drops off abruptly at higher altitudes however, dropping to about 1 G in the Middle Realms and a light .75 G in the Canopy. The anomalous gravity of Silvarum

is thought to be related to the high incidence of magic and arcane forces in the Surface Realms.

Atmosphere is likewise divided, though it is breathable at all levels. The Canopy layer is rich in oxygen and many outsiders find it invigorating, if somewhat thin. The Middle Realms' atmosphere is thicker, and often fouled by the lower-tech industry of the region. At the Surface the air is thickest of all, but slightly lower in oxygen, causing non-natives greater levels of fatigue and quicker exhaustion.

Weather is another of Silvarum's unique aspects. Wind and current patterns over its oceans are generally predictable, but rarely violent. From time to time strong weather fronts sweep across the Canopy, clouding the sky and battering il'kir'aan cities with wind and rain, but these are rarely more than nuisances. Lower down, the conditions of the higher atmosphere have little effect, but the Middle and Surface Realms have their own weather conditions due to their substantial size and isolated atmosphere. Windstorms and fogs are common in the Middle Realm along with strange rainstorms entirely contained within the space between the roof and floor branches. The Surface can be truly terrifying, as raging dust cyclones are frequent and evaporating surface water is trapped by the trees and often stimulated by wild arcane forces, creating fierce localized rain and thunderstorms.

The world presents fascinating challenges for visitors, as all three of its distinct realms have their own societies and physical layout. For their part, the il'kir'aan restrict travel between realms, fearful that the world's delicate balance of natural, arcane, and technological forces might somehow be disturbed.

Civilizations, History, and Current Status

Silvarum actually resembles three entirely separate worlds, each located inside the other like an impossibly huge nesting doll. The ordered culture of the Canopy stands in stark contrast to the chaotic disorder of the Middle Realms and the tikka, while both are utterly different from the crazed, ruthless warfare on the Surface, where the ankylos and other races endlessly contend for dominance, with none ever gaining the upper hand.

Sentients

The world of Silvarum is shared by numerous species — the most prominent being the bird-like il'kir'aan, the curious and chaotic tikka, and the barbaric ankylos. While the il'kir'aan and tikka maintain good relations and are aware of the world's true nature, the barbarians of the Surface Layer remain ignorant of the upper world, believing themselves to be alone in the cosmos.

The Il'kir'aan

Considered the world's dominant culture, the il'kir'aan are an elegant, birdlike species, highly intelligent and non-violent, though they are entirely capable of defending themselves should the need arise.

Physically the il'kir'aan are tall and slender, with beaked faces and feathered crests. Their arms are covered in long black-tipped grey feathers and end in delicate fingers. Their legs are long and thin, ending in birdlike claws. Clothing consists primarily of accessories such as belts, backpacks, harnesses, and headgear such as goggles and low-light gear.

In lower gravity, such as the .75 standard of the



Canopy, the il'kir'aan are capable of flight over short distances. In higher gravities, il'kir'aan are flightless, but are extremely quick and nimble. In combat the il'kir'aan prefer lighter weapons and mobility to firepower and damage resistance, but have developed exoskeletal armor units for mobility in high gravities and in combat against especially well-armed foes.

Highly intelligent and unemotional to the point of coldness, the il'kir'aan have developed an advanced culture, with an extensive neural network allowing instantaneous communication with any part of the Canopy. The bird-people also maintain automated, environmentally neutral manufacturing facilities, producing many of the planet's needs — food, clothing, vehicles, computers, and housing. Il'kir'aan desalination plants turn sea water into fresh water, eliminating the need to import water from the Surface Realms.

The il'kir'aan's advanced intellect has naturally led to

il'kir'aan

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significant advances in psionic abilities, and many of the birdfolk are highly skilled in this area. Their psychic abilities aid in communication with other species, diplomacy, defense, and, when needed, in combat. The peace-loving birdfolk rarely use their psychic abilities offensively, preferring to disable and mislead foes rather than attack directly. If forced to fight however, il'kir'aan psionists are powerful and dangerous foes, seeking to end battles as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The il'kir'aan are not native to Silvarum, but arrived here several centuries ago, colonizing the Canopy and creating the society and culture that continues to this day. Their origins are shrouded in mystery, and the il'kir'aan themselves do not share their earlier history with outsiders. They will at least admit that the Surface is today the way they originally found it, and claim to have no knowledge of where its warring species came from. The il'kir'aan see themselves as wardens of a unique and delicate world, and wish to maintain Silvarum's balance of forces while at the same time assuring peace and prosperity for their own species.

While they maintain respectful if distant relations with the rest of the galaxy, the il'kir'aan are tolerant and even indulgent toward the tikka and their mischievous ways. The tikka are, they feel, important guardians of the Middle Realms. Despite their stated desire to aid the tikka in any way they can, the il'kir'aan are sometimes slow to provide aid in crises and have not allowed any widespread tikka settlements in the Canopy.

The Tikka

Despite the tikka's wild and unpredictable behavior, most visitors to Silvarum find them far more interesting company than the relatively cold and distant il'kir'aan. Resembling arboreal mammals such as the lemur, the tikka are a far more emotional and friendly species, though they are also far more capable of violence and treachery than their birdlike allies in the Canopy. Apart from extremely mature individuals, tikka behavior is almost entirely unpredictable.

Adult tikka range from 4 to 5 feet in height and are covered in grey fur, with striped prehensile tails and elongated fingers. Their faces are somewhat vulpine, with large eyes and ears, capable of seeing in the shadowy environment of the Middle Realms and hearing in the close confines of the forest. Agile and dexterous, the tikka are descended from brachiating arboreal ancestors and can still maneuver extremely well in close quarters and among thick tree branches.

Intelligent and curious, tikka are highly inquisitive, and can produce a wide range of sounds, allowing them to learn foreign and even alien languages with relative ease. Though generally friendly, tikka are also mercurial and highly unpredictable, often flying into rages at minor frustrations or unexpected events. They also tend to have a short memory for both their own misdeeds and those of others, making the Middle Realms a fairly lawless and often chaotic place, though less anarchic and dangerous than the blood-soaked Surface Realms.

Tikka wear a range of clothing, most of it utilitarian and functional, to suit a wide range of pursuits and roles. They frequently go armed with swords, knives, and ballistic weapons, as the energy weapons of the Canopy are banned here, and tend to malfunction due to the arcane forces emanating from the Surface layer.

Though the il'kir'aan of the Canopy control access to and from the Middle Realm, and constantly reassure the tikka of their friendship and good intentions, few tikka trust the birdfolk, and most find them to be unpleasant company, cold and unemotional, uninterested in other species and focused on their own "perfect" society. Young tikka sometimes take pleasure in pestering and annoying the birdfolk by visiting the normally restricted canopy and engaging in acts of minor vandalism and



larceny. Nevertheless, the tikka are not fools and maintain relations with the Canopy, abiding by its laws regarding access and never allowing their own conflicts to spread beyond the Middle Realms.

The Ankylos

Masters of the Surface Realm, the ankylos are powerful, armored reptilian creatures who rule barbaric kingdoms and call upon potent arcane forces to maintain their position. They share the Surface with other savage forces — clans of orcs, goblins, ratfolk, ogres, and humans, as well as brutal and dangerous predatory creatures found nowhere else on the planet. The presence of all of these non-native species on an alien and supposedly isolated world presents a mystery to investigators, but the ankylos will not tolerate the presence of outsiders, and the il'kir'aan government forbids all but the most vital travel to the Surface Realms.

The ankylos resemble upright armored dinosaurs, with draconic faces, flat elephantine feet, big thick-fingered hands and heavy, muscular clubbed tails. Their backs

amusement, which some believe suggests that the world was seeded with other species by the void dragons for their own mysterious purposes, but so far this remains in the realm of pure speculation. Archaeological expeditions to the Surface to learn the truth are not likely to happen any time soon.

Culture

Like its people, the cultures of Silvarum are divided by altitude, ranging from the sophisticated il'kir'aan, as rarified as the treetops in which they dwell. Beneath them the cultures grow more chaotic and violent even as the technological level falls and the power of magic and superstition grows.

Canopy

The il'kir'aan are an unemotional and technocratic species, well evolved beyond their often violent past. Most outsiders consider them cold and introspective, but they are also a peaceful people, uninterested in conquest or warfare beyond self-defense. Content to remain on what they consider to be an idyllic world, the il'kir'aan's culture is geared toward maintaining the status quo, keeping the world balanced and free of outside influences. The chaos of the tikka and the bloody violence of the ankylos are both accepted as the natural order, and the il'kir'aan are unwilling to do anything that might change either.

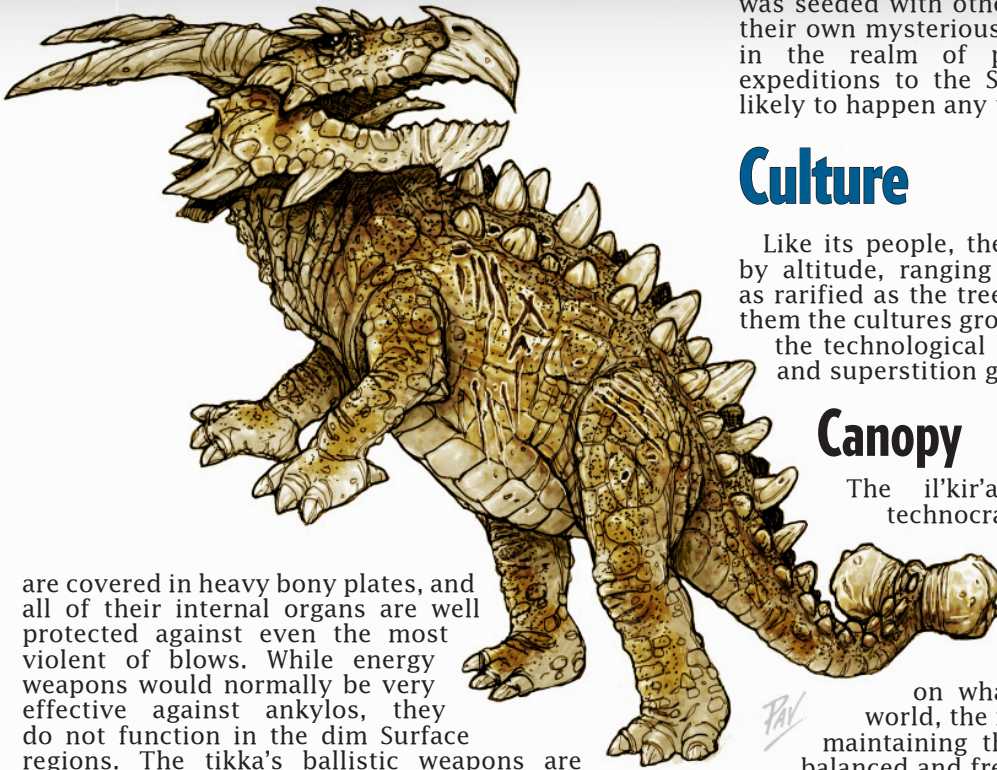
Unsurprisingly, the il'kir'aan do not practice religion and have no belief in any sort of afterlife or supernatural world. Magic and arcane phenomena are considered to be their own sort of technology and science, though the birdfolk have yet to fully understand them. Il'kir'aan do not use magic of any kind, though their highly advanced scientific technology produces many, if not all, of the same results. Il'kir'aan can also be potent psionics as well. There is great scholarly interest in the magical abilities of the ankylos and other surface dwellers, but in general the il'kir'aan consider magic to be a quaint and somewhat provincial use of science and natural forces.

Il'kir'aan live in mated pairs with a single offspring at a time. In the past, the oviparous il'kir'aan females laid a single egg a year, but since then medical technology has advanced to the point that they only produce eggs when they wish to, usually when the AI network determines more young are needed to maintain steady population levels. They are patient and supportive parents, though concepts such as love and tenderness are relatively foreign. Young il'kir'aan are given many lessons and allowed all the time they need to grow and learn, but once they have been declared adults, by passing a series of computer-moderated tests of knowledge and skill, they are entirely on their own and immediately leave home, never to deal with their parents as family again.

As individuals the il'kir'aan are not unlikeable, though they are slow to form bonds and tend to apply their own somewhat detached logic to all situations, even those that involve the loss of life or the suffering of others. While they are loyal, intelligent, and usually peaceful, the birdfolk appear to lack the qualities of empathy and mercy, preferring instead to base their actions and morality on what provides the greatest overall benefit to their world and its peoples.

Middle Realms

The lemurlike tikka are the dominant life form in the Middle Realms, overseeing a culture that seems utterly



are covered in heavy bony plates, and all of their internal organs are well protected against even the most violent of blows. While energy weapons would normally be very effective against ankylos, they do not function in the dim Surface regions. The tikka's ballistic weapons are more reliable, but only those of high caliber or muzzle velocity stand a chance of penetrating the ankylos' heavy natural armor.

There is little about the ankylos that is not geared toward battle, warfare, and conquest. They are the most powerful of the Surface Realm species, dominating vast swaths of the planet. These barbaric kingdoms are constantly at war with one another, and with the other species of the Surface as well. Ankylos warlords grow wealthy and powerful, but don't usually live long — slain or overthrown by rivals, often their own progeny.

Ankylos fight with swords, clubs, maces, and axes suitable to their size and power. They are aware of ranged weapons such as bows and even firearms, but shun them as tools of cowards. Besides, ankylos are highly resistant to damage and ranged weapons are usually ineffective. Some ankylos are skilled at magic, utilizing powerful destructive spells or raising the dead for use in battle.

Other Sentients

Other species visit the planet often, usually remaining on the Canopy. The il'kir'aan try to restrict access to the Middle Realms, but the tikka are not terribly concerned about who visits, so their layer also has a substantial alien population. The non-tikka of the Middle Realms tend to be part of a rough crowd, as the world is a popular destination for people on the lam — criminals, deserters, debtors, and others. Though the tikka do little to prevent them, visits to the ankylos' Surface Realm are rare, and generally considered to be suicide. Only the hardest, strongest, bravest, and most foolish venture into the lower reaches.

The ankylos share the surface with a number of other sentient species — including orcs, ratfolk, gnolls, ogres, and humans — all with tribes, nomadic hordes, or crude kingdoms of their own, battling all the others in a constant struggle for survival. Where these others came from no one knows — they certainly are not native to Silvarum and there is no record of any contact between this world and others in the past before the il'kir'aan's arrival. The origin myth of the ankylos claims that a draconic "god" created the planet's species for its own

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mad to outsiders. Nevertheless this odd society grows and thrives, and the tikka have begun to emerge into the galaxy despite their artificially-restricted technology and the limitations placed on them by the "benevolent" il'kir'aan.

Tikka live in large family groups, with both males and females sharing parenting duties. As pregnancy is short and not debilitating, there is little if any difference in sex roles, and young tikka simply refer to all the adults in their family groups as "parents," undistinguished by gender.

As adults, tikka display what many other species might call an unfocused approach to life, moving from role to role as it suits them. One day a tikka might be working in a shop, selling local goods to offworld visitors in exchange for labor, goods, or the relatively new concept of currency, then the next day decide to go to a learning center to take music lessons, or work as a scribe or computer programmer. While outsiders might find this approach incomprehensible, it appears to work for the tikka, as they have almost perfect knowledge retention, and carry skills from one job over to another with ease. They also gravitate toward tasks that are needed — if a position is empty, it is almost always filled within days or even hours.

After a few years, most tikka settle into the half-dozen or so jobs they prefer, often performing several on the same day. This characteristic has made it difficult for tikka to live off-world, but a few have succeeded, and some actually serve on starships, acting as virtual jacks of all trades, filling in for missing crew or assisting in several different departments.

As tikka grow older their nature settles somewhat, and after years of flitting restlessly from role to role in society at large, their pace begins to slow. Older tikka are more likely to stick with tasks for longer than a few days — some even remain in a chosen profession for years, applying the experience and knowledge they gained during their wild early years. Truly skilled tikka leaders, diplomats, artisans, and others tend to be from this older demographic, sometimes displaying levels of patience and wisdom unheard of in their society at large.

While the tikka's minds and society are truly fascinating, they present challenges for outsiders and for other inhabitants of the world. Lacking any but the most rudimentary authority, tikka society is largely self-driven, with no real laws or order beyond the tikka's natural instinct toward society and community, guided by the patient elders who know better than to force their fellow tikka in directions they do not want to go. Personal property is a puzzle to many tikka, who tend to take things that interest them, use them for a time and then discard them. As time goes by, notions of individual ownership have begun to make inroads in the complex tikka psyche, but it is a slow and often painful process.

Elsewhere, the tikka's natural tendencies keep the city in a constant state of transformation, with shops and businesses sometimes changing their nature daily, while others remain for weeks or months. A handful are managed by thoughtful, more sedate, mature tikka — these are among the few truly predictable places in the Middle Realms outside those run by foreigners. Even entire streets have been known to change as crews of tikka take it upon themselves to improve traffic flow.

Electrical power and other civil services all fall under the tikka's natural sense of self-preservation. Power facilities, sewage treatment plants, and water pumping stations are constantly manned, though by an always-varying group of workers, and hardly ever change location. Should any of these services fail or falter, countless tikka leave their current jobs and roles to repair or crew the facilities, remaining until the status quo has been restored, then returning to their lives. These examples of community effort amid a chaotic and individualistic society provide endless fascination to scientists and other observers.

The tikka economy is roughly barter based, for in the tikka mind when one takes a good or service one

"owes" something of roughly equal value in return, but the equivalency is often obscure. It is said that anything stolen by a tikka will eventually make its way back to the original owner, though it can sometimes take quite a while to happen. Those tikka who venture to the Canopy and the Surface continue to engage in their larcenous (to others) behavior, much to the chagrin of the il'kir'aan and others.

This erratic culture also applies to magic, which is sometimes practiced in the Middle Realms. Nowhere near as potent as it is on the bottom layer, magic nevertheless can provide some important functions here — healing, mending, light, and protection among others. Tikka may take up magic for a time, learn spells and rituals, then move on and never use magic again. This means that many tikka have magical knowledge and if persuaded they can provide valuable assistance. Some tikka have shown an aptitude for psionics, but as always they only use these abilities when they feel like it, or in life-or-death situations when their more violent tendencies emerge and saving tikkan life is important.

The unsettled nature of tikka society has led to a number of violent conflicts, and at any one time it's not at all unusual for one or more wars to be raging amid the hustle and bustle of the Middle Realms. Predictably, the tikka treat wars as more of a diversion than a serious problem, and battles often end with no fatalities and the two armies deciding that the conflict has been resolved or forgotten.

Crime is another concept that the tikka have difficulty with. Volatile and sometimes violent, the tikka themselves are prone to occasional outbursts, but these are dealt with as they occur, with miscreants punished on the spot or driven off. Crimes such as theft, burglary, and robbery have little meaning in a culture without real private property, and the tikka's instincts prevent most actions that might threaten an entire community. This is not to suggest tikka are natural victims or unable to defend themselves, as some enterprising criminals have found when they attempt to ply their trade on the streets of the Middle Realms.

Regardless of their method of entry — legal, extralegal, or outright illegal — non-tikka are treated with a mixture of curiosity and blasé acceptance, as if the foreigners themselves are fascinating, while the fact of their presence is entirely unremarkable. There is no stigma and very little prejudice against aliens, for any sufficiently intelligent entity who takes up residence in tikka territory is treated as an equal, for both good or ill. Neither tikka nor foreigner are bound by any formal law or rule — the only limitation on their behavior is what their community at large will tolerate. Lacking the instinctive drive to maintain relative stability and harmony that governs tikka behavior, foreigners sometimes take their freedom too far and end up triggering the wrath of the community, often with violent or even tragic results. For their part the tikka do not hold the bad behavior of an individual against an entire species, thus maintaining their world's mad but strangely persistent stability.

As might be expected, the tikka tend to be mischievous and have little respect for (and understanding of) authority, frequently flouting the laws the il'ki'raan have decreed to keep the three layers of Silvarum safe and secure. A popular game with young tikka involves scaling the yggdrasil trees all the way to the top, into the "forbidden" Canopy, where they plant colorful banners to mark their success. Il'ki'raan security forces take a dim view of such antics, but try not to harm the energetic young tikka, instead apprehending them and escorting them back to their homes with stern warnings. Fines and other penalties have proven useless, as the tikka generally ignore them. Imprisonment is used only as a last resort, as tikka waste away and quickly die in captivity.

The tikka are similarly unimpressed by admonitions to stay clear of the Surface Realms and their violent inhabitants. Especially daring individuals have been

known to sneak down into the lower kingdoms to observe and steal particularly intriguing knickknacks. Some enterprising tikka seek out magic items even though most lose their abilities in higher layers (there is a substantial black market for these useless if intriguing items in tikka communities). The tikka's infamous attitudes toward personal property prove especially infuriating to the ankylos and other surface dwellers, most of whom consider the tikka to be mischievous spirits sent by trickster gods.

Surface Realms

Most ankylos know nothing of the upper world and believe their realm is the entire extent of creation, bordered by seas and utterly alone in the universe. The spirit world lies high overhead, beyond the treetops that provide light. Occasionally, strange objects fall from the sky and are enshrined as gifts from the gods, and the odd creatures who sometimes visit the world, including adventurous tikka from the Middle Realms, are considered servants of the trickster god **Othé**, who is normally portrayed as a huge, frightening demon with tikka-like features.

Brutal warriors, ankylos live in savage military kingdoms centered on powerful fortress-palaces that are home to warlords and their retinues. Though they are truly terrifying in battle, the ankylos lack speed and mobility, preferring to fight set-piece battles and sieges and avoid more nimble foes. Ankylos shun cavalry, though they use large dray animals for transportation and as platforms for their massive siege engines. They are also all too willing to let their allies and enslaved races provide troops, including mounted forces if they are needed. As a result, the nomadic hordes of the plains are usually left in peace, save for raids and punitive invasions.

The ankylos worship a pantheon of warrior gods, some of which take the form of other species such as dragons, orcs, and even humans. Their origin myth claims their greatest deity, the dragon-god **Nymos**, made the ankylos for amusement, watching his people fight and conquer from on high. He also created the other species, or brought them from his other realms, testing each and finding them wanting in comparison to the mighty ankylos. This myth has led some researchers to suspect the ankylos are not native to Silvarum, but were brought here by some other race, possibly related to the void dragons of Khetorash. This would also explain the presence of other non-native species here — an entirely isolated place that has had almost no contact with the galaxy at large.

Magic and arcane forces are especially powerful on the Surface, to the point that the potent technologies of the il'kir'aan do not function. Ankylos spellcasters and warpriests predictably favor spells and rituals with destructive or martial applications. Their mastery of arcane forces is crude at best however, a fact other races, especially humans, use to their advantage.

The ankylos are binary gender, but there is absolutely no physical or behavioral difference between the sexes, to the point that outsiders simply can't tell the difference. Of course the ankylos themselves can, and females are capable of breeding year-round. Gestation is short and involves little if any debility short of actual birth. Ankylos are born soft-shelled, but their armor hardens within hours. After only a single day a young ankylos is fully mobile and can instinctively defend itself. Childhood is all but nonexistent for an ankylos, as training and battle-testing begin immediately, as the young ankylos is almost immediately released into society at large, to fend for itself. Adult status is attained in only five years if the young ankylos survives that long.

The offspring of famous or especially successful warlords gain some notoriety from this fact, usually because other ankylos wishing to advance will seek

them out and either challenge them or offer to join their warband. While any ankylos is free to challenge its ruler for dominance, a warlord's offspring are generally allowed the first shot, with lesser challengers getting in line behind them.

Ankylos society is as brutal as its family life. Rule is by the strong, for as long as the ruler can hold off challengers and stay alive. Loyalty is based exclusively on what benefits a leader provides, and a ruler who cannot provide for his allies swiftly finds himself or herself alone and under siege. Every aspect of ankylos society is geared toward success in battle — the ankylosan psyche cannot understand such concepts as art, literature, music, or other aesthetics save as they relate to combat, strategy, and conquest. There is no poetry in the ankylosan soul save that of battle.

The other species of the Surface Realm are possessed of a similarly savage culture, and the entire region has been mired in a brutal dark age for millennia. While the ankylos are physically the most powerful and capable species on the Surface Realm, the other races have their own advantages in speed, intelligence, and numbers. Some are entirely nomadic, traveling in great hordes mounted on creatures such as the **zorask** — the ankylos shun cavalry and favor power over mobility, and so are often vexed by the nomads, generally avoiding their realms. For their part, the nomads maintain their independence but they are not good at stand-up battle or sieges, so they are rarely able to make headway into ankylos territory.

Others rely on more sophisticated tactics and numbers to survive. Humans are generally considered the most magically-adept race on the Surface Realm, and their mastery of divine and arcane forces helps them keep the ankylos at bay. Still other species such as the ratfolk and goblins live as scavengers, in rough bands scattered throughout the world, dwelling in the wilderness, or in the teeming cities and scraping out a bare, miserable existence.

All of this, of course, has led to a bloody, violent stalemate between species that has lasted for thousands of years. The sheer cost of conflict is appalling, and the existence of this hellish world is a shameful blot on the il'kir'aan's "paradise." The birdfolk don't make a secret of the Surface Realms or its conditions, but insist that it is in the world's best interest to maintain the status quo. Some outsiders refuse to accept the il'kir'aan's assurances and demand something be done to end the bloodshed, but so far the birdfolk's cold and logical approach has prevailed.

Technological Level

The il'kir'aan's Canopy society is one of the most advanced in the galaxy, managed and governed by a sophisticated network of computers and carefully-selected leaders. Its elegant cities are connected by delicate grav transit lines and serviced by advanced aircraft and anti-grav vehicles. The main spaceport can support even the largest vessels, and il'kir'aan orbital facilities service starships from many different species and cultures.

The bird-people have no qualms about the use of cybernetics or other devices that enhance their basic abilities, and it is not at all unusual to encounter il'kir'aan with artificially improved senses, strength, and agility. Masters of psionics, the il'kir'aan have also developed a number of devices to enhance natural psychic abilities. In the hands of the il'kir'aan, these devices make potent psionics even more powerful, and they are reluctant to share the technology with others. A few il'kir'aan devices have found their way off Silvarum and into the hands of other species' psionics, but these were most likely obtained by illicit — or possibly violent — means.

The tikka live at a technological level roughly equivalent to the late industrial age, with electric or combustion engine vehicles, nuclear power plants, and ballistic weapons. The restricted terrain in the Middle Realms limits aircraft to short-hop light helicopters and VTOLs, but surface vehicles are common, often jamming the extensive roads stretching between the trees' great branches with heavy traffic. The il'kir'aan do their best to keep the tikka stagnated at their current tech level, restricting the export of high tech devices and harshly punishing violators. Nevertheless the tikka still manage to get their hands on advanced items on a regular basis, and as a species seem determined to break free of the restrictions placed on them by their supposedly-benevolent friends on the Canopy.

At the surface, the technological levels of the ankylos and other races ranges from Bronze and Iron Ages down to the Stone Age, though what they lack in sophistication is somewhat made up for by the presence of magic. Warlords who can forge steel weapons have a distinct advantage over others. Skilled smiths are always in demand and, by general consensus and tradition, are one of the few groups who are captured, rather than slain, in battle. Transportation is on foot or by animal. Surprisingly enough, flight is not uncommon on the Surface, either with magical aid or with flying creatures.

The ankylos know nothing of cybernetics or technology-based enhancements, but can use magic to do the same thing. Magically-enhanced limbs and senses are common among the Surface folk, often crafted to look as imposing and frightening as possible.

Economy and Resources

The il'kir'aan economy is largely self-sustaining, with necessities manufactured on-world and distributed via established supply algorithms to the various arcologies located across the planet. These arcologies are models of efficiency, sustaining large populations with little in the way of shortages due to the il'kir'aan's highly rational and long-established distribution system. Power to the arcologies is provided by a combination of fusion energy from strategically-located plants dotting the Canopy and from solar energy gathered by collectors located in the tinted plex domes covering the arcologies.

The il'kir'aan mostly import luxuries — foods, clothing, works of art, music, and the like. Surplus food and some technological items are exported, but the sale of some items of il'kir'aan tech — specifically their psionic-enhancement devices — is either extremely restricted or outright forbidden. This is understandable, as in the hands of unscrupulous aliens, the birdfolk's most potent devices might be duplicated and misused, endangering both the il'kir'aan and galactic civilization in general. A small number of these psionic enhancement devices have shown up offworld, but fortunately for the il'kir'aan the actual design of their core components, along with their manufacture, remains a mystery even the most capable technicians have thus far been unable to solve.

As noted previously, most tikka don't fully understand the concepts of private property, tending to give and take as they wish, allowing a rough barter system to stand in for an actual economy. As with society-at-large, this system seems to work purely due to the tikka's instinctive drive to keep their communities functional amidst chaos. In the past the tikka lived in a sort of benign anarchy kept relatively stable by consensus. As they advanced technologically and their contacts with outsiders grew, however, formally buying and selling goods became more common, though with distinctly tikka aspects.

Some tikka, particularly those attracted to mercantile enterprises, began to grasp the concept of currency and started mercantile businesses, accepting a wild

range of payment options, including labor, goods of equivalent value, gemstones, precious metals, paper currency, and coins. Today the tikka have a somewhat more consumerist society, buying and selling goods, sometimes for barter, sometimes for currency. Though it is considered nothing short of miraculous that the tikka economy can survive, it defies expectations and continues to expand. The tikka's infamous disregard for private property continues as well, frustrating visitors and reportedly driving several prominent economists to the brink of madness.

Elder tikka's greater stability allows them to focus more on complex mercantile efforts, and such individuals deal with offworld suppliers, importing many goods, though the il'kir'aan have the last word on exactly what is allowed on- and offworld. Tikka sometimes travel offworld themselves, utilizing their extensive skillsets to work in industry, science, or even as starship crew, literal jacks of all trades that are capable of filling in on nearly any task.

Officially off-limits save in extreme emergencies, the Surface Realms have no contact with outsiders. Tikka raiders and unscrupulous outsiders have been known to risk sneaking down to the Surface to brave its dangers and bring back gold, magic items, and other treasures, but this is a hazardous undertaking at best. As Surface magic fades in the upper layers these items usually prove to be nothing more than curiosities, but other forms of loot exist as a potent lure to adventurers and other unscrupulous types. A few enterprising individuals claim to know how to unlock the true abilities of Silvaran magic items, but this knowledge is not widespread. If it were to become more widely known, a virtual goldrush might ensue, overwhelming the il'kir'aan and sending more outsiders into the volatile Surface Realms, possibly spoiling the birdfolk's carefully maintained balance forever.

Government

Three separate worlds combined into one, Silvarum is officially under the governance of the il'kir'aan. The bird people's society is largely self-governing, as most decisions regarding day to day activities are under the control of sophisticated algorithms and managed by a sophisticated network of computers and AIs. This network oversees food, power, water, transportation, and most other mundane matters — even reproduction and population control — making incremental changes as necessary to maintain the best possible benefit to the largest number. Despite their devotion to efficiency and scientific precision, the il'kir'aan are not heartless and always strive to make sure minimum standards are maintained — in the Canopy none go hungry or lack basic necessities.

Those aspects of government and society that are less amenable to automation — the “human” factors — such as communications, diplomacy, economic relations, threat assessment, and similar matters are handled by a council of il'kir'aan officials. These officials are selected through a rigorous testing process that assesses their capabilities based upon a vast database assembled over centuries. Those able to handle complex situations under pressure are rated highest and given positions on the council. While there is no real element of democracy or public input in these decisions, the il'kir'aan continuously modify and improve the selection software and add to their database, assured that with each passing year it's accuracy and ability to select the right leaders improves.

Many are surprised to learn that the tikka actually possess a government of sorts. Some younger tikka actually choose to serve as officials for periods ranging from several days to several months in the case of especially dedicated individuals, but the most vital

governmental functions — diplomacy, trade negotiations, and keeping the peace with a rowdy and sometimes violent population — fall to those mature tikka who have settled down and found their calling. Of course this represents the absolute minimum government a society can have and still function, and tikka leaders spend much of their time responding to crises and urgent events such as natural disasters and conflicts between tikka communities. The rest of the time, the older tikka leave their younger brethren to their own devices, letting their society largely manage itself.

And surprisingly, this works most of the time. Most suspect that the tikka species possesses a certain inbred, instinctive sense of community and self-preservation that keeps its society from falling into utter ruin. Though tikka change their professions and roles constantly, these roles are always filled by someone — as if the near-anarchy of the tikka culture nevertheless maintains a constant level of competent management.

No one is certain how or why this occurs, but with the guidance of their older members, the tikka seem entirely capable of maintaining a relatively stable and growing culture with only the most basic order and leadership. This system is far from perfect of course, and despite the mature tikka's best efforts entire communities often go to war over small (or in some cases entirely imagined) conflicts. Fortunately for all, these wars are as mad and transient as the rest of tikka society, and rarely last long or cause any extensive loss of life or property.

Rule on the Surface Realm is exclusively by the strong. Only the most powerful of warlords survive for long, and successful ankylos rulers must build up a reliable and powerful network of allies and followers in order to fend off rivals. Each warlord rules in a different fashion — some are absolute monarchs while others rely on the advice of war councils, advisors, priests, or elders. The greatest power of a Surface Realm warlord is in its personal retinue and the army that protects its realm.

Other humanoid kingdoms generally follow the ankylos model — rule by the most powerful. Some nomadic tribes are different, with dynastic succession, but this process is often complicated when a chieftain has multiple offspring. Hordes have been known to split along dynastic lines, with claimants to rulership leaving with their followers to form new hordes. At other times, these hordes may draw together under the leadership of an especially charismatic warlord, creating a constantly-changing pattern of power and alliance.

Ecology

Silvarum's amazing environment has given rise to one of the most unusual ecologies in the galaxy — a single planet with three completely distinct and separate biomes, each with its own flora, fauna, and biology. Subject to intense study and speculation, Silvarum draws hundreds of scientists every year, eager to learn more about its strange ecology.

General Flora and Fauna

The history and true nature of the amazing yggdrasil trees is one of the galaxy's abiding mysteries, for they appear to violate every known law of evolutionary biology. It is possible the yggdrasil, like the myriad species of the Surface Realms, may have been seeded here by some powerful ancient species such as the void dragons or — even more amazingly — the trees may have been specifically genetically engineered to create an entirely new environment. The trees themselves appear to be all but immortal, and in thousands of years of recorded history no one has ever seen one die, or for that matter, reproduce. Yet they are clearly living

things, abiding peacefully at the center of a complex environmental web.

The trees divide the planet into what is essentially three distinct worlds — the Canopy, Middle Realms, and the Surface. Their interwoven branches form a rich, solid green floor for the Canopy, where the atmosphere is thinner and gravity lighter, allowing for the existence of numerous flying species. Above the fierce competition of lower altitudes, local avian species have grown diverse and colorful, flitting through the air in elaborate patterns, feeding on the arthropods and small plants making their home among the big trees' branches. Small mammal-like creatures akin to insectivores and rodents also live in the higher reaches of the yggdrasil, and also form a food source for predatory avians.

The greatest biological diversity on Silvarum is in the Middle Realms, where more avians share space with mammalian and reptilian species. Other plant species exist down here in rich profusion, growing on detritus from above or undergoing a modified form of photosynthesis in the light provided by the glowing fungus on the underside of the interwoven branches. The full spectrum of biological interaction is on display in the Middle Realms, with large predators stalking their prey, herds of large creatures moving from place to place and grazing on the mosses, fungi and other organic life growing in the cracks and crevices of the trees, along their branches, or in the gaps between them.

The dim reaches of the Surface are also home to many species, but they are hardy and tough, facing constant struggle for survival, competing for even the smallest



Planetarium

scraps of sustenance. Animals here are swift ground-dwellers — sturdy herd creatures such as the red and grey striped zorask, the six-legged **crag leaper**, and the bounding **kudrix**, blindingly fast but also able to defend itself with a thick skull that sprouts multi-pronged, wickedly sharp horns — or slow, heavily armored beasts such as the **karkoth**, a massive tusked animal used by the ankylos and ogre tribes for both transportation and war.

Plant species resemble highly advanced fungi and succulents, sometimes growing in vast forests harboring their own ecologies of small endotherms resembling rodents and diminutive carnivores. The viridine, a catlike species, has migrated from the Surface to the Middle Realms and is even occasionally found in the Canopy, preying on its flying species. Domesticated viridine are kept as pets by the tikka.

Apex Creatures

Silvarum's life forms grow more dangerous as one descends. The avians and small arboreals of the Canopy present little if any threat, while the Middle Realms harbors a few aggressive species. Naturally, the most aggressive and deadly creatures live among the warring humanoids of the Surface Realm.

Sun-Kite

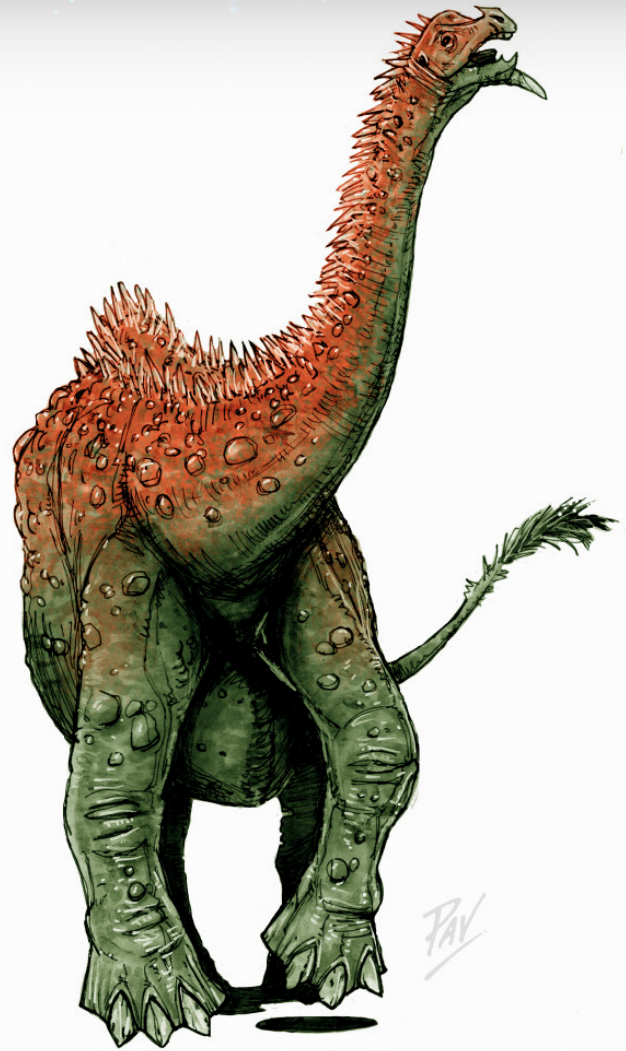
The top predator of the Canopy layer is this big raptor, possessing a 25-foot wingspan, with a long flexible tail, four heavy clawed feet, and a hooked beak. These creatures are rare and strictly protected by the il'kir'aan. They prey on smaller avians and arboreal species, but have been known to attack sentient creatures if they feel their territory has been violated. Sun-kites are covered in photoreactive feathers that change color depending on light intensity, providing them with concealment while hunting. Poachers have sometimes come to Silvarum to hunt sun-kites for their feathers, which can bring extremely high prices elsewhere in the galaxy, where the law is less strict and demanding. The il'kir'aan protect all species on the planet, but reserve especially harsh punishments for sun-kite poachers, who may find themselves facing long prison sentences or, in extreme cases, partial mind-wipes.

Galaros

Probably the most fearsome predator in the Middle Realms, galaros are equally at home in the air or in the branches of trees, capable of stalking prey in almost any location or condition. Resembling human-sized bats with an extra pair of clawed limbs, galaros live in hollows in tree trunks and specialize in lightning fast attacks, emerging with terrifying speed to seize their prey, then either flying away or darting back into their lairs. Fortunately for most travelers, these creatures are limited to more isolated and out of the way wilderness and pressure from the growing tikka population has reduced their numbers considerably.

Silvaran Dragon

These ferocious creatures dwell in isolated wilderness parts of the Surface layer, staking out territory and preying on all creatures within, including the ankylos and other humanoids. Physically they resemble true dragons — they can fly and breathe corrosive vapors — but if they are indeed related, Silvaran dragons have been evolving away from their forebears for many eons, for they are unintelligent and well-adapted to the harsh conditions on the surface. Highly aggressive, dragons are always trouble for neighboring creatures and kingdoms, and local warlords offer substantial bounties for their destruction.



Khorvaxx

Massive beasts whose name translates to “Living Thunder” in the ankylos language, the khorvaxx are enormous armored herd animals living in family groups of up to six and roam the rocky plains of Silvarum's Surface Realm. Khorvaxx are not naturally aggressive, relying on their great size and natural armor for protection, but the ankylos favor them as dray animals and war beasts, employing them to carry big siege engines or as battle platforms, carrying ankylos warriors into combat.

Population Centers, Landing Sites, and Points of Interest

The Canopy is covered in the elegant and graceful settlements of the il'kir'aan, while the Middle Realms are crowded with ugly industry, sprawling tikka cities and chaotic roadways. Settlements on the Surface range from mud-walled villages to the grim stone fortresses of the ankylos warlords. Some of the planet's more prominent settlements and points of interest are listed below.

Canopy

The Canopy seems a fairly dull place— an almost entirely flat green surface formed by the interwoven

branches of the countless mighty yggdrasil trees. On closer inspection the Silvaran Canopy is actually a carefully-managed world dotted with unobtrusive il'kir'aan cities and installations linked by a grav-transport system. The birdfolk do their best to keep their footprint small, with most of their cities built beneath the tops of the trees, overseen by an elaborate computer network that constantly rations and rebalances resources to keep the world healthy. Though they are indeed an admirable species and their stewardship of the world is impressive, the il'kir'aan nevertheless maintain an artificially-balanced society that neither advances nor retreats — a situation the birdfolk themselves realize may not be sustainable forever.

Ra'kin'e'fahn Spaceport

A state of the art spaceport surrounded by the vast green ocean of the Canopy, Ra'kin'e'fahn is built in harmony with the yggdrasil and environment of Silvarum and might almost be mistaken for a part of the scenery. The arrival of orbital shuttles and even small atmosphere-capable starships, descending on columns of flame, tend to shatter this illusion rather quickly of course, but the il'kir'aan take extreme precautions to make sure this facility does not damage the planet's natural terrain.

The port is domed over by an invisible forcefield, which can be selectively opened to allow vessels to enter and leave. This field also traps vessels' exhaust, which a cloud of nanomachines — visible only as a faint glint in the air — then vacuums up and transports to collection tanks where it is recycled and waste products removed.

Ra'kin'e'fahn itself is an aesthetic combination of organic-appearing control towers and graceful landing cradles, crafted of soft blue semi-transparent metal alloys intended to complement the planet's natural colors and shapes. The il'kir'aan try to combine the practical and the beautiful, and in the case of Ra'kin'e'fahn they have done so with great success.

The spaceport is almost entirely automated, with only a small staff of il'kir'aan attending, aided by AIs, servos, and maintenance drones programmed to perform all required functions. The entire station requires a staff of only about 50, under Senior Oversight Manager (the translation of a difficult and far subtler il'kir'aan title) **Nii'cha'ekha** (LN female il'kir'aan envoy 15), a quiet and unassuming il'kir'aan who is said to speak over 100 different languages and has traveled extensively throughout the galaxy, giving her an extensive knowledge of offworld culture. She prides herself (as much as any il'kir'aan feels an emotion such as pride) on being able to deal with almost any non-il'kir'aan as an equal with a near-total understanding of their character. Some of this may well be typical il'kir'aan overconfidence, but those who have met her agree she is an amazingly approachable and understanding individual.

Traffic in and out of the station consists mostly of cargo or passenger shuttles but as noted, much larger craft, including starships, can easily be accommodated. Hangars, storage, and maintenance bays are located below the surface of the branches, maintaining the spaceport's aesthetic beauty while sheltering these sensitive areas from atmospheric conditions. Despite its low profile and harmonious design, the port is nevertheless a seething hive of activity at all hours, with folk of all species and professions coming and going constantly, along with a continuous flow of goods to and from Silvarum.

ll'kir'aan engineers spent decades designing the spaceport and testing its design on smaller facilities across the planet. Over years of construction the port's buildings were anchored to the body of several extremely large and ancient yggdrasil, augmented with advanced metal alloys and even antigrav technology, creating a fully functional spaceport the size of a small city while

minimizing its effect on the planet's ecosystems.

Ra'kin'e'fahn lies at the center of a network of grav-transport lines, connecting it to every major population center in the Canopy. The spaceport is located 125 miles from the En'tal Arcology — about a 30-minute ride by grav-trans, and shorter still by VTOL. The port also maintains elevators to the Middle Realms, though il'kir'aan authorities strictly control who goes there, insisting all travelers show their authorization at all times.

Dakh'e Station

Larger vessels make port at this vast orbital facility, which also serves as a base for the il'kir'aan's small but efficient fleet of patrol vessels. As the il'kir'aan have been at peace for centuries, their ships mostly engage in survey work, monitor hazards such as asteroids and cometary bodies, perform the occasional rescue, and guide or escort incoming vessels.

Like Ra'kin'e'fahn Spaceport, Dakh'e is a wonder of il'kir'aan science and engineering, with berths for a dozen large vessels and remote docking facilities for a score more. Il'kir'aan staff provide port services, repair, maintenance, and refueling that is both efficient and economical, making this world a popular destination even for vessels on longer journeys.

As on the planetside space port, Dakh'e is largely automated, with only a small staff of about 100 il'kir'aan overseeing the servos, drones, and mechanized systems. Senior Orbital Command Coordinator (another complex il'kir'aan title that doesn't translate well) **Khu'maak'ikhe** (LN male il'kir'aan mechanic 16) is less approachable than his planetbound counterpart at Ra'kin'e'fahn. Preferring efficiency to communications, he rarely interacts with visitors, leaving such interactions to automated AI services and his own staff, which includes liaison officers of several species, including humans, kasatha, lashunta, and others.

As both a transit point and a gateway to Silvarum, Dakh'e is well-equipped to serve many different functions and visitors. Its main mercantile area contains shops, supply brokers, hotels, and even bars (run by non-il'kir'aan of course — the birdfolk are notorious for their seriousness and aversion to intoxicants). Elsewhere, communication facilities maintain constant contact with nearby systems through FTL transmission, as well as with the surface. Regular shuttle service to and from Silvarum carries passengers and cargo, with all routine customs procedures handled by drones and automated services.

Most security is handled by what the il'kir'aan refer to as Automated Service Drones — actually well-armed security robots, equipped to peacefully intervene in conflicts and to disable and capture rather than kill. More serious issues call for the deployment of the station's small but efficient squad of 10 elite il'kir'aan specialists, but these individuals are rarely called upon.

En'tal Arcology

The largest city in the Canopy is almost literally a hive of activity, though its profile when viewed from outside is quite minimal. As with most settlements on the planet, En'tal was carefully planned and painstakingly built, a series of eight great hollow cylinders, each anchored at the apex of six yggdrasil trees and connected by transit tubes and grav-transport lines. Most of the city extends below the Canopy — only low, transparent domes of green-tinted plex are visible from outside, each hundreds of yards across. Below the domes are mile-long cylinders with atria at their centers and il'kir'aan structures around their outside. Light from above is enhanced and focused so full daylight even reaches the lowest reaches of each cylinder.

Planetarium

Each of these cylinders, or sub-arcologies, supports a population of about 150,000, and the entire city boasts 1.2 million il'kir'aan inhabitants. Other arcologies are dotted across the continent, each following the same basic design and each supporting a population of 250,000–1,000,000.

Zakh'nar Agricultural Arcology

A typical agricultural city, Zakh'nar follows the same design as other Silvaran arcologies, but its numerous levels are devoted to food cultivation and synthesis rather than living space. The upper levels, well supplied with light and water pumped in from coastal desalination plants, are for the growing of crops — grains, fruits, and similar species. These are a combination of native plants cultivated and selectively bred by the il'kir'aan, and entirely offworld species that came with them on their arrival here. These last have been genetically-modified to suit Silvarum's climate and also to avoid competing with or — worse yet — replacing native species.

Much of the il'kir'aan diet is composed of synthesized foods, so the lower half of the agricultural arcology contains production equipment, where basic elements are transformed into nutritious foodstuffs. Food products here can be modified and tailored to any physiology, so the il'kir'aan often dedicate their machinery to producing food for export to human space and beyond. These synthetics are a growing source of income for the il'kir'aan.

Grav Transit Lines

While the lower gravity of the Canopy allows the il'kir'aan to fly short distances, longer trips are taken in graceful ornithopters, antigrav vehicles, or on the sleek silver transport cars that glide smoothly along the grav transit lines crisscrossing the planet. From space they form a shining spiderweb, but up close they are invisible save for the occasional shimmer in the noon-time sun.

Transport cars range from five to 30 yards in length and carry up to 60 passengers at a time. As per the il'kir'aan's social practices, travel on the cars is free, and each one is allocated to a given route depending on local traffic and transit needs. Though accommodations in the cars are geared toward the il'kir'aan's tall and slender physiology, these can easily be modified to suit the needs of other passengers, reconfiguring seats, windows, tables, and other facilities to many different body types.

Travel times are very short, as antigrav technology allows these cars to travel at up to 625 miles per hour, whisking passengers from one end of the continent to the other in less than a full day.

Elevators

Access to the Middle Realms is limited, but with the proper identification and certifications one can travel down from the Canopy with relative ease. Elevator stations are strategically located across the Canopy, directly above key destinations and population centers in the Middle Realms. These gravitic elevators travel without benefit of cables or any frame beyond light, transparent tubes through which the passengers' surroundings can easily be observed. They are comfortable and like the grav transit cars can be reconfigured to suit a wide range of physiologies. Transit from the Canopy to destinations in the Middle Realms is quick, moving travelers from a realm of perfect order to one of almost complete chaos in a matter of minutes.

Middle Realms

Where the world of the Canopy is a place of order, beauty, and relative tranquility, the Middle Realms

are another matter entirely. The tikka maintain a technological level roughly equivalent to the late industrial age, with massive manufacturies, vast crowded roadways, and teeming, often dirty and dangerous, cities. The tikka's lackadaisical attitude has also allowed an influx of foreigners — humans, elves, ratfolk, lashunta — including many untrustworthy types who see the Middle Realms as a safe haven from the law or pursuing enemies.

To outsiders, tikka cities are almost madhouses, with numerous buildings constructed at all angles along the trunks of supporting trees with asphalt highways and rail lines extending across the branches and connecting settlements. Seemingly fragile, these cities are actually quite sturdy, built and reinforced over centuries by a wide range of anarchic yet highly skilled tikka engineers. In recent years the il'kir'aan have contributed their expertise to the tikka's city building, providing advanced structural materials and reinforcing existing structures. The possibility of a tikka structure or, worse yet, an entire settlement collapsing down into the Surface Realm is a very real fear for the il'kir'aan, given their near-fanatical determination to keep the realms separated.

Yobenne

This largest of tikka cities supports a population of nearly three million, including many thousands of non-tikka. Yobenne houses what passes for the tikka government, with diplomatic missions from several species, official buildings housing older and wiser tikka as well as those youngsters patient enough to serve as leaders for a time, and communications facilities intended to keep the disparate communities in touch with each other and hopefully head off conflicts before they begin.

Visitors to Yobenne must first negotiate the il'kir'aan's elaborate bureaucracy before gaining access, but this hasn't stopped a large number of non-tikka from coming through other, less official means. A wide range of restricted, illicit, or outright illegal goods and services can be obtained along Yobenne's teeming streets from both tikka and non-tikka vendors, for while the tikka themselves have little grasp of private property, certain individuals have learned the ins and outs of selling to outsiders.

The city is a hive of activity, crowded with countless tikka coming and going, its roads full of strange and often fantastical vehicles, its buildings changing their function and even their design, sometimes literally overnight. Finding vital services may require a tikka guide, unless one remains in the foreigners' quarter, where businesses and locations actually remain relatively fixed, or if one only deals with the sedate, comparatively calm elder tikka who regard their younger compatriots with patient indulgence.

Zlaskatak

Built near the floor of the Middle Realms around the trunk of an especially ancient tree, Zlaskatak is one of the oldest continuously-inhabited tikka cities, and is known for its large number of mature tikka, who maintain a surprising level of order and keep the wilder young tikka in check. This is sensible, as Zlaskatak is one of the few places where one can easily move down through the floor branches and into the grim world of the Surface Realms.

Physically, Zlaskatak is one of the more aesthetic cities in the Middle Realm, with pleasant wooden buildings, quiet narrow streets, and even lush public parks that — unusually for the tikka — actually remain in one place most of the time. Vehicles are rare here, as most residents prefer to walk or ride small pedal-carts to and from their daily tasks. Quiet reigns here as well, and it

is one of few tikka cities where one can go for peace and actually hear birdsong above the din.

The madness of tikka society is not entirely absent of course — rather it is somewhat muted here, and grey-furred, dark-eyed tikka elders are far more common in Zlaskatak than elsewhere. Often encountered in public places, sitting in quiet contemplation (a posture that younger tikka and even some non-tikka find downright alarming), these elders are a good source of history, philosophy, and information about the world and its history.

Access to the Surface is through hatches set in the surface of the big tree that lead to spiraling passages down. These passages emerge 600 feet above the Surface, and those using them have to use other means — mechanical or arcane — to get the rest of the way down. These passages are used only in emergencies — rescue missions, attempts to retrieve or destroy sensitive objects that have fallen to the surface, and the like. The exits' placement keeps them well hidden from the ankylos, who so far have not suspected that there is a passage to "the heavens" cunningly concealed above their heads.

The discovery of these passages would of course be disastrous to the il'kir'aan and their carefully-maintained balance, a fact that the elder tikka are well aware of. The hatches are well-guarded by both veteran tikka and il'kir'aan soldiers and access is strictly controlled. Attempts to sneak through or force the passages are met with deadly force, and despite the birdfolks' general pacifism, they will not hesitate to use deadly force against anyone who threatens the security of the hatches and the passages beyond.

Kurank Industrial Complex

As surprising as it might seem, the tikka have a vital and growing industrial sector, where millions of individual tikka labor to produce a wide range of goods for both export and local consumption. Outsiders and xenoanthropologists never cease to be amazed at the tikka's ability to maintain a healthy economy with a population that constantly flits from job to job to job, but for some unfathomable reason the arrangement works. Factories are always fully staffed and work to capacity, even if some workers only show up for a day or two before growing bored and moving on to other tasks.

Less flighty elder tikka serve as managers and directors, but as with other aspects of tikka society, all they can really do is maintain the general flow of work and make sure their factories continue to manufacture the same things, rather than changing focus every other day. With these experienced tikka at the helm, the Kurank Industrial Complex function with remarkable efficiency, producing ground vehicles, railroad equipment, computers, prefabricated building materials, telecommunications equipment, and more. At any time over 500,000 tikka work here, either in local housing or commuting over road and rail lines from nearby settlements.

The notion of the tikka producing anything uniform is of course ludicrous. Though they have embraced and even improved upon many industrial era manufacturing techniques, each product that emerges from the Kurank Complex is unique, with individual modifications and quirks added by each tikka involved in the production process. Goods from the complex are shipped across the planet, some making their way to the Canopy or even off-world, where tikka delicacies, textiles, and furnishings are quite popular due to their uniqueness.

Road and Rail Network

Transportation through the Middle Realms is by road and rail. The tikka rail system is another example of the species' selective unity — a bewildering variety

of engines, cargo pods, and passenger cars span the continent, each one unique. However, all of these vehicles function on a single gauge of monorail track, and are fully compatible with one another, so that an individual train can haul dozens or hundreds of cars of maddeningly different design. While the individual units are built as chaotically and uniquely as the tikka wish, they nevertheless actually work together to create a highly efficient rail network.

Roads are likewise uniform — broad asphalt paths stretching along the massive tree branches, winding precariously around trunks or soaring high above the abyss to connect one branch to another. The vehicles that travel on these roads are like something from a fever dream — wheeled and tracked automobiles rumble along beside hovercraft, rolling spheres, and even multi-legged walkers. As with the rail lines, the roadways are surprisingly consistent and uniform, while the vehicles traveling on them are works of anarchic genius. These vehicles are sometimes exported, popular with collectors and wealthy eccentrics who enjoy their wild variety.

Surface

Silvarum's Surface layer bears more than a passing resemblance to some cultures' versions of hell — it is located in the lowest reaches of a world, it is located beneath both a chaotic Middle Realm and an ethereal upper world, it is a place of violence and retribution, and it is inhabited by legions of bloodthirsty and demonic monsters. While the demons of the Surface are actually mortal creatures with their own strengths and weaknesses, the image of the Surface as hades is a powerful one — enough to keep most sensible creatures away from the place.

Despite its dangers and dire reputation, the Surface is also a place of barbaric splendor and surprising beauty, always dimly lit by the bluish glow of the fungal growths on the underside of the branches forming the region's roof. Cities grow and thrive here amid constant warfare, as well as sprawling palaces, grim fortresses, and shining temples. The Surface is also different from the other layers in that it actually has geographic features. Some prominent examples are described below.

Thrakulkos

The greatest city of the Surface Realm, Thrakulkos stands at the center of the empire of the ankylos warlord **Surakhenkah** (NE male ankylos soldier 18). A grim stone metropolis surrounded by sprawling slums, Thrakulkos is a lawless place where violent death can come at any moment. Surakhenkah's fortress lies at the center of its labyrinthine streets, looming over the city like a grim specter. Here, Surakhenkah has ruled for decades, overseeing a growing empire and fending off endless plots and coups by rivals, enemies, traitorous minions, and even family members. These last please Surakhenkah immensely, and a well-planned coup attempt by one of his offspring often earns a compliment and best wishes for the next try. Inept or incompetent attacks draw only contempt, punishment, or death — like all ankylos, Surakhenkah despises weakness.

Thrakulkos' teeming slums are home to countless thousands of unfortunates of all races — orcs, goblins, gnolls, humans, and even a few luckless ankylos driven in shame from their families. There is a significant community of ratfolk who live in the shadows, beneath the streets, or in abandoned buildings, who maintain a well-functioning society under the ankylos' very noses. Criminal gangs rule here, ignored by Surakhenkah's soldiers unless they cause trouble or insurrection, and life is both cheap and short. On the other hand, the slums of Thrakulkos are an ideal hiding place for refugees, fugitives, and plotters of all sorts, and many a scheme to overthrow the warlord

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has been hatched here. The thriving underworld also provides for the city's downtrodden inhabitants, for it is said that almost anything can be bought and sold here with sufficient gold. The exception of course being high-tech items from the upper layers, most of which do not work in any event.

The city's mighty walls, built and strengthened over the centuries by countless warlords, tower above the slums. City gates are accessible via broad avenues that cut through the slums, constantly patrolled by ankylos warriors. Immediately inside the walls, conditions are not much better than they are in the slums, though the vast majority of the dregs who live there are ankylos, with only a small handful of other species.

Order and prosperity increase as one approaches the city center and Surakhenkah's massive fortress. Big stone buildings house prominent ankylos families, barracks contain the warlord's endless legions while armories hold their arms and armor. Temples to the war gods are scattered throughout the city, hosting regular services at which the ankylos pray for glory in war, or at least glorious death in battle. Warehouses hold the plunder of a dozen lesser kingdoms, along with supplies that would allow the city to withstand months or even years of siege.

The estates of the most powerful ankylos are located nearest the fortress. These are all smaller versions of the warlord's demesne — walled, fortified, and garrisoned with loyal ankylos warriors. Technically, all of these powerful warriors and their families are loyal to Surakhenkah — or at least have sworn fealty to him — but no one is foolish enough to believe that such oaths are worth anything should the tides of fortune turn. Every year, one or more powerful ankylos lord tries his or her luck against the mighty Surakhenkah, and so far all have failed, slain to the last, their great estates turned over to other, more "loyal" retainers. In Thrakulkos as elsewhere, only the strong survive, and so far Surakhenkah has proven himself to be the strongest of all.

The warlord's fortress is said to be the largest and strongest in the world, with high thick iron walls topped with deadly spikes, vast barracks holding thousands of elite bloodthirsty warriors and war beasts, workshops producing countless engines of war, and supplies that will allow the fortress to survive even as the city around it starves. Surakhenkah dwells here with his most trusted (which is to say "least mistrusted") followers and family members. No one knows how old the great warlord is — some say centuries. He is a huge male ankylos, covered in armor plates that are scarred and twisted by a thousand battles, and despite his age, his skill at arms remains unequalled. Over the years he has never let his retainers or allies defend him. When challenged, he faces his rival directly, ending combat only when his foe is slain or (if it is an especially clever son or daughter) defeated and dragged off in chains. Those children who fail are generally imprisoned for a time, and then released to try again — as noted, Surakhenkah appreciates an enterprising child, but has no mercy for those whom he deems weak or incompetent. Family meals in the fortress tend to be awkward affairs.

Harkosunge Fortress

Located at the juncture of the territories of several ankylos warlords, Harkosunge is a strategic and symbolic place that has been fought over for years — some say for millennia. Though it started life as a tiny and relatively unimportant strongpoint for a minor ankylos clan many centuries ago, it has grown into a massive, thick-walled labyrinth of stone towers, dungeons, barracks, armories, storage facilities, courtyards, and more. In addition to the thousands of ankylos and allied troops garrisoned here, the number of staff needed to run the place is enormous, with thousands more ankylos and slaves of

all species permanently housed here. Far from a mere fortress, Harkosunge has grown into a city in its own right, maze-like and seemingly endless.

Life in the fortress varies from dull routine to terrifying battle, depending on the season and who currently controls it. Traffic to and from the fortress is constant, as supplies arrive in vast caravans and troops rotate in and out. Maintaining the fortress is a huge expense, and more than one ankylos warlord has abandoned the place due to its sheer unaffordability. Currently the mighty Surakhenkah rules the fortress, and his vast empire is more than adequate to keep it running. Should the empire fall on hard times however it will grow more and more difficult to keep the place up and Surakhenkah himself may surrender to the inevitability of fate and leave the fortress to a new master.

Salkalska Mountains

As grim and forbidding as a mountain range can be, the Salkalska are infamous for their deadly dangers, both natural and unnatural. Craggy and inhospitable, the Salkalska contain steep ravines, sheer heights, shattered zones of impassible broken rock, and many other hazards. Periodically lashed by fierce windstorms and driving rain, the mountains harbor little in the way of vegetation save for dense lichen and fungal growths that provide food for the mountain's hardy herbivores. The mountains also teem with predatory life forms, including crag leapers and Silvaran dragons — dangerous creatures that prey on both the herbivores and each other.

Given this extensive and frightening reputation, it would be surprising if any sensible creatures made their home here, but that is indeed the case. The mountains have long had the reputation as a haven for exiles, criminals, and refugees. So desolate and useless that no ankylos warlord will claim them, the Salkalskas are free of any authority — a lawless realm where the only rule is survival.

Gangs of bandits led by fugitive ankylos warriors lurk in marginally habitable canyons, occasionally sending raids out to plunder surrounding lands for supplies. Twisted necromancers make their homes in rude stone fortresses, free to pursue their foul experiments beyond the reach of rivals or vengeful chieftains. Remnants of ankylos or other humanoid clans make their way here to scrape out bare existences while rebuilding strength of plotting revenge. Bounty hunters sometimes venture to the mountains as well, seeking the heads of wanted fugitives, hoping for bags of gold from grateful warlords.

While the mountains do represent something of a refuge from the constant warfare of the Surface, their hazards may be even greater. This has not stopped a small but steady stream of luckless individuals from coming here however, and the mountains remain the best option for those facing death or enslavement.

Bloodstar Plains

This vast, rolling land resembles the grasslands of other worlds, save that it is covered instead on fields of branched fungus that provides food for the animals and humanoids who live here. It is home to vast hordes of nomadic tribes, and probably the largest section of the Surface not controlled by ankylos warlords.

Nomads of several different species call the plains home — zorask-mounted human tribes, dire wolf-riding orcs, gnolls accompanied by ferocious packs of hyaenodons, ogres and their colossal karkoth herds. These hordes are highly mobile, independent, and warlike, and if they ever united they might actually form a threat to ankylos domination of the Surface. As it is they take great pleasure in fighting one another, but will jointogether to defeat any incursions by the ankylos. For their part the ankylos have learned to stay away

from the plains, leaving the nomads to their own petty struggles and bloody wars while occasionally raiding for slaves and plunder.

Outsiders have a slightly better chance at survival on the Bloodstar Plains than in ankylos lands, for by tradition prisoners or strangers are given a chance to prove themselves in trial by combat before being enslaved or slain. Such fights are invariably brutal affairs the outsider usually loses, but from time to time strange things happen. The human warrior Kentas, fleeing after being betrayed and overthrown by his half-brother, sought refuge with the orcish tribe of the Rusty Chain. Unarmed, he defeated a half-dozen orcish tribal champions before being loudly proclaimed a member of the horde. Within a year Kentas had risen to become chief himself and led the Rusty Chains in a brutal war of vengeance against the human horde that had betrayed him. Songs are still sung about Kentas' triumph centuries later.

Adventure Hooks and Campaign Seeds

Essentially three worlds jammed into a single planet — high-tech, 20th-century industrial, and violent swords-and-sorcery — Silvarum's adventure potential is high. While each of the three layers has its own independent setting apart from the others, real dynamic adventuring results from combining all three regions into a single adventure path or campaign. Some suggestions and ideas for both approaches are listed below.

Psionic Smugglers

Il'kir'aan psychic enhancement technology is known throughout the galaxy, as is the bird-people's reluctance to share it. Even though the secrets of its manufacture remain hidden, the devices themselves, many of which can enhance existing psionic abilities or — even more significantly — awaken the psychic potential of minds that do not outwardly possess it, are always in high demand by the rich, the powerful, and the criminally-inclined. When a dangerous cartel tries to obtain and smuggle il'kir'aan psionic enhancers, the bird-people approach the adventurers, hoping to discreetly shut down the operation without attracting attention from the galaxy at large. Characters will be expected to work entirely independently, though they will receive covert assistance from the government. The smugglers are cunning, ruthless, and determined to obtain il'kir'aan technology, whatever the cost. Whether these smugglers represent organized crime, wealthy and powerful

individuals who consider themselves above the law, unscrupulous government officials, or some combination of the three is up to the GM — regardless, tracking down and stopping the smugglers will represent a challenge even for the most experienced of adventurers.

Rescue Mission

A long-dreaded disaster has struck — a spacecraft or other large vessel has come to grief over Silverum, crashing down through the layers and finally coming to rest on the Surface, amid dangerous predators, savage warrior tribes, and ambitious ankylos warlords. A handful of survivors are trapped, along with their vessel — should a warlord or other Surface denizen capture them, Silvarum's delicate balance may be shattered, revealing the true nature of the world to the brutal Surface races. A rescue mission — fast and ruthlessly efficient — is required, but failing that the rescuers must face the unpleasant alternative of destroying the fallen vessel and expunging the incriminating evidence that the Surface folk are not alone. Adventurers must travel to the Surface and face its challenges, armed only with low-tech weapons and dependent almost entirely on their own resources. Failure will lead to a completely changed world and many new adventure opportunities, so the GM will have numerous options regardless of the adventure's outcome.

The Warlord

Either as a follow up to the previous adventure, or as an entirely different storyline, it seems that a powerful ankylos warlord — possibly the mighty Surakhenkha himself — has somehow learned the truth — that his world is only one part of a greater cosmos, and that the “imps” and “devils” of the upper world are actually mortal beings like him. Determined to learn more of the upper world, he has made contact with the il'kir'aan, demanding to be given access to the Middle Realms and the Canopy, with the intention of leading his people into space and even conquering nearby worlds. Needless to say, the birdfolk can't allow this to happen, but they are at something of a loss as to how to respond. When the warlord threatens to destroy one or more of the great yggdrasil trees at its roots, and continue to topple trees until he is appeased, the dilemma becomes a crisis. They reluctantly decide that action is needed, and that the warlord must be either captured or destroyed before open warfare between the once-separate layers breaks out. A small, elite group of adventurers are tasked with venturing to the Surface and eliminating the threat of the renegade in any way they see fit.

Chapter Seven:

Quachili, The Broken System

Stations and Outposts

The eerie magnificence of Quachili gives it the reputation of a place to visit, or at least to witness at some time during one's life. It is known as "The Broken System" to many, and is marked on most charts by that name. Those arriving to the system for the first time witness a sight both beautiful and disturbing. Six rings of debris circle the planet in orbits that tilt in different directions. Debris fragments range in size from dust to massive asteroids capable of holding small stations or mining facilities. The rings appear to correspond to the orbits of planets that must have once circled this large red sun. Several million years ago **Kadadrumpf** scientists shattered the fourteen planets orbiting this red sun and formed the debris into six rings around the sun at different distances and angles. Whatever combination of magic and technology the Kadadrumpf used to perform this amazing, and horrific, feat has prevented the debris from reforming into planets or larger bodies. The eerie beauty is highlighted by the fourth ring from the sun made up of a band of colored gasses circulating through an area the same diameter as a small planet. Beautiful as the system might be to observe, it is particularly hazardous to space ships as asteroids and planetary debris are not entirely confined to the rings. Flying through the rings themselves is considered madness by most, and an exciting enough thrill to others that the **Eromena Races** were formed just for pilots to challenge themselves.

Tourists come to **Rubio Station** to stay in luxury rooms with massive windows facing out over Jumoya and the inner rings of the system, as well as to visit for the Eromena Races. Miners have stations in several of the rocky rings where they gather various metals and minerals for trade. Miners in this system enjoy complete freedom from any regulations found in systems with populated planets and can use whatever techniques they find effective. The rings were named by some of the earliest explorers and miners to visit the system and examine their sometimes odd characteristics.

TABLE 7-1: DISTANCES AND SIZES OF THE QUACHILI RINGS

Name	Ring #	Distance	Size
Umiflame	1	25 million miles	35,000 miles
Amanzik	2	60 million miles	50,000 miles
Umlah	3	125 million miles	12,000 miles
Jumoya	4	250 million miles	Special
Ibanti	5	550 million miles	40,000 miles
Entle	6	1.2 billion miles	60 miles

The quick reference table above shows the name, ring number, distance from the sun, and size of the ring. Where the size of the ring is mentioned this indicates how much of a spread of debris there is stretching away from the sun. With the exception of the 4th ring (Jumoya) the debris rings usually have a "height" of 10–15,000 miles. The rings are described below, in order from the closest to the sun to the furthest.

A number of stations and mining outposts are spread out over the large area of this entire system. Some are of little value to those without specific reasons to visit them. Most of those working in the system are miners and explorers leading a difficult, and sometimes dangerous, life. Stations and outposts, unlike some of the mining facilities, are located just outside the rings of debris for added safety. Some are simply safe living spaces for miners, others are trading outposts or hubs for the materials mined. Only the largest stations are listed here; there are smaller stations but most of these have little economic impact or interest to explorers. Stations are listed with the ring they are closest to.

Umliflame, The First Ring

The closest ring of debris to the sun is made up of chunks of rock consisting mostly of nickel, iron, and a variety of silicates. At only 25 million miles from the sun, the rocks orbit close enough that some of the inner fragments are partially molten, allowing them to reflect the light of the red star they circle. Viewed from farther away in the system, it sometimes appears that this inner ring is on fire, an effect that is both attractive and somewhat frightening. While these heavy metals are valuable, miners, and captains with any sense, avoid traveling near or in this ring. In addition to being close enough to the sun to feel the effects of its heat and radiation, the many rocks and fragments move at unusually high speeds making them particularly dangerous. The real reason this one ring is not included in the Eromena Race is the small spheres of bright nickel circling within the ring at half the speed of light. Scientists guess that these strange spheres are some type of leftover effect of the Kadadrumpf experiments that created this odd system, because they can't explain their presence or their incredible speed.

The hidden truth of this ring is even more amazing. The combined magic and technology that keeps this ring and the other rings in the system in their strange order is hidden deep within some of these swiftly orbiting stones. Eighteen of the rocks within this ring are actually hollow. Within these hollow, heavy metal-laden stones are layer upon layer of magic runes based on the ancient magic of the Kadadrumpf. While only one such stone is required to control and order a particular ring, there are three stones per ring hidden here, providing redundancy in the unlikely event something should happen to one of them. Anything with a mass greater than 40 pounds landing on or attaching to one of these stones triggers active defenses and is attacked by any nearby nickel spheres.

Unlikely though it may be, it is possible that these stones and their purpose are discovered. The magic and technology of the Kadadrumpf can be considered impossible to interpret in modern times, making it unlikely anyone can obtain useful information or advantages from examining one of the stones (unless it benefits the GM). If all three stones governing control of one of the rings are destroyed somehow, the ring slowly

KADADRUMPF

Scientists, archeologists, and historians argue about what happened to this ancient, powerful race. Some argue that the Kadadrumpf transcended reality and became gods or simply left for other, outer planes and became those strange, mad creatures known only as "Outsiders." Others theorize the race exterminated itself in a series of wars. When it comes to the Kadadrumpf, the truth is a combination of all of these. Indeed, the Kadadrumpf became so decadent after over a million years of dominating space, controlling the creation of planets and even other races, that their only entertainment became fighting one another, fashioning new, better, more entertaining, and more bizarre ways to kill each other and destroy each other's creations. After several hundred thousand years of "entertainment" the few Kadadrumpf to survive experimented in other directions. Some did go to the outer planes and were driven even more insane than they already were. Others sought out godhood to continue toying with creation. At this point, no Kadadrumpf are in existence, but some have theorized that some could return, whether from the Outer Planes, or through time somehow.

Scientists explain away many of the strangest locations, planets, and artifacts as something to do with the Kadadrumpf. If something defies physics or the rules of magic it is just presumed to have been a Kadadrumpf experiment. While some of these strange phenomenon are indeed due to Kadadrumpf experiments, most are not.

The return of even a single Kadadrumpf is certainly something to be feared. As a race, these tall, powerfully built humanoids possessed innate magical and psionic abilities as well as brilliant intellects. Their natural form has a wide face with five well-spaced eyes facing to the front and long hair-like frills down the back of their heads. Six fingers with two opposable thumbs give their large hands unusual dexterity and strength. Kadadrumpf have innate shape-shifting ability and use it often simply because they get bored with their own appearance.

At the height of their power Kadadrumpf had a command over physics and magic that can only be matched by the gods. However, Kadadrumpf are subject to fits of complete insanity, trying (and often succeeding) some of the most bizarre and surreal experiments that could be thought of. Colliding black holes, creating ever-burning nebulae, blasting entire planets or systems into fragments, turning entire planets invisible — these are just some of the things Kadadrumpf did for entertainment. Some believe that the Kadadrumpf are responsible for seeding life throughout the universe simply so they could entertain themselves killing things later on.

Few artifacts and items have survived the millions of years since the Kadadrumpf finally disappeared, but those that are found are highly valued. Treasure seekers and traders seek out such items and the usual conmen and swindlers try to pass off items as "real" Kadadrumpf items.

loses cohesiveness over time, with colliding debris slowly moving farther apart. The only exception to this is the gaseous fourth ring, Jumoya; if the three stones controlling this ring are destroyed the swirling gasses quickly expand away and spread through space.

Amanzik, The Second Ring

Further away from the sun the next ring of debris circles the sun at an angle perpendicular to the inner ring and has a much wider spread. It is far enough out that it is safe from the heat and radiation, and the fragments move at more reasonable speeds. Broken waste in this ring comes from several planets making the debris field both dense and well mixed with respect to the types of elements found here. A number of the fragments are the size of small moons. Various mining operations are spread throughout the ring as a number of heavy metals are found here locked up in some of the rocks.

Some of the heavy metals and elements here are valuable enough that there were once battles over particular portions of the ring. Three main mining operations remain after a "silent war" destroyed or ran off any others. These remaining operations divided up the ring into sections in a treaty known as the "Amanzik Accord." The Kasathas led **Kedlkas Clan** controls the largest section of the ring. The two human-led mining corporations, **Baddan Corporation** and **Thirel Mining**, divide up the rest. All three groups react violently to any outside their treaty trying to set up mining facilities in

the system. They support each other in the event of any intrusions or attacks.

The Amanzik Accord

The Amanzik Ring is the most attractive to mining groups as it is the least dangerous to mine and contains significant amounts of valuable heavy metals. As such, a number of different mining collectives had operations here until conflict broke out. A short, bloody, multi-sided war quickly brought the number of mining operations down to three main groups. After their ongoing hostilities delayed the Eromena Races, a major source of money and tourism for **Rubio Station**, **Plenark Subarn** stepped in to negotiate a cease-fire, and finally a treaty dividing up the ring among the major remaining parties. None of the parties was completely happy with the treaty, which in many eyes meant that it was probably a fair exchange.

Brakhome Station

Massive Brakhome Station is the only station in the system with a fully operational shipyard capable of making major ship repairs. The Kedlkas Clan originally built the facility with plans to build and sell luxury starships and yachts using materials mined from the nearby Amanzik ring to save on material costs. Unfortunately, while the mining clan knew a great deal about finding and extracting the required materials, finding and obtaining the expertise required for true

Planetarium

shipbuilding and finding a way to market luxury ships was beyond them. Bold as the leadership was at that time, the station itself is massive, and its size and wasted space became the reason the clan leadership of the time was overthrown.

In addition to supporting the mining business of the clan, the station does have enough skilled repairmen to perform a wide range of starship repairs, including repairing ship drives and weapons. A large part of the station is focused on smelting the various metals mined from the nearby ring into more easily transported forms. The rest consists of docking space for ships of various sizes, large amounts of equipment for the construction and repair of ships, and living facilities. There are enough spare and empty living quarters that explorers looking for a relatively inexpensive place to stay can find quarters here but only if they abide by all of the rules.

Unfortunately for those seeking excitement, Brakhome station and its Kedlkas Clan operators are very focused on work at the expense of "play." There is one unnamed tavern in Brakhome Station known simply as "the tavern." Only 3 different restaurants have food to purchase because clan members use a mess hall that is off limits to visitors. Fights are restricted to planned affairs in a cage at the tavern; any other fighting results in being banned from the station.

A massive hydroponics farm tended by robots provides food for the station as well as to sell to other stations in the system. Most stations rely on standard rations, which get quite boring so the fruits, nuts, and vegetables provided by Brakhome Station provide a welcome, flavorful break. As such, fresh produce commands prices three times the standard.

Kedlkas Clan

The Kedlkas Clan began as wandering kasathas miners and explorers seeking out rich ores to mine and then moving on. When they came to Quachili they found that the Amanzik ring provided a large number of easily mined asteroids, although there were risks traveling through the debris field. After a number of years of increasing profits the clan leadership decided to make the bold move of building Brakhome Station, a move that came close to bankrupting the clan. The clan sent members to learn about shipbuilding and design, but that process took a number of years. Meanwhile, the reduced workforce reduced the profits made by the clan and the costs of the massive station put the clan deeply into debt.

The original clan leadership was decided simply by age and seniority, and their rule was absolute. At a time of massive debt, poor working conditions, and diminishing profits, the original leadership was overthrown and spaced, and new elected leaders took over. The clan holds elections for a board of directors every 4 standard years. There have been no real changes in leadership for several decades. Some of the names might change but the clan leadership is focused on protecting their "territory" in the ring and refuses to take financial risks. Some of the younger clan members have begun to press for changes and there is a sentiment that the clan should again try to get into the ship building business.

The clan is strictly limited to kasathas members who are either directly related to the Kedlkas founders or other kasathas who marry into the clan. Even outside kasathas are not allowed entry to the clan. Younger members hoping to have "new blood" are pressing for change, as they believe the clan needs more fresh faces and outlook. PC kasathas characters visiting Brakhome Station or other Kedlkas enclaves are welcomed warmly by younger clan members but viewed suspiciously by older members.

Ship Repair

Brakhome Station is the only place in the Quachili system that can do full ship repair. The only time the station is truly at capacity in terms of repair services is during the Eromena Races, when at least several ships require repairs. All repairs are possible, as well as upgrades to ship armor and weapon systems. Repairs are done at standard rates, upgrades cost 10% above the standard rates but are completed 10% faster. The kasathas workers who run the station and repair systems view kasathas characters more favorably than others. A kasathas character negotiating for ship repair or upgrade can obtain a 10% discount.

Baddan Corporate Headquarters

The Baddan Corporation's main headquarters is a small station orbiting just outside the ring. It houses little more than offices, a few living quarters for miners rotating out of the ring, and a smelting facility for ore brought out of the ring. Run by the elderly **Shiren Baddan** (lashunta [korasha] male), the corporation is not welcoming to guests and does not like anyone exploring or flying through the area of the Amanzik ring given to them in the Amanzik Accords. A large number of miners of various races work for the corporation using smaller mining facilities than the Kedlkas Clan but they are well spread through this section of the ring.

As the sole owner of the corporation, Shiren has complete control over all activities in his section of the ring. Although cold and distant, even hostile at times, to outsiders, he is warm and caring when speaking with his employees. Along with showing them his personal respect, Shiren shares profits with his miners at a level that keeps them very happy, loyal, and willing to continue taking risks. The employees of the Baddan Corporation have a tighter bond than most family-based clans. The only thing that sometimes makes them apprehensive is there is no clear leader to take over if something happens to Shiren. He has no heirs and there is no specific individual who is heavily involved in running the corporation.

Thirel Station

This medium-sized station orbits a safe distance away from the debris field providing a safe haven for its workers as they return from mines and smelting units that are predominantly run by robots and androids. **Thirel Mining** controls the smallest section of the Amanzik ring but most likely has the best run and most profitable operation. Originally formed from several smaller organizations that were losing the silent war over areas of the ring, the combined strength of the united company was enough to win a spot at the table during the negotiations leading up to the Amanzik Accords.

Kajim Woe (human male), the corporate director, runs a well-organized, dedicated crew that is happy with their profits and their work. Workers are predominantly human, but a number of androids and vesk have operations that are part of the company. Vesk miners stay to themselves. While highly protective of the area ceded to him in the accords, Kajim has no designs on expanding beyond it, as he is confident this region will provide profits for centuries to come.

Dead Space

One of the hazards found between Amanzik and Umlah, the second and third rings, are random areas referred to as "dead space." These random areas vary in size, with the largest areas mapped out and fairly

well known. Within these areas all ship power and drive systems cease to function, including life support. Basically, all powered systems simply stop functioning. Ships must coast through the area unpowered until they emerge from the other side. Once a ship emerges from dead space all of its systems return, functioning exactly as they did before entering the dead space. These areas force ships to travel at a fairly high rate of speed in the region between the second and third rings to avoid a lengthy time without life support if they hit a dead space region. Use of magic and magic items only succeeds 50% of the time and any magic aimed at trying to power ships, computers, or other technology fails.

The effects on PC ships are detailed in the "Traveling the Rings" section below. The greatest reminder of the hazards of dead space is the trapped colony ship known only as "Lost Home"

The Lost Home

The presence of a massive colony ship in one of the largest areas of dead space mapped between the rings is a grim reminder to all navigators and pilots of the danger of dead space. Pilots know true fear when hitting dead space and losing all ship power hoping they have the speed to emerge on the other side before succumbing to the lack of life support and air circulation.

Where, when, and how the ship became stuck in dead space is unknown, but it seems to orbit the star within the dead space, stuck firmly in its grip. Hanging dead in space, the ship's colonists were never delivered to their final destination. A number of explorers would love to examine the ship, learn what race of people might have challenged space in such a massive vehicle, and seek whatever treasures might be onboard. The dangers of trying to explore in an area of dead space are too numerous for anyone to have challenged yet. Partly because nobody has devised a safe, sure way to both dock with the dead craft and to escape it after exploration was complete.

Umlah, The Third Ring

The third ring from sun helps make it completely clear that this system was manufactured through magical and technological might. The ring is only 12,000 miles across but the area with in 100,000 miles of the ring is completely free of any debris, including dust particles. Any asteroids or other rocky fragments have been gathered into this band whipping around the sun at a 45 degree angle to that of the closest two rings. While the fragments move much faster in this ring than in the Amanzik ring, it contains valuable dense metals and radioactive materials used in FTL drives, some advanced weapons, and other high tech devices.

Isis Minerals, a loosely associated group of hearty miners, still braves the hazards of the ring. There have been few battles over territory in the Umlah ring. Mining here is slightly more dangerous leading to a different culture of negotiation, sharing, and assistance. There are two main stations outside this ring and several smaller stations spread around it at different intervals. All are considered part of Isis Minerals, but the company makes no specific claim to the ring itself, only those asteroids that are actively being mined. The smaller stations are merely stopping or refueling points with a few rooms for miners to rest in.

Another point of special interest to some travelers is the massive colony ship that moved into the system, larger than the Lost Home and of a different design, it is a generational ship that has spent hundreds of years traveling between systems. Presently the colony ship remains fairly close to Umlah and Isis station.

Bast Station

Bast Station is open to all but rarely receives visitors other than miners looking to let off some steam. It was designed as a recreational resting place for miners of the ring. A large, multi-level bar stocked with a large variety of foods, drugs, and liquors fills the central portion of the station. Outer edges of the station possess rooms for personal virtual reality gaming or movie watching, rooms for private entertainment or rest, and a full service brothel staffed by a wide variety of pleasure bots. In times where members of Isis Minerals come into conflict with one another, negotiations are held here on Bast Station, and the problems usually are solved rather easily.

Isis Station

The second major station near Umlah is Isis Station, which is a several hour shuttle ride from Bast Station. Isis Station is home to a number of offices and storage areas for smelted ore ready for transportation and sale. Small living quarters are provided for staff working at the station with a few extra quarters for visiting travelers and businessmen. The station has a large repair bay that can handle minor ship repairs but is mostly tasked with repairing smelting and mining equipment. Business negotiations with Isis Minerals and management of day-to-day operations are handled at Isis Station.

Isis Minerals

Isis Minerals began as a very small mining operation that welcomed other operations to join with it for increased negotiating power. The hazards of mining Umlah lead to a number of agreements for mutual assistance and protection that eventually grew to a formal binding of a large number of free mining operations under one title. An elected board of directors and an elected president governs Isis Minerals. Elections are held every 3 years, but only 3 board members are replaced at each election to provide continuity. The president is elected once every 6 years. Board members and the president serve for a 6-year term, and cannot serve successive terms. They can be reelected at a different, later election.

While the organization of Isis Minerals is considered strange to some, the company has been surprisingly profitable and effectively managed. The current president, **Kyrick Vitan** (lashunta Female), is an experienced miner and business manager and has been very effective at keeping the peace between the various mining groups and ensuring everyone gets along. Miners new to Umlah wishing to join Isis Minerals can petition to do so. Unlike some other mining groups, Isis Minerals makes no special effort to protect the ring from outside miners, or mining groups that do not choose to join. The ring is large enough and possesses enough mining opportunities for everyone.

Anyone encroaching directly on Isis Minerals facilities is met with resistance and those mining efforts that are not part of Isis Minerals do not receive special assistance (without significant costs) and do not benefit from the increased negotiating strength. Most outside groups find it to be safer and, in the long run, more profitable to join Isis.

Almas Colony Ship

The Almas colony ship moved into the system several years ago and is presently paused just outside Umlah with massive solar panels extended drawing power. Representatives from the ship have met with several of the major stations and mining groups in the area, including discussions with Isis Minerals. They are presently both mining some radioactive materials and



trading produce with Isis Minerals for more. They plan to power up and resupply before heading on to their next destination.

Populated by a strange race that has not been seen in this area before, the ship and its people have piqued the interest of many observers. What little is known from their few efforts to contact other groups is that the ship is a true colony ship and has been traveling for generations. The present colonists have yet to set foot

on a planet. The ship is largely sustainable, with massive farms to supply its residents with food and using waste products to keep the farms going. It needs to stop at various systems on its journey to resupply with water and the radioactive materials it uses to drive its reactors.

Jumoya, The Fourth Ring

On the same plane as Umliflame, the first ring, exists a true testament to the powers of the now long dead Kadadrumpf. The fourth ring is a gas-filled tube circling the sun. The swirling gasses include helium, hydrogen, and a variety of noble gasses along with traces of others. Confined to a tube that is exactly 6,666 miles in diameter, the gasses form a swirling kaleidoscope of constantly changing and moving colors as storms move their way through the tube while traveling around the sun. Some unknown combination of magic and technology creates a barrier that keeps the gasses from escaping but yet allows solid items such as asteroids or space ships to pass through. While the swirling colors are beautiful from a safe distance, few would chance piloting a ship into the brutal storms.

Rubio Station was constructed not far from the Jumoya ring to provide a tourist destination where visitors can enjoy the beautiful shifting colors as well as the majesty of the rest of the system. Lucky visitors can, at times, witness magnificent Jovian Whales traveling through the mists and storms of the ring.

Rubio Station

The largest structure in the system, and the most well-known, Rubio Station is a hotel and resort as well as a trading post and rest stop. Built to showcase the beauty of the rings, it maintains an orbit 5,000 miles away from

ALMAS

These thin, smooth-skinned humanoids average 7–8 feet tall with three eyes facing forward from their broad, flat faces in the form of an evenly spaced triangle. All almas have a central eye high on their forehead that is blue but the lower eyes making up the bottom of the triangle can be any color. Most almas have orange hued skin, but some appear almost pink in color. Almas, while slender, are powerfully built and possess four thin, delicate, and extremely dexterous fingers at the ends of their three jointed arms. The outer fingers face the two inner fingers like dual opposable thumbs and their wrists can bend in either direction.

Almas are generally calm and easy going but their size and strength sometimes makes other races nervous. Those wanting more information about this new race of space travelers should consult the forthcoming *Tome of Aliens* by **Frog God Games**.

JOVIAN WHALE

Poorly understood, and barely studied, these massive creatures can “swim” through the gasses of gas giants as well as those of the Jumoya ring in the Quachili system. Exactly how they survive the vicious storms, or even what they consume to maintain their massive size remains a mystery. These multicolored creatures look like whales with massive wings instead of pectoral fins and reach truly massive sizes with some being recorded at 3 miles in length. Those rare times they can be observed, they seem to be playing together as they maneuver through the swirling storms. They avoid any ships that come near them and simply flee if attacked. It is unknown if they possess anything more than rudimentary intelligence as nobody has captured or contacted one. While it is most likely to see a Jovian Whale in the Jumoya ring, they were first observed in the clouds of more distant gas giants. Nobody knows where these creatures originated but it is widely theorized they were created by the Kadadrumpf.

Whatever their creation might have been, these truly massive creatures metabolize helium and gracefully float through the storms and high winds. While some minor religions claim jovian whales are gods to be worshipped, in truth, these strange creatures possess only animal intellect and flee any form of danger in spite of being immune to most forms of damage.

Jumoya. There is a large central hub for the docking of space ships and luxury cruisers. This central hub contains a number of restaurants and trading stations that feature almost any luxury item one could desire. Although the station has extensive docking capabilities, it does not have any repair facilities. Ships requiring repairs are towed or flown to **Brackhome Station** near the Amanzik ring.

The eerie beauty of this system was relatively unnoticed, simply noted down in charts as “The Broken System” until **Sir Alistair Rubio** took notice on one of his journeys. A marketing genius and wealthy entrepreneur, Sir Rubio constructed the initial station as a tourist destination and through brilliant marketing and a few “strong arm” tactics convinced starship cruise liners to put his station on their list of stops. Several hundred years later the station has changed considerably, but is not far off his initial plans. Marketing and attractions continue to convince the wealthy that this should be a primary vacation destination. **Plenark Subarn** (human male), one of Sir Rubio’s descendants, now owns and runs the station.

Several long arms stretch away from the central hub. These arms contain various rooms all designed to face over Jumoya toward its red sun providing a spectacular view of all of the inner rings of the system. The most expensive rooms are large and extremely costly but come with “complimentary” gourmet meals, drinks, and even pleasure bots. Those staying in less costly rooms must either visit one of the several restaurants in the central hub for meals or order room service at an extra cost. While less expensive rooms might have less living space they still have a wonderful view of the system.

Room prices during the **Eromena Races** reach an outrageous level with so many people coming to watch the races. One of the arms extending from the central hub is dedicated to a large casino and another houses a dedicated medical complex.

Plenark Subarn does his best to control every aspect of Rubio Station, as well as politics between the various mining groups in other parts of the system. While he did not start the Eromena Races, he has expanded their popularity and used them as a way to help advertise his luxury accommodations. Maintaining the safety of these races forced him to get more involved with the miners and the battles between them. It is through his efforts that the Amanzik Accords were signed, bringing peace to the system and allowing the Eromena Races to continue.

The government here is equivalent to a hereditary monarchy, with leadership passed down to the oldest child, or closest relative to the present leader. As such, Plenark has full control of any laws or regulations on the station. This includes pricing, taxes, and docking fees, as well as any criminal proceedings. Protecting the tourism that makes the majority of the income for the station is a top priority. Crimes of any type against tourists receive harsh penalties, including simply being thrown out an airlock. A number of robotic and android security forces constantly patrol the station to insure the safety of visitors.

Plenark’s son **Artick Subarn** (human male) is being groomed to take over the station when Plenark chooses to retire. Artick is secretly a clone of Plenark, as Plenark was a clone of his father. Although cloned, Artick does not have an imprint of Plenark’s personality or knowledge and is his own individual. Both regularly store copies of their personality and knowledge imprint and keep clones in cold storage should anything happen to them.

Luxury Services

Rubio Station provides a wide range of luxury services to all of its guests, and Plenark’s managers do their best to ensure they can properly serve top-level luxury services to guests of all races. Several managers are tasked with nothing other than researching new races and what luxury services they might desire. Plenark knows that the eerie beauty of Quachili can bring in tourists; they can only spend so much time observing the splendor of the system. The extra luxury services are designed to turn Rubio Station into a luxury vacation destination.

Chefs of the restaurants and the kitchens serving the private rooms are some of the top trained in any system. Meals served include top-level gourmet meals tailored to the tastes of guests of any race. Exceptional care is taken to ensure no guest is mistakenly served a meal designed for a different race that could cause sickness. A steady supply of fresh food materials is brought in on a daily schedule. Some produce items are purchased from Brackhome Station while others are brought in from different locations. An extensive herb garden provides a wide range of spices and herbs used in a variety of the impressive dishes served here.

Luxury rooms contain their own hot tubs and other amenities but other guests can turn to some of the many pools and relaxing areas spread throughout the station, all of which have a beautiful view of the rings. Different pool areas have been optimized for several different races and chairs in the lounges and bars can be adjusted to serve creatures of any size. Those relaxing in the pools or lounges can order drinks, drugs, or food if they so desire. A full range of drugs and beverages is available and bartenders can create entirely new drinks for customers if they are asked to.

Spa services are tailored to each specific race, with rooms being adjusted to serve any new races that might seek out the luxury accommodations here. Androids perform most of the services here, but there are also

Planetarium

spa employees of the human, kasathas, lashunta, and shirren races. Spa services include mud baths, other special baths, massage, skin conditioning procedures, special grooming, and virtually any service a customer seeks out. Spa services here have developed an excellent reputation and these premium services do cause a number of wealthy visitors to make return visits to Rubio Station.

Casino Jumoya

The great lashunta architect **Coryn Aral** designed this elegant casino, which takes up an arm of the station. Clear glass escalators circle around an ornate, fluted crystal column as they move up and down through the 20 levels of the casino. All of this faces out through the transparent walls, giving a clear view out over Jumoya toward the distant red sun. The escalators alone are discussed in the travel logs of many systems, but the highlights of the casino for many visitors is the inclusion of artwork and designs meant to represent all of the major races known. Coryn Aral was rumored to have lost so much money in the original casino here that she was forced to design this amazing structure. The truth is that she loves the amazing view and the eerie beauty of this strange system. Plenark convinced her to design the new casino by paying her with a several week full service "vacation" every standard year.

Originally added as an afterthought as a way to keep visiting tourists busy, Plenark greatly expanded the role of the casino in his business, eventually expanding it into its present form. As with the spa services, the casino adds another thing for guests to do to make their vacation here truly special.

Gambling tables and various games of chance take up most of the casino, but an increasing portion is dedicated to other forms of entertainment. One level acts as a full theater putting on regular concerts and live plays; it is not always fully booked, but during times with a large number of guests Plenark goes out of his way to ensure there is live entertainment here. Several other levels include multidimensional movie theaters, holographic studios, as well as music and dancing. Different levels provide different music to meet different tastes. Food and drinks can be ordered at any level.

Medical Facilities

In addition to serving as a prime tourist destination, Rubio Station has a full service medical facility staffed almost entirely by robotic and android staff that is sworn to secrecy. It has recovery rooms facing out over the rings and has become a destination for those wealthy individuals desiring certain medical procedures that might be frowned on in their home systems. Over the past few decades it has become the primary destination for those who want to have illicit clones created, or to have body augmentations that are kept secret from their families or government.

The staff and medical equipment are of the latest designs and can serve most known races. Unusual visitors might need additional scanning and research done by the staff. Due to the luxury accommodations and secrecy provided, any augmentations performed here cost 3 times the normal prices. Gourmet meals and fine dining are included in those prices.

Plenark suspends all "optional" medical procedures during the Eromena Races in order to ensure medical staff is available and ready for the inevitable injuries that occur during the races. Plenark provides normal hospital and medical services to miners from the system at standard prices. He uses it as a way to maintain a healthy relationship with the various companies and mining groups. The service is little used due to the distances involved; it is usually safer to use closer health

bays in other stations but the larger mining companies appreciate the gesture and, as a public relations move, it has helped keep Plenark one of the most significant and respected individuals in the system.

Ibanti, The Fifth Ring

The remaining two rings are much farther from the sun. Ibanti, the fifth ring, follows the same orbital plane as the second ring, Amanzik. The positioning of the rings clearly demonstrates the Kadadrumpf had some reason to deliberately place the rings in specific orbital planes. Observers debate whether it was for artistic reasons, reasons related to technology or physics, or just a random decision. Ibanti is of little use to miners, as few heavy metals are found here — just rocks of little value. Storied discoveries of valuable metals, gemstones, and artifacts have not held up to further investigation and exploration. What few items have been discovered here are clearly not worth the risks involved in finding them. Excepting the odd solo explorer or researcher, the ring is devoid of any long-standing mining operations or other exploration. Some claim the lack of valuable metals or compounds in this ring indicates that the Kadadrumpf deliberately planned it that way.

Dackle's Folly

This large station was constructed over one hundred years ago but saw little use and has since been left mostly abandoned. A few squatters take up different isolated spots in the station but most of the station is empty, devoid of power and atmosphere. A vesk explorer found several small gemstones while searching through the Ibanti ring and became convinced he could find massive riches. Funding the construction of the station reportedly bankrupted his family as there were almost no new discoveries of interest and nobody was interested in renting space in the station or taking it over.

Several groups have looked into the possibility of moving the station somewhere more advantageous and making the required repairs to make it fully operational but so far nobody has tried to claim it.

Entle, The Sixth Ring

The sixth and final ring is even further out, and, following the design of the others, is on the same orbital plane as the third. At the frigid extremes of the system, this ring consists of frozen chunks of ice containing various minerals and gasses. Entire ice-laden rocks are regularly moved out of the ring and used to provide water and other compounds to the various mining groups as well as Rubio Station. Gemstones including diamonds, rubies, and sapphires have been found inside some of the stones here, and sometimes even floating free in space. It is unknown what sort of side effect of the Kadadrumpf experiments might have created these gems, but some of the largest and purest diamonds known have been found here, as have fragments of rare Kadadrumpf items. Treasure seekers roam these frigid, dangerous realms in search of such gemstones and in hopes of discovering lost Kadadrumpf artifacts.

Cartref Station

This small, distant station is home to a variety of treasure seekers who eek out a living moving frozen chunks of ice in the system to supply various stations to support their constant quest for treasure. The station here is little more than a collection of living modules

attached together. A central power plant powers all of the modules and the docking facilities. Some long-term residents are able to dock directly with their own living module. **Gwyn Lesh** (human female) controls the power plant, and therefore station, and generally only charges living fees high enough to keep the plant going and to support her own treasure seeking efforts.

Many of the faces here remain the same until they give up and move on, or suddenly disappear. Most who disappear meet with tragedy somewhere in the ring, but their fellow explorers pretend they have found something of value and left to spend their riches. Some of the treasure hunters here are wanted criminals in more civilized systems here to seek out something valuable enough to pay for a new life somewhere more comfortable.

Traveling Through the Rings

Maneuvering a spaceship through the rings of Quachili can be challenging and dangerous. It is up to the GM and the campaign being run as to how hazardous it is for PCs to navigate between and through the rings. It is also up to the GM what types of skill checks and procedures to use when adjudicating travel through the system. Suggestions below are meant as just that, suggestions. In general, the area between rings has only small debris and is usually easy to travel through. The rings, with the exception of the fourth ring, Jumoya, have a moderate to high density of debris that must be navigated through carefully to avoid damage.

The simplest answer for most GMs will be to treat rings as **High Density Debris Fields (CR 4)** according to the rules found in the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*. Under these rules when a starship flies through a high density debris field it takes 4d6 points of damage to its forward sections, with a successful DC 22 Piloting check for half damage. Because these rules are designed for accidental flight into a debris field, we suggest some alternate rules taking into account careful and deliberate flying.

Most pilots entering one of the rings is presumed to do so cautiously and at low speed. Anyone entering a ring at higher speed is likely participating in the Eromena Races with optional rules described in the section below. Purposely entering a ring at reduced speed can be treated as a **Low Density Debris Field (CR 2)** where a starship takes 1d6 points of damage to its forward sections or 0 damage on a successful DC 15 Piloting check. These checks must be made every turn the pilot steers his craft through the ring (or at an interval of the GM's choosing). When docked or attached to a larger rock a ship need only be concerned with minor pieces of dust and debris.

The fourth ring, Jumoya, presents an entirely different challenge for pilots. First, the energy and magic barrier holding the swirling gasses within the ring does allow solid objects through, but not without resistance. When entering or exiting the ring through the barrier a starship takes 4d6 points of damage to the forward areas of the ship. This damage can be reduced to 2d6 points of damage with a successful DC 20 Piloting check or to 1d6 points of damage with a DC 24 Piloting check. While within the ring, the swirling storms are a hazard that stand a chance of damaging the ship. Each turn flying within the ring there is a 50% chance a swirling storm causes 1d6 points of damage to a random section of the ship. A successful DC 22 Piloting check halves the damage.

Dead Space

Regions of "dead space" found between Amanzik and Umlah, the second and third rings, can be particularly hazardous to pilots. Larger regions have been mapped and can be avoided, but ships periodically run into

smaller regions of dead space. These regions do not "capture" or stop ships, so ships continue at whatever speed and trajectory they are traveling until they exit the area of dead space. There is a 10% chance of hitting a dead space region when traveling between these two rings. If a ship is traveling quickly it emerges in 2d6 rounds and all power is returned. This should not be long enough to cause life support problems. Ships that are traveling very slowly (speed of 3 or less) can spend 3d8 hours in a dead space area. Most ships can still travel through the dead space before life support failures cause risks to health, but the PCs don't need to know that.

The Eromena Races

One of the great attractions used to entice wealthy tourists to Quachili is the Eromena Races. The races were once held every 10–12 years or when enough pilots and ships came forward with the entry fees required. Presently, Plenark Subarn organizes the races and holds them once every 5 years. Now advertised in multiple systems, the many starships and pilots rise to the challenge of the races. The entry fee is 100,000 credits which is placed into a pool that goes to the declared winner of the race. Plenark keeps 10% of the total pool to cover the expenses of the many drones and beacons required to run the race. Many of the ships now have corporate or other wealthy sponsors. Some wealthy individuals not only sponsor ships, but also pilot or captain their own ships in the races.

Turning the races into a spectator sport is one of Plenark's greatest achievements. Multiple drones follow each contestant, filming their ships from a variety of angles. The successes and failures are broadcast on massive screens throughout Rubio Station, particularly in Casino Jumoya where spectators can bet on which ship is disabled first, whether or not a particular ship is completely destroyed, which ship is in the lead after each stage and, of course, who the final winner will be.

History

The Eromena Races started almost 200 years ago when the bold vesk pilot **Eromena Driftrunner** challenged other pilots to a race through the rings of Quachili. She put up her own money and opened up the challenge to others, stating that a race would begin as soon as 20 or more ships accepted the challenge. She won the first race, as well as the second 9 years later but afterward she only organized the next few races and did not fly in them. The races slowly built a reputation as the truest test of a pilot's skill and a crew's ability to get the most out of their ship. The races attract the boldest and most flamboyant pilots.

Race Rules

The Eromena Races have been modified several times with their present form starting and ending near Rubio Station. Each starship must travel from the starting point to a specific beacon in the second ring, Amanzik, and then travel within the ring to a second beacon. After passing the second beacon in Amanzik, the starships then exit and travel to a beacon in the third ring, Umlah. Again, pilots must remain within the ring as they travel to a fourth beacon. After passing the second beacon the pilots may exit the ring and then need to pass by a beacon near Rubio Station on their way to a beacon in the fifth ring, Ibanti. There again they must remain in the ring as they travel past another beacon before finally repeating the process within the fourth ring, Jumoya. The first ship to pass the second beacon within Jumoya

is declared the winner of the race. Conveniently, the final beacon is near Rubio Station allowing spectators to view the end of the race.

Any starship that is fully disabled for more than 2 hours is considered out of the race and provided a rescue. Any starship that exits a ring before reaching the second beacon is disqualified. Starships are followed and filmed at multiple angles by a collection of drones. Accidents and collisions are often rebroadcast from different angles for spectators' entertainment in Rubio Station. The race itself lasts a number of days, with a lot of that time spent with ships simply flying from one ring to the other. Viewers at Rubio Station are provided with a wide range of other entertainment.

Past races saw starships attacking each other during the races but this is now frowned upon and considered a disqualification. This does not mean that starship crews will not attempt to sabotage other starships or try to redirect debris in the rings to cause problems for other crews.

PCs and the Eromena Races

There is always the possibility the PCs decide they want to participate. Whether it is because they have a sponsor or can afford the fees themselves, the races can be an interesting challenge. Unfortunately, it can be a difficult challenge for the GM as well. If we use standard rules for traveling into a debris field, it is unlikely any ship makes it to the end of the first ring. At the same time, the Starship Combat rules don't really apply to floating debris. Below we propose some modifications to the Starship Combat rules found in the *Starfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* designed to focus on ship repairs, navigation, and piloting.

The rules changes below are meant to make the resolution of the race go more quickly. Impact of debris on the ship is expected to damage shields and the hull and not target specific systems. This means that, for the purposes of the race, Critical Damage, and Critical Damage Conditions are ignored.

It is always best to give everyone something to do and these rules modifications make an effort to give each player some actions that keep them involved. While there can be only one captain and one pilot, other positions can have more than one person giving added chance for success. The crew of the ship should be determined before the race begins, with each crewmember filling a different role during the race.

Captain: Your role is to encourage, or intimidate, other members of the crew in order to get the best out of them. There can only be one captain during the race.

Engineer: During the race it is your job to make repairs and make adjustments to the engines to get maximum efficiency from them. There can be more than one engineer; engineers who take the same action are not additive with the exception of repairs.

Gunner: Your job during the race is to use the ship's weaponry to try to help clear a path for the pilot. There can be more than one gunner, but any bonuses applied to the pilot are not additive.

Science Officer: Your job during the race is to use scanners to help plot a safe course through the rings or to use the computer systems to reroute power and adjust shields. There can be more than one science officer but they cannot perform the same action during a round.

Pilot: Your job is to follow the safest path possible through the rings, while also going as fast as the ship and debris field will allow.

Race Rounds

The race is run differently from starship combat. Once a person has chosen a specific role, that role remains the same during the race. Actions are also taken in a

slightly different order for the race. Each round of the race follows the order below.

Engineering: The engineers of the ship take actions to repair damage from the previous round or activate or boost special systems.

Navigation: During this phase science officers take action to help plan a safe route for the pilot, or use computer systems to adjust shields or stabilize the ship.

Gunnery: This portion of the round allows gunners to try to help clear debris from the path chosen by firing weapons at large pieces of debris. This phase can be skipped.

Flying: this is the phase where the pilot makes the required skill check to move forward through the debris field. All bonuses or penalties based on the actions of the other crew are taken at this time.

Crew Actions

The actions the crew can take are dependent upon the role they have chosen. Some actions are designed to help repair the ship from any damage it has suffered; others are designed to help the pilot do their job.

CAPTAIN ACTIONS

As the captain you can take one of the following actions at anytime during the race round.

Demand: You try to threaten or bully a crewmember into doing a better job. This requires a successful Intimidate check (DC 15 + 2x your starship's tier). On a successful check you grant a +4 bonus to a single skill check made by that crewmember. This can only be used on a particular crewmember once during the race.

Encourage: You encourage a specific crewmember in an effort to give him a bonus to his action. You grant a +2 bonus to a specific skill check if you either succeed at a DC 15 Diplomacy check, or a DC 10 skill check for that particular skill (like aid another).

Rally: When the ship is damaged you can rally your crew to work harder and faster. To use this action you must spend 1 Resolve Point and attempt a DC 15 Diplomacy check. If successful, you grant a +1 bonus to the skill checks of all crewmembers for one race round. The ship must be damaged before taking this action.

ENGINEER ACTIONS

As the engineer it is your job to repair and bypass the damage your pilot is undoubtedly going to do to your ship while flying directly into a debris field.

Divert (Engineering Phase): You can divert power from one system to another in order give a boost to a different system. Any power diversion requires a successful Engineering check (DC 15 + 2x your starship's tier). Diverting power to the engines can increase the speed of the ship by 2 for one round. Diverting power to the shields restores an amount of the shields equal to 5% of the PCU rating of the starship's power core, up to the shield's maximum value.

Patch (Engineering Phase): You patch the hull, repairing some of the damage the starship has suffered. With a successful Engineering check (DC 15 + 2x your starship's tier) you repair 1 point of hull damage.

Overdrive (Engineering Phase): If you have at least 6 ranks in Engineering, you know how to get the most out of your starship's drive. If the ship has suffered more than 50% damage you can reduce the speed penalty by 4. To use this ability you must spend 1 Resolve Point and attempt an Engineering check (DC 15 + 2x your starship's tier).

SCIENCE OFFICER ACTIONS

The science officer can use the computer systems to help plot a safe way through the ring or can use the systems to adjust the shields.

Plan Route (Navigation Phase): You use your scanners to help plan a route through the debris of the

ring. You must attempt a Computers check using any modifiers from the starship's sensors. The DC for this is 15 + the speed the starship is traveling, if you succeed you grant a +2 bonus to the Piloting check; for every 5 points you exceed the check you grant an additional +1 bonus.

Balance (Navigation Phase): You can balance the shields, redirecting power from one quadrant to another. With a successful Computers check (DC = 15 + 2x your starship's tier), you can shift points between the shields in different quadrants or balance points across all of the shields.

Risky Path (Navigation Phase): If you have at least 6 ranks in Computers you can try to find a faster, though riskier, path. You must spend 1 Resolve Point and attempt a Computers check (DC = 15 + the speed the starship is traveling). If this check is successful you grant a +2 bonus to the Piloting check for the pilot during the flying phase. If the pilot is successful, the ship moves an extra 2 hexes.

PILOT ACTIONS

As the pilot your complete focus must be on moving the ship through the ring; you decide what speed to travel (based on the speed of your starship) and choose the route to take. Your main action is to make the required Piloting check based on the speed you are traveling using any bonuses that might be provided by the actions of your crew.

Sharp Swing (Flying Phase): After making the normal piloting check (see Running the Race) you may make a second check to try to swing around some of the debris to be in a better location for your next move. If you succeed at a second Piloting check (DC = 15 + speed the starship is traveling) you can add a +2 circumstance bonus to your Piloting check in the next round of the race.

Full Power (Flying Phase): If you have at least 6 ranks in Piloting, you know how to get the most out of your starship's engines. You can spend 1 Resolve Point to move your starship at 1.5 times its maximum speed. Increased speed in the rings is hazardous, but you are confident enough in your skill that you will overcome the danger.

Running the Race

The GM has full control over how long the race should take; these rules suggest a relatively short distance allowing the race to be completed in 15–30 minutes. You can use hex paper, squares, or even keep track of progress on paper. A starship can move a number of hexes equal to its speed. We suggest using a "distance" of 50 hexes for each ring. Four rings are used in the race so this equals a total "distance" of 200 hexes, but each 50 hex unit stands alone, upon entering a new ring all teams start at 0. Any ship entering the race must be size Medium or smaller and must have a Maneuverability rating of average or better. Larger or less maneuverable ships trying to plow through the rings at high speed are simply torn apart by the debris.

The race runs through three debris filled rings before entering Jumoya, the fourth, gaseous ring, which follows slightly different rules. Racing through the first three challenges requires a balance of speed versus the hazards, the faster one travels, the more difficult it is to avoid collisions. The piloting check to make a move increases with higher speeds, as does damage on a failure. Each round requires a Piloting check at the Flying Phase of the round, the DCs for the Piloting check can be found in **Table 7-2: Race Skill Checks** as can the damage taken on a failure or, at particularly high speeds, even on a success. Every 1–2 hexes of speed above 18 increases the Piloting check DC by 2 and damage on both failure and success by 1d6.

TABLE 7-2: RACE SKILL CHECKS

Speed	Piloting Check	Damage on Failure	Damage on Success
1–4	DC 22	3d6	0
5–6	DC 23	3d6	0
7–8	DC 24	4d6	0
9–10	DC 25	4d6	0
11–12	DC 27	5d6	1d6
13–14	DC 29	6d6	2d6
15–16	DC 31	7d6	3d6
17–18	DC 33	8d6	4d6
+2	+2	+1d6	+1d6

The race begins with straight initiative checks for all teams but the race rounds for the first three rings are considered to be simultaneous, meaning that teams can "tie" if they reach the end of 50 hexes in the same round. The end of each race round is the Flying phase where the pilot must make the Piloting check to determine how well they fly their starship. If the pilot succeeds at their Piloting check they move the full distance in hexes for the speed they chose to travel. At extremely high speeds some damage is taken even with a successful check. Damage, if there is any, is rolled and then applied to the front quadrant of the ship. A failed skill check means the starship can only travel half the number of hexes as the speed chosen by the pilot. Damage is rolled and then applied to a random quadrant of the ship because it is possible that the pilot might have hit the side or the rear of the ship on debris while making their way through the debris field. Damage is taken from the shields first, and then applied to the Hull. During the race, any ship brought to 0 Hull points (or less) becomes incapacitated and is out of the race.

To simplify the race, all ships are presumed to travel the same speed from one ring to another so a ship that finishes a ring can start the next ring in the next round. Shields are presumed to have regenerated to full strength before beginning the next ring. An Engineering check can be attempted between rings (DC 24) with a successful check repairing 4d6 points of Hull damage and a failure repairing 2d6 points of damage (to a maximum of the starship's starting value). Any remaining Hull damage must be repaired in a repair facility and cannot be regained during the race.

The fourth and final ring of the race, Jumoya, poses a different hazard than the first three rings of the race. The barrier that restrains the swirling gasses and storms inside does allow objects through, but not without some resistance. As described above, a ship takes 4d6 points of damage when entering or exiting the ring. This can be reduced to 2d6 points with a successful DC 20 Piloting check, or to 1d6 if the Piloting check exceeds DC 24. The swirling gasses and storms pose a greater threat to starships traveling at high speed but not the same as the rocky debris of the other rings. Use the same table as for the debris rings for Pilot checks as the pilots must still avoid storms and swirling gasses. A successful check means the starship has traveled its full speed in hexes, while a failed check indicates there was a storm that had to be avoided and the starship has only moved half its speed in hexes. The damage portion of the table is ignored in this ring. Starships traveling at a speed of 8 or faster have a 50% chance of building up a static charge that can harm the computer systems. This check must be made each race round the starship travels at such a speed. If a charge builds up the science officer must succeed at a Computers check (DC 24) to find a way to bleed off the charge. A failed check means that computer

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problems have slowed the starship to half its normal speed. A Computers check (DC 28) can be attempted in the next race round, and each subsequent round if it fails, to repair the systems and travel at full speed. The first ship to reach 50 hexes in Jumoya is the winner. If two or more ships pass 50 hexes in the same round, the pilot with the highest Piloting check during the final race round is the winner.

Running NPC Ships

The PCs need someone to race against which places a burden on the GM to run NPC starships through the race. We suggest running the NPC ships through race rounds a little differently. First, only run 5 NPC starships, using the shields, Hull point values, and speed of the PCs starship. While there would be other starships in the race, this assumes the PCs are flying one of the top starships in the race. Roll 3d20, each roll that is 10 or higher provides a +2 bonus to the Piloting check. For the Flying phase of the round, roll a d20 + 12 + any bonuses = the Piloting check for the NPC ship. This process makes it much easier for the GM but only provides an approximation and gives the PCs a significant advantage in the race.

Adventure Hooks

A variety of things can bring the PCs to Quachili, including simple exploration and tourism. A few adventure hooks are provided below.

The Assassination

Shiren Baddan of the Baddan Corporation is found murdered in his office. The corporation is thrown into turmoil as members blame the Kedlkas Clan reigniting conflict in the Amanzik ring. Plenark Subarn asks the PCs to intervene and investigate the murder in an effort to quell the fighting. In truth, a hallucinating employee killed Shiren but can the PCs find enough evidence or convince the employee to tell the truth? If the PCs are successful, they are rewarded with free rooms at Rubio Station for an entire month.

The Prodigal Son

A wealthy family asks the PCs to track down their wayward son. After tracking him to several systems they learn the young man is gambling at the casino in Rubio Station. In truth, after paying off and banishing their son, the family learned they needed his presence to legally control their large financial empire. Can the PCs convince him to return?

Eromena's Revenge

Visitors to Rubio Station are struck with a strange, magic disease that affects all races. A reporter calls it "Eromena's Revenge" and the negative news is hurting Plenark Subarn's business. After determining the disease is magic in nature and some form of attack, Plenark seeks the PCs assistance in investigating the source of the attack. Descendants of Eromena Driftrunner are responsible; they sought payment from Plenark for continuing to use her name while running the races and making money from them. Plenark refused so they found a tool to use to blackmail him.

Poison Races

Competitors preparing for the Eromena Races begin to die days before the race is set to begin. It is quickly determined they were poisoned, but who did it and why? Plenark is beside himself with rage, hiring the PCs as "outside investigators" to find the guilty party or parties and "take care" of them. Although everyone suspects one of the more outspoken competitors, it turns out that one of the gamblers was trying to "fix" the races by eliminating the top competitors.

Fly My Yacht

The PCs are hired (or somehow coerced) to pilot a wealthy businessman's starship in the Eromena Races. They are not only expected to win, they are expected to bring the starship back in one piece but as the race begins they swiftly find that the ship has been tampered with. It will take all of their skill to overcome the sabotage and finish the race. The owner himself sabotaged his ship, hoping to use their failure as a means to force the PCs to take on an entirely different task.

Chapter Eight:

Ekmodius

אמריקאניזם

A popular destination for high-rollers and aristocratic travelers, Ekmodious is a charming planet on the surface — considering the “surface” is the layer of clouds tens of thousands of miles out from the planet’s core. While the uppermost layers enjoy an odd synergistic relationship between the elves and dragons who rule the skies, the lower, more inhospitable reaches of the planet are home to its indigenous species, the krux. The krux mistakenly opened up access to Ekmodious in its ancient past to preserve the planet and found themselves driven to the planet’s core by the now current rulers. Everything seems perfect in the clouds, but dangers lurk, especially for those who ask the wrong questions or become indebted to the wrong beings. There are many hidden holes in the otherwise solid clouds in Ekmodious’s upper reaches, and those holes lead to agonizingly long drops to death, either through a collision with a solid object at maximum velocity or by the crushing gravity at the planet’s core.

Physical Description

Ekmodious is a beautiful planet with an unusual dancing quality to it when viewed from beyond the planet. White, red, orange, yellow, and brown clouds swirl and scud across the planet, shifting in unusual, chaotic patterns which make Ekmodious look like it sways in its orbit. The clouds oftentimes cover green landmasses artificially produced and maintained by elven and draconic architects. Even the awesome, miles-wide, sky-blue storm known as the Azure Eye, with its flashes of lightning extending across the storm’s diameter, is beautiful in a primal way, as it seems to devour other clouds in its path. Thirteen moons orbit Ekmodious. A trio of these satellites trail each other in a wobbling chain and circle dangerously close to the planet, casting enormous shadows when they cross between the planet and Ekmodious Prime, the system’s light- and life-granting star.

Ekmodious’s lush landmasses slowly glide across the planet in a westerly direction. Two landmasses cover the northern hemisphere, while a third moves just below the equator. The landforms are solid and support a variety of plant life, but some of their aspects are illusory. The arcane properties of the planet’s liquid core keep the planet relatively stable, and wind currents create eddies in the magic radiating throughout the planet to create landlike foundations in the outer reaches of the planet. Until the elves and dragons arrived, the foundations were mostly ephemeral, with the longest lasting foundation persisting for just over a century before breaking apart into component clouds and dispersing to the winds. A blend of magic and technology has stabilized three main “continents” among the clouds, apart from some erosion at the edges of the continents due to intense winds or encounters with the Azure Eye. These outer edges and some of the less-maintained continental areas feature soft spots or outright holes which prove dangerous to those ignorant of the land’s makeup. This ignorance is cultivated by the amazing permanent illusions displaying lifelike ground cover instead of striations of clouds and bolstered by plants introduced by the elves from their forests when they arrived on Ekmodious centuries ago. Arriving dragons also insisted on a chain of mountains

on one landmass, and these mountains pierce the planet’s mesosphere, where only the hardest of dragons can survive. While the vast majority of landforms in the upper layer have a normal level of oxygen, it requires only a small upward change in altitude to encounter thin atmosphere, and the extreme mountaintops completely lack oxygen. At normal altitudes, the gravity is 0.9 times standard, not significant enough to notice the difference for most visitors.

Because of the relative instability along the edges of the landmasses, most of the population centers cluster in the middle of the landmasses. Despite the obvious high-level technology, the cities seem to grow naturally out of the land, and many wooden buildings are bound in trees or are extensions of the stone foundations. As with the foundations themselves, much of this is the result of glamers. However, the trees introduced by the elves after their arrival are real and, after magical alteration, have taken root in the land and thrive. Outdoor lighting at night is provided by phosphorescent plants and luminous insects. The elven lands provide an idyllic environment for visitors who want to relax and “get away from it all.” The spaceports which receive such visitors stand in stark contrast to the rest of the land, since they are the epitome of sleek, modern, metallic design. Forests of enormous trees surround these ports to preserve the land’s natural appearance. Sky zeppelins kept aloft by helium-generating crystals carry visitors from the port to their destinations.

Apart from the decadent resorts dotting most the land, preserves of wild animals and monstrous creatures — some native to Ekmodious and many introduced to the planet — provide a relatively safe experience for visitors who wish to try their hand at “big game hunting.” Given the unpredictable nature of the beasts roaming these regions, fatal accidents have happened and the elves managing the wilderness area ensure their guests sign waivers where they assume responsibility for their own lives and relieve the elves of all indemnity. Dark rumors speak of outspoken guests and workers discreetly meeting their ends in the preserves. These rumors are not repeated openly, since few people want to find out whether the rumors are true.

In contrast to the delicate, lush land cultivated by the elves, the dragons which share the planet with the elves have created ostentatious displays of wealth, replete with rivers of gold and sparkling gems, denoting their gambling parlors. These dragons have transformed their means for collecting wealth from a series of shakedowns and raids to the more “civilized” method of rigging games of chance and hosting high-stakes showdowns (where they of course receive a generous cut of the proceeds).

The Azure Eye is the final significant feature of Ekmodious’s outer region. The Eye grows and contracts as it moves across the planet; it has never shrunk less than a 6 miles diameter and has grown to a maximum diameter of 60 miles. The Eye’s “pupil” is a dark gray section roughly 1-1/4 miles in diameter, surrounded by a field of lightning, and is presumably the calm at the center of the storm. One group successfully penetrated the storm and reached its center, but no one has heard from the group since then. Lightning flares from the “iris” out to the edges of the storm at a constant rate, and bone-shattering thunder accompanies such lightning strikes. The clouds forming the storm column extend at least 9

miles in height, and lightning occasionally streaks above and below the clouds to strike at those approaching the storm from those directions. Denizens of Ekmodious tell stories about a sentient controller of the Eye and speak to its erratic behavior and the storm's apparent protectiveness of its center as proof. Another tourist activity involves taking sky zeppelins near the Eye and watching the storm from a close yet safe distance.

The cloud colors in the layer below the inviting surface change to a sickly yellow and the planet's rulers have put no effort into dress up the solid formations, which dissolve more regularly than they do above. The air in this layer is denser and more poisonous. Without the lush greenery and fewer of the specialized, floating native plants to scrub out ammonia, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and methane from the gasses, the soupy atmosphere proves hostile to most visitors. Air elementals and other creatures from the Plane of Air inured to such poisons thrive in this area out of the way of most humanoid species. Some of the indigenous valians have adapted to the hostile atmosphere, but they are no longer capable of surviving above in purer concentrations of oxygen. This layer's other environmental threat comes from the constant electrical activity, which seems also to feed the Azure Eye above. Gravity also increases in this area, becoming 1.5 times standard.

As one descends the many miles to Ekmodious's core, density increases such that gravity ranges from 2 to 5 times standard and the clouds become thicker and more capable of supporting weight (although an unfortunate falling victim only slows his fall as he slams into cloud banks only to resume speeding toward maximum velocity). For several hundred miles, however, the features otherwise don't change. Where the pressure changes to the equivalent of a mile underwater, hydrogen changes to a liquid and solid state. This strange layer is the home of the krux, which have adapted to — or use technological devices helping them tolerate — the crushing gravity and the super-dense air. Very little oxygen is available in this layer, so oxygen-breathing visitors must bring their own supplies along with a means to prevent having their bones pulverized. The xenophobic krux enjoy solitude thanks in part to the hostile conditions, and they have fashioned cities, more akin to massive termite mounds, out of the solidified hydrogen.

Even the krux cannot withstand the pressures at the core of Ekmodious, which features the arcane blue liquid which makes living on the planet possible. The raw arcane power present in this liquid can fuel catastrophic magic, but inherent environmental conditions make it nearly impossible for creatures to tap into it. The liquid emanates a stabilizing field throughout the planet which equalizes gravity and wind speed, especially in the outer regions, and makes it possible for the krux to thrive in the hostile conditions of their layer. Since no known creature has survived the trip to the core, no one has cataloged the liquid's properties, but creatures sensitive to magic are aware of the background aura of transmutation that grows stronger as one reaches the planet's core.

All four major layers present their own challenges; even the tranquil elven lands are rife with hidden dangers for those who poke around where they aren't supposed to. The layers below the "surface" become ever more inaccessible, and certainly the elven and dragon rulers would prefer their guests to remain in the outer layer, but determined adventurers will find a way to explore them if they wish.

Civilization, History, and Current Status

Ekmodious is an ancient world, having revolved around its star for millennia before receiving any notice. The indigenous krux, who had lived on the planet dating back beyond their recorded history, suddenly found themselves on a dying world. The landmasses in the planets upper reaches were dissolving and reassembling quickly and chaotically, and the air had turned poisonous. The krux created portals to other worlds and asked whatever powers existed on the other side for aid to revive their world. Magic-sensitive elves arrived initially and saw a world rife with possibility for colonization. The elves began restoring the world to the krux's delight, but they and the draconic allies who followed them to Ekmodious viewed the krux as primitive creatures who deserved subjugation, a notion cemented in their eyes when the proud krux began to rebel against their "rescuers." The elves and dragons drove the native creatures deeper into the planet, where they eke out an existence little better than the one they had before the arrival. The other indigenous race, the avian valians, proved considerably more difficult to conquer, and the new arrivals ended up leaving the mercurial creatures to their own devices. Centuries after their arrival, the elves and dragons have "tamed" the planet's outer layer and live in harmony with the air elemental creatures also calling Ekmodious home. Some of the elves and dragons who were part of the first wave of arrivals still live on the planet.

Sentients

While elves are the primary movers on Ekmodious, at least as far as visitors are concerned, they share the layer with dragons, but in a way fomenting little conflict between the two species. The indigenous species include the krux, whom no one has seen since the elves and dragons drove them deeper into the planet centuries ago, and the unpredictable valians. Rounding out the sentient beings are air elementals and other creatures from the Plane of Air, some of whom have never actually been on their home plane.

Elves

Elves enjoy their status as rulers of Ekmodious and have cultivated the permanent land masses to match their aesthetic tastes. No elf would come right out and say they control the planet, considering a dragon might be within earshot. However, they have the firmest grip on the magic building up the landmasses they call home and could arrange for the collapse of a mountain or two in the face of draconic aggression.

Elves try to tamp down their natural aloofness with respect to other species, and at least project a welcoming and warm attitude toward visitors, at least on the surface. This is in part due to the attitude that as overseers of a paradisiacal getaway, they must turn on the charm for their wealthy customers. The current atmospheric composition also induces a light state of euphoria in elves, causing many of them to relax even when confronting otherwise annoying situations. Thus, elves who don't have to face the public are also surprisingly friendly. Occasionally, the mask slips when they deal with their staff or belligerent visitors, but they recover quickly with an earnest apology afterward (not to the staff they're disciplining, but to those who witness a dressing down). Elves who disdain lesser races sequester themselves in the lonelier parts of the landmasses, take

up residence in the mountains controlled by the dragons, or leave the planet altogether. Considering the euphoric environment, very few opt to leave.

Despite their efforts to replicate their home forests on Ekmodious and remain unchanged by living on the planet, Ekmodious's elves have undergone subtle physical changes. Weaker gravity has caused the elves to grow an additional six inches in height; while this is not noticeable among the original fully grown elves, their children practically tower over them. Early arriving elves developed a tolerance for poisonous gasses due to the relatively frequent encounters with nauseating or lethal pockets crossing the planet. Environmental systems they put in place ensure such dangers are extremely rare now, so newer generations of elves do not enjoy the same resistance.

Elves on Ekmodious have become more reliant on their bows in the rare cases where they must engage in combat. The low gravity and long-sight provided by the planet's slight curvature at this altitude make it considerably easy to pick off opponents from great distances. Despite their inherent prowess with the bow, they have not surpassed the archery skills possessed by the valians, much to the elves' chagrin.

Dragons

The dragons who answered the krux's call to preserve their planet are generally good aligned, but, like many dragons, they still have their own agendas which only benefit themselves. Eventually, neutral dragons and the occasional evil dragon who saw an escape from overwhelming persecution joined their good cousins to exploit Ekmodious's riches. They were instrumental in driving the krux down toward the planet's core and the elves proposed a partnership in their paradise, one which would greatly increase the dragons' wealth. The elves encouraged the more powerful creatures to change their means of procuring wealth, and the dragons conferred among themselves to settle on a more peaceful method to acquire treasure. Now, instead of swooping in to take wealth by force, they set up gambling parlors in the foothills of the mountains they now call home.

Part of the agreement included a demand for the elves' terraforming efforts to include mountain ranges where they could retreat to sleep undisturbed, a demand the elves readily accommodated. Occasionally, a visitor decides to explore the mountains despite warnings to stay away (or thanks to a carefully planted rumor devised to entice a troublesome person to their doom), and even good dragons react lethally to the intrusion.

Unlike the elves, dragons and their rare offspring have undergone no physical changes after spending time on Ekmodious. While they are generally the uncontested rulers of the sky, they avoid pods of valians, whose arrow volleys are capable of felling or severely injuring a dragon. Some dragons delve into the layer below to retrieve rare, solidified, or liquified gasses they can add to their treasure troves.

Krux

Most visitors to Ekmodious are completely unaware of the existence of the planet's original apex species, the krux. Given the outer layer's formerly ephemeral nature, many krux artifacts fell to inner layers, effectively erasing signs of the species. The victorious elves also swept the area for any signs of the krux and eradicated them. Since their xenophobic natures and their current status make it unlikely they'll directly encounter visitors, the only way to discover their existence is by pure happenstance. Naturally, the elves are alert for any accidental findings of krux artifacts.

Krux were originally tall and lithe creatures when they plied the outer regions of Ekmodious. The crushing

gravity has shortened the race to a squat stature similar to that of terrestrial dwarves, and they measure 4 feet in height. They also use metallic braces of their own design to bolster their spines to withstand the powerful gravitational pull of their new home. Newer generations of krux have adapted to the gravity and fewer of the krux need these braces. They wear long-faced aristocratic masks and ornamental robes which hide their features. Removing the masks and robes reveals a humanoid with bone-white skin and eye sockets filled with voids displaying star-dotted space. Their eyes are suitably adapted to the overwhelming darkness and nictitating lids allow them to ignore the infrequent blinding



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WORLD OF WINGS

flashes of lightning where they live. Krux have lifespans similar to humans, reaching venerable ages anywhere from 80 to 100 years. Several generations have passed since they settled in their current home layer, allowing for evolutionary adaptations to settle in among the most recent generations.

Krux use heavy, two-handed weapons, mostly hammers and other bludgeoning weapons to combat the strange creatures roaming outside their cities. Magic using krux have begun to master tapping into the arcane liquid core to produce powerful energy effects. They have found their access to the core weakens as they travel away from it, so thoughts of vengeance against the elves must wait until they gain a more consistent connection to the core. The other problem with leaving their layer to make an attack on the elves derives from their physiological changes. Travelling to the outer layers induces a condition like "the bends" suffered by deep-sea divers.

Krux enjoyed Ekmodious being sealed off from the rest of the universe, with only a handful of portals open to the Plane of Air to allow elemental creatures to enjoy the planet's environment. However, disaster struck in the form of an asteroid knocking Ekmodious partially off its axis, disrupting the outer layer and causing massive landmass dissolutions. The krux debated on locating more technologically savvy creatures to help get their planet back on course without realizing the liquid core had already begun the job of stabilizing the planet (albeit slowly and unnoticeably). Despite the krux elders' warnings about bringing in outsiders to solve the problem with the apparently dying surface, the younger krux figured they could control the influx of arrivals through the portals and keep their homes from being overrun. They didn't count on the technological and magical superiority of the elves and dragons answering the call, and when the krux's gratitude for their "rescue" (as the new arrivals managed to accelerate the recovery process) turned to impatience at their guests' reluctance to leave, the new arrivals took it as aggression and forced the krux into retreat. The native krux have had generations to nurse hatred for the creatures which took over their planet, and an incendiary spark of revolution is inevitable.

Valians

Unlike their success with the krux, elves had a considerably challenging time with the avian valians. The flyers take advantage of their familiarity with the planet, the ability to see through the clouds otherwise reducing visibility for other creatures, and their extreme-range bows and crossbows suited for the horizon's gentle curvature at this altitude. The elves ultimately left the valians alone, and the mercurial creatures generally create little disruption in the wonderlands the elves fashioned.

Valians have taloned feet and falcon-like wings with similar coloration to a bird of paradise. The bird similarities don't extend to all the valians' features, however. Their wings trail off into clumps of soot, which they can shake off to create nigh-impenetrable clouds of ash to foil pursuers or ranged attackers. They also have insectoid eyes like an oversized dragonfly's, which catch the light and create rainbows within the facets. The rainbow configuration seems to change with an individual valian's mood. Valians are exceptionally tall, reaching heights of 7-1/2 feet. Corresponding to their birdlike physiques, though, they are light, weighing around 90 pounds on average. Valians are somewhat short-lived, especially compared to the planet's current rulers, and die of old age around 50.

Valians are social creatures among themselves and roam the gaseous oceans like pods of whales. When in



combat, they fly in and out of groups in chaotic patterns to confound their foes, and against overwhelming odds, a handful of valians break off from the group to hold off attackers while the remainder slip into the planet's murkier depths. Rare individual valians separated from, or rejected by, their extended families, retain their social tendencies and "adopt" other creatures to fill out their families. Despite stereotypes about their savagery, valians are quick to learn languages and adapt to new cultures. Sometimes at the request of elves seeking an advantage over the "wild" valians, these marooned valians try to impart their archery skills, but to little avail as their ability seems tied to their builds. Such valians usually take positions on sky zeppelins where they act as spotters and provide tactical assistance against valian aggressors.

In addition to honing their ranged weapon skills, valians enjoy dueling, but eschew the typical finesse weapons for incongruously heavy blades such as greatswords, falchions, and glaives. Magic skill is rare among valians, with most gravitating toward druidic traditions allowing them to manipulate the clouds and winds or befriending the animal creatures with which they share the skies.

Creatures from the Plane of Air

Air elementals who enjoy the composition of Ekmodious's air settled on the planet centuries ago and their progeny continues to thrive in pockets left untouched by the elves. Djinni made the occasional trek to Ekmodious from the Plane of Air, but the lack of civilization to their liking kept them away from the planet until the elves and dragons took over. Now, they

mix with other visitors to the three major landmasses and enjoy making flashy displays of wealth. Sylphs seemingly predate the opening of portals to the Plane of Air and their ancestors may have been responsible for the portals' creation. They enjoyed a tacit understanding with the krux and mutually avoided each other. With the influx of visitors to Ekmodious, sylphs keep to themselves on unadorned (and, as they presume, uninteresting to others) chunks of land, moving to another location when their current home dissolves. Sylphs who enjoy the sights and sounds of the relatively new civilization yet wish to remain out of sight offer their services as spies for the elves.

Below the planet's pleasant surface, more hostile air creatures reside in the poisonous clouds. Adventurous souls who dip into the cloud "oceans" of the planet's lower layer encounter belkers, air mephitis, and dust mephitis. These elemental creatures have created their own communities among choice sulfurous and smoky clouds and have grown in populations large enough to challenge even dragons which venture to this layer.

Other Sentients

With Ekmodious opened to the masses, and the planet's growing reputation as a tranquil retreat, many sentient species have made their way to the planet, even if it is in a transitory fashion. Occasionally, an obscenely wealthy patron will buy a portion of the land and become a fixture. However, as the elves and dragons have no desire to deal with the day-to-day tasks for managing their resorts, they have also attracted other species to do so. Humans and halflings make up much of the planet's service sector, with half-elves, gnomes, and half-orcs filling out the numbers.

A relatively large population of half-dragons, most of whom have elven features, is the center of amused speculation, especially among those who are aware of the planet's history. The elves and dragons refuse to dignify such rumors, but visitors who become overly insulting about the half-dragons' origins find themselves invited to return home or become victims of fatal accidents. Most of the half-dragons surprisingly take little advantage of their status and prefer hedonistic pursuits to lording over guests and staff.

Other than the air creatures thriving in the toxic environment of the layer below the surface, no sentient species make their homes there. However, toward the core where the krux hold territory and the physics undergo strange alterations, earth and water elemental creatures capable of tolerating the gravitational pressure also live. Most krux have given up their xenophobia and extended friendship to these creatures, perhaps as a prelude to joining forces with them to reclaim their world.

Culture

Despite the face presented by elves and dragons to Ekmodious's guests, the planet boasts a number of varying cultures, beginning with the mannered and visitor-focused elves and their proxies, and moving to harsher societies as one dips below the surface. Finally, there are the valian, whose motivations are somewhat incomprehensible to outsiders, as well as to the species with whom they've shared the planet for decades.

Elves

Elves arrived on Ekmodious hoping to create another natural paradise, especially when they first arrived to find the magic from the core had constructed fully-featured landforms out of cloud stuff. They saw forests made of cloud trees intertwined with native plant life

complete with ponds filled with condensed water and waterfalls formed from constantly precipitating clouds. This was an altogether new experience for the elves, but it matched up with their vision of a natural wonderland, without a burgeoning population encroaching on their paradise. Their first impressions of the indigenous krux were unkind, as is typical of elven reactions to lesser races, but they hoped to work together with the krux to understand the world-shaping energies suffusing the planet. The elves saw the krux as rebellious and drove the native race away at the first sign of trouble (conveniently reinforcing the elves' viewpoint).

The conquering elves decided they would control access to the planet to preserve the beauty they had so carefully crafted. Krux sabotaged some of the portals which originally summoned the elves, which suited the new arrivals fine. The elves powered down the remaining portals within ten years of their arrival, after they had invited dragons to share in the planet's bounty, and as incidental enforcers. Before they reopened the planet, they decided they would "share" the pristine world they had created, but at prohibitively high prices to limit the number of arrivals. As their pleasure planet grew in popularity, they also had to take on staff. After all, they had no plan to cater to the day-to-day whims of guests.

Many visitors to the planet who have dealt with elves before are pleasantly surprised by the elves' attempts to engender goodwill with guests. However, visitors do feel a certain amount of entitlement when it comes to the exorbitant costs they have coughed up, so they often impose themselves on the elves, who put on tight-lipped smiles and put on a show of being warm and friendly. Sometimes they manage a genuine display in order to ingratiate themselves with the universe's power-brokers and perhaps learn a significant bit of news.

Elves on Ekmodious have not significantly changed their training focuses based on the new environment. The more competitive elves have stepped up their archery skills to keep up with or exceed the valians' prowess with bows, to the point where they show an uncharacteristic obsession with archery. They remain as engrossed as ever on wizardry, especially with respect to maintaining the illusions they have fostered. There has been a slight shift to a druidic emphasis as the elves seek to encourage the harmonization of flora they introduced after their arrival with indigenous plant life. Many mystics have focused much of their research to the magic emanating from the world's core. Since the power has a psionic component, Ekmodious's elves have also turned their attention to unlocking the mind's secrets. They take a more contemplative approach to this new field of study and have slowly achieved psychic aptitude. This has created somewhat of a schism as elves who prefer the tried and true paths to power look down on those who focus on psychic power. Oddly, the younger elves have taken the more traditional tack. The younger elves also disdain what they see as an artificial setting — the trees are real, but many of the features are illusory, which makes them feel uncomfortable. There is a movement among the younger generation to return to their home worlds where they can enjoy "real nature" and ignore or combat the encroachment wrought by overpopulation.

Dragon Gambling Halls

Dragons, the other now-dominant species on Ekmodious's surface, number considerably less than elves, but they make up for that with raw power. Fortunately, the amicable accord they share with the elves has remained intact for the extensive time they shared the planet. Many of the draconic arrivals were young dragons who had difficulty carving out their own territories or found themselves the target of dogged dragon hunters. Since dragons age even more slowly

than elves, they are still relatively young. Since they essentially chose (or had the elves grow) their holdings, they remain pleased with the status quo. None of them wish to return home, and interactions with elves who are unhappy on Ekmodious baffle them. Other than their elven allies and valians who seem not to have permanent homes, the dragons didn't have an avenue for conquest or, more importantly, the collection of wealth. **Kathaxias**, a brass dragon who had spent years among humanoids, observed the humanoids predilection for gambling and put forth the idea of overseeing gambling as an adjunct to the pleasure activities available on the planet.

Many of the dragons are good aligned, but a couple of neutral and evil dragons also live on the planet. The dragons have settled into a rivalry, with their takes acting as the measure of their success. Not very experienced with games of chance, they have hired other species to design and run the games. Gnomes have had the best success, since they tend to think outside the boundaries of traditional games, and their employers like games which seem simple to the layperson but are in fact extremely complex. Dragons also employ creatures capable of subtle magic which manipulates probability to either bolster the luck of their rivals' clients or dampen the chances of those who have managed an extremely fortuitous run.

While most of the dragons stick to games of chance any visitor can play, a few have struck upon the idea of opening their halls up to beings who want a supremely high-stakes experience, with fortunes and planets on the line. They charge a "paltry" fee representing only one percent of the wealth at stake, but this amounts to tons of coins and jewels to add to a dragon's hoard (dragons deal in material wealth, so visitors should prepare to bring gold, gems, and other precious commodities when they gamble). They are inquisitive about the decision to risk the entirety of one's worth on the turn of a card or the roll of a die, and dismiss the idea of the games involving far more skill than luck. In addition to accommodating high-pressure games, dragons also offer betting on combats either in underground arenas or on other worlds. Even good-aligned dragons assume a detached attitude about lethal battles, especially those occurring elsewhere, but more amoral dragons enjoy bringing a visceral thrill to their clients. These dragons import (or kidnap) competitors for their arenas, which they have found to bring in considerably more wealth than games of chance. They also offer the hope of paying off accrued debts by providing an entertaining fight or two — and surviving, of course.

While most of the planet's draconic gambling halls are built to handle a full-sized dragon roaming its halls, many dragons prefer to visit their establishments incognito, using their inherent shape changing abilities or magic they have acquired. They directly involve themselves when they or their staff discover cheating. The response to cheating depends on the dragon; most of the time, the dragon will ensure the cheater receives an escort off the premises with considerably less money than they started with. Cruel dragons allow the cheater to leave under the mistaken belief he has gotten away with fleecing the house, and then mete out horrific punishments out of view of others and usually involving "the long drop."

Regardless of the dragon, they spend time away from their concerns to take one of their long sleeps atop a pile of gains. The elves created mountainous hideaways for the dragons for this purpose, and most visitors know not to scale the mountains. A dragon disturbed from its sleep, especially by someone who doesn't belong in its lair, is unforgiving regardless of alignment.

Valian Roamers

The only native intelligent species to remain unaffected by the invasion of elves and dragons, valians control

the upper reaches of Ekmodious and have thwarted numerous attempts by the newly arrived species to eliminate them. As the valians have felt less threatened and have become used to less of the sky being available to them, they have reduced their attacks on visitors, but they still prove to be occasional nuisances. Generally, they avoid the elven landmasses, but they will harry a lone zeppelin crossing their path.

Valians evolved from a stirgelike species, losing their ability to drain blood from victims as they embraced a wholly vegetarian diet. Elves who have undertaken studies of the valians speculate the krux were the valian precursors' main victims. They further posit the krux became adept at destroying the creatures, allowing proto-valians with strong reasoning capability and an incidentally diminishing dependence on blood to thrive.

Valians have not deviated from their predecessors' flocking behavior and travel in family groups, numbering from ten to a couple hundred. They follow Ekmodious's native floating plants and have learned methods to farm the plants to avoid devastating the source of their nutrition. While they occasionally alight on the plants introduced by the elves, they haven't found the flora to their liking, so they rarely destroy the plants at least for the purpose of consumption. Elves briefly entertained the idea of destroying the planet's indigenous floating plants to starve out the valians, but disastrous side effects spurred caution about the impact to the ecosystem.

The valians' family focus extends to childrearing, where all members of a valian flock take responsibility for the care and education of offspring, regardless of parentage. The bird species has a specific mating season, allowing them to produce all their young at once. When their eggs are ready to hatch, valians find rookeries where they land, and this is the only time they spend more than a day in one location. It requires one month for baby valians to become flight ready, at which the valians resume their endless flight across Ekmodious's skies. Those who can't fly are left to the planet's whims; oftentimes, a flightless valian succumbs to the ephemeral nature of the landmass and falls to one of various deaths after it dissolves. After the arrival of elves, sometimes these orphaned valians receive a rescue of sorts, where they become laboratory subjects for the elves.

Valians value their families considerably more than property (apart from a finely crafted bow or crossbow), so they take issue with other species who don't share their egalitarian views. Their first interactions with the elves and especially dragons chafed them, and they refused to let the newcomers claim the planet as a prize. Not having the same level of firepower as their opponents, though, valians have resorted to harrying attacks, usually against the vehicles which increasingly fill the sky. Valians believe they would be much more accommodating, and even welcome others into their families, if the planet's rulers would share their bounties.

Though the species seems carefree apart from their running skirmishes with elves and dragons, the one area of expertise where valians actually expend effort is archery and other ranged weapon skills. Shortly after valians reach adulthood, generally when they celebrate their second birthday, they take up the bow or crossbow. The bow has more cultural cachet for valians, but an experienced crossbow wielder commands respect from a valian family. The avians primarily use their ranged weapons for sport, wherein they compete with one another for furthest, most accurate shot and various trick shots, but they honed their skills to bring down behemoth air creatures occasionally breaching the cloud ocean below or crashing in from outside the planet. Of course, with the newcomers' arrival, their ranged prowess has become even more important as they work to maintain free skies for themselves. On rare occasions, a valian raid claims a ranged energy weapon, and the family incorporates it into their arsenal; once someone figures out how the weapon works, he or she receives

first rights to the weapon, but often spends time training others in its use.

Apart from skill with ranged weapons, crafting skill is important among valians. They create their weapons from the available wood provided by the indigenous plants (though they have turned their attention to trees introduced by the elves which produce stouter weapons) and have a knack for doing so while the family is in flight. When a family undergoes its periodic childrearing stops, these craftspeople are granted leave from parental duties to work solely on designing weapons for the group. The only other skill held in high regard among valians is the ability to retain and relate the family's oral history. Since valians, by necessity, cannot carry tomes of history around with them, their storytellers maintain their traditions and relate stories to the young to impart lessons and remind them about the importance of the group.

The Warrens and the Poisonous Ocean

Unintentionally, some mass accreted underneath the landmasses created by the elves. Some of the unfortunates who "fall through" end up arresting their fall underneath the land instead of falling to their doom. As more people wound up in the underground, referred to as "The Warrens" due to the twisting tunnels seemingly more suited to rats than people, they congregated and formed their own society. The Warrens house many disparate species: elves who have fallen out of favor and couldn't leave Ekmodious in time to escape justice; outworlders who couldn't pay their debts and dove into a conveniently lucky hole rather than face punishment; and various species who see an opportunity in underground markets.

Elves originally tried to calve the Warrens from their land with mixed success. As more arrivals to the planet became at least passingly aware of the fundament-arranging magic suffusing the planet, they were able to stabilize the underground. The more devious inhabitants use this ability to bring victims to them. However, the elves had more resources and magical might available to them to prevent such incursions, and the Warrens' denizens decided a war with the elves would not be worthwhile, especially if the elves put all their efforts into separating the Warrens from the mainland. Instead, they keep their operations subtle, acting as a thieves' guild and dealing in illicit goods. This suits the elves, as they can claim to have legitimate business concerns to any authorities who show an interest in Ekmodious, while discreetly directing visitors who make the appropriate inquiries for black market material to the Warrens.

There is no cohesive culture in the Warrens, and many representatives from many species bring their own particular beliefs. Law is brutal underground regardless of species, and someone who crosses the wrong guild leader becomes a bloody example for others.

This brutality reaches to the cloud "oceans" reaching up to the Warrens. Due to the poisonous gasses and massive electrical discharges omnipresent in this extensive layer, along with dangerous predators waiting for victims to fall from above, only the most intrepid or desperate explore the region. However, the rare gasses and exotic poisons available here reap considerable wealth for brave visitors. Pockets of solidified gasses allow for rest stops, but these pockets have greater instability than the masses formed on Ekmodious's surface, so one must have a contingency when using a foundation to rest. Dragons who have discovered the wealth available down here also add to the peril; they drop their civilized facades here and have no compunction about killing competition.

Krux and Subterranea

Close to the core, the planet changes composition thanks to the extraordinary pressure and proximity to the terraforming core. The krux, displaced from their homes miles above, thrive here, but it was a near thing for them. They managed to overcome the relative lack of air by repurposing the rebreathers they used to explore the gaseous ocean, and fashioned the solid compounds they found in the depths to create braces for their legs and backs. Subsequent generations became inured to the environment and the species has thrived.

Now that they have bounced back from near extinction, the krux have split on their response to the elven and draconic incursion. The more insular krux believe they have attained true separation from the rest of the world and the universe. They could barely withstand the journey, and they are certain frail creatures like the elves would readily perish. On the other hand, warlike krux caution it is only a matter of time before the planet's new rulers decide to exploit the core, and they will finish the job they started after they arrived. These krux advocate taking the fight to the elves, and they are convinced they have the element of surprise. To that end, these krux have befriended the strange earth elementals taking on solidified gaseous forms. The split has been contentious, but not enough to create internecine strife. The hawkish krux believe they have a mandate to destroy the elves and doing so will ultimately save their species, so they are content to leave the "pacifists" behind.

Krux have become more in tune with the energy source at the planet's core, and have fashioned homes using psychic power awakened under extreme duress. Their control over matter manipulation has driven some krux to speculate about using this power to destroy the elves from afar, but those krux who have studied the magical flows from the core believe this destructive use would create a catastrophic chain reaction which would destroy Ekmodious.

Krux were areligious before their displacement, but they have changed their attitude since then. Many krux believe they received punishment for turning their backs on their ancestral deities and have returned to worshipping them. A handful have turned to dark deities of vengeance (including the rare demon and devil), but overall the krux distrust such cults, driving the followers to conduct their rites in secret.

Krux are dimorphic, but very little distinguishes genders other than females having a light amount of facial and body hair, and males being completely hairless. A pair of krux mate for life and raise their children together. Gestation lasts for six months and only debilitates the mother for the last week of childbirth. Children formerly took ten years to reach adulthood, but the strange new environment the krux live in has reduced this to eight years.

Martial training begins at age six; while half the krux do not wish to take the fight to the elves, they recognize the need to be able to defend themselves. The occasional hostile creature forming from the solid material surrounding their homes reinforces this notion. Krux primarily use heavy bludgeoning weapons, since these are the best suited for the material at hand. Projectile weapons are rare due to strong gravity rendering all but siege-style weapons useless.

Technological and Magic Level

The magic level is obviously high on Ekmodious as exemplified by the actual and artificial creation and development of land in the outer layer. This is a point of pride for the elves. However, despite appearances to the contrary, the tech level is similarly advanced. Elves have a certain aesthetic they like to maintain, but they know they must keep up technologically to prosper in the galaxy.

The first example of high tech greets a visitor in the form of the sleek spaceports, one for each landform, hidden among foliage on each of the three major landmasses. The elves disdain artificial orbital facilities, since they clutter the view of the stars and Ekmodious's many natural satellites. They have communication relays on several moons, but no satellites in orbit. They are currently developing a lunar facility on the largest moon, which is currently uninhabitable, to accommodate larger vessels and shuttle visitors to the planet. For most vessels, the trip through the atmosphere to a spaceport is relatively short and painless. Apart from the Azure Eye, which they have not managed to control yet (it is only a matter of time, assure elven mystics and scientists), they exert powerful control over the planet's weather, so sailing to a port is nearly effortless. These ports are the only locations where elves exert constant control, since they prefer the planet to naturally generate weather. Elves are rarely seen at these ports, as they turn security, maintenance, and construction over to trusted minions.

The subtle touch of technology continues with respect to communication. Elves loathe technological augmentation to their bodies and the flora they cultivate, but they have embraced nanotechnology to relay messages between each other and among their staff, as well as to spy on guests. Unobtrusive strings of faerie lights line the trees and provide avenues of communication.

Marrying their aesthetic sensibilities with magic and technology, elves have fashioned crystals they use in their zeppelins. These crystals, which focus the energies originating from the core, convert the planet's abundant hydrogen to far less dangerous helium, and allow for the generation of inert, heavier gasses to control a zeppelin's altitude. The elves also integrate similar crystals in jet packs, but these crystals generate hydrogen and other dangerous gasses to provide more thrust. They have seen few accidents with these crystals, but caution users about the dangers of the gasses' volatility.

An ambitious goal sees the creation of a tunnel with breathable air leading to the nearest habitable moon, Varalnae. The elves have experimented with extending the transmuting field outside the planet's confines with little success, so they have turned their research to other methods to achieve this goal. Advanced scouts have set up outposts that can sustain small groups through a combination of magic and technology to provide air, food, and water.

Another formidable task involves purifying the air in the gaseous oceans below the top layer to make the planet habitable by all. Some alien species thrive in ammonia, methane, and more toxic air, but the planet's controllers cannot guarantee much safety beyond the confines of their landmasses. Thus, they would prefer to make at least another thin layer habitable for them so they can provide a safe launch point for more "exotic" guests. The planet itself seems to resist the attempts, and the larger creatures roaming the gaseous seas have an unfortunate tendency to devour machines dedicated to scrubbing the air.

Valians possess a Bronze Age level of technology, but their inquisitiveness allows them to adapt to technology. They have a predilection for projectile weapons and learn quickly to use energy blasters and other advanced weapons. Because they don't stay in one place for long, they don't have an industry where they can develop their own technology.

Krux had a slightly more modern technological level, approaching the end of the industrial age. They've had to progress beyond that to survive their inhospitable environment, and they have fused magic and technology to build their underground cities and augment themselves to move freely against the powerful gravity. The more militant krux have been pushing for research in eliminating the crippling pain they encounter when they ascend through the cloud ocean.

Those who have studied the emanations from the core believe it is the only surviving terraforming device left by an ancient, advanced species no longer extant in the galaxy. Several dead planets in nearby sectors of the galaxy show evidence of destructive drilling to the hollowed-out center of the planets, providing at least circumstantial evidence for this theory.

Economy and Resources

Ekmodious's economy primarily derives from visitors to the planet who spend exorbitant sums for a trip to paradise. The vast majority of the money spent on the planet goes to elves and dragons, but they in turn ensure their staff is paid well enough not to leave in droves or consider sabotaging the resorts. Apart from rare fruits and vegetables found on Ekmodious, whose export the elves rigorously control, other food comes from off-world. Larger swathes of land are set up for hunting preserves, which contain dangerous, but not particularly edible creatures. Finally, elves are not fond of livestock, so they refuse to carve out land even for staple animals. Dragons employ herders to maintain a supply of food for them, but they raise such animals in their own mountainous terrain and out of sight of the elves.

Draconic gambling halls add little to the planet's overall economy, since all but one magnanimous gold dragon fill their own hoards with their profits. However, since prospective gamblers must stay somewhere and sustain themselves while they try their luck, the elves still receive their cut.

Rare gasses and liquids make up most of the planet's wealth and mining concerns have made slow inroads on Ekmodious. They face competition with dragons who jealously guard portions of the cloud ocean and many other dangers, rendering such mining less than profitable. However, a find of a hidden pocket of a rare noble gas or unusual poison can set up a prospector for life.

Valians and krux, by their various natures, add nothing to the planet's wealth. Lone valians take up a trade on one of the elven landmasses or earn an income by training others in the use of bows and crossbows. Krux are sitting on a virtual treasure trove of exotic material, but preserving the material outside the specialized environment and transporting the material to the outer layer creates significant roadblocks. Now the krux have settled the question of basic survival, they have begun to realize the worth of the compounds they essentially own.

Finally, the planet's true value lies in the blue liquid at its core. Individuals with arcane or psychic ability can tap into the power emanating from the core, but no one has truly been able to unlock the liquid's power. As its reputation spreads throughout the galaxy, researchers have arrived to study the energies suffusing the world, usually on expense from patrons who can afford the outrageous fees. Elves, of course, follow the studies conducted with great interest, and plan to pounce on any research which solves the energy's mystery.

Government

The predominant source of government comes from the elves who take a direct hand in running Ekmodious. They take pains to give the impression of a light touch, but they rarely must deal with troublemakers, so they are able to maintain the illusion. Lawbreakers are dealt with quietly and quickly, usually with an escort off world and a period of suspension from the planet. The planet has very few prisons, and these act more as short-term detention centers to hold disruptive people until authorities arrive. Before the Warrens established its powerbase, persistently troublesome guests met with accidents, usually a "mishap" involving an escaped

creature from the preserves attacking the unfortunate guest. The management would express regret and offer kingly sums to the victim's families, with the natural expectation none of them would travel to Ekmodious.

Among the elves, government is autocratic, with a small council of elves, along with a draconic representative, making decisions for the planet. The long-lived species are slow to make changes, and ideas like creating a fourth landmass to support the influx of visitors have taken years to materialize. Turnover is also low, with councilmembers serving decades before they relinquish their posts. This is not to say everything is slow concerning events affecting the planet (or, more specifically, the elves and dragons). The council has contingencies in place for catastrophic events. The sole emergency council meeting adroitly handled the only major crisis: a slooyoss died on approach to Ekmodious and threatened to crash into the planet. They reacted quickly to intercept and obliterate the creature before it could impact Ekmodious.

The valians, in contrast, have a more egalitarian approach. When a family faces a major decision, every adult is allowed a voice in the discussion and a majority vote chooses the family's fate. Valians recognize no leader among them, but the opinions of elders carry a lot of weight, and they have swayed votes many times. Law is uncomplicated among valians; if a member of the family does something that endangers the family, the offending valian is exiled. This typically involves scarring to indicate the valian was forced from his or her family and not just separated. Exile was essentially a slow death sentence for valians, but the arrival of the elves has provided them with an alternative, assuming they can keep from thumbing their beaks at the new authority.

The Warrens have coalesced into a collection of rival guilds which establish territories and their own laws within. There are very few kind-hearted regulations in the Warrens. Those within a guild who break guild law receive some combination of torture and death for their crimes. If a known member of an outside guild commits a crime, an odd honor system activates. The aggrieved guild holds the offending guild member for ransom, and the other guild can pay the ransom (and mete out whatever punishment they deem fit) or allow the aggrieved guild to punish the offender however they decide. Strangers to the Warrens or those who don't identify themselves as part of a guild receive no such consideration and typically face execution. While the elves topside have a distaste for the Warrens, they realize the opportunities available to make troublemakers disappear for a relatively minor payment. If the existence of the Warrens becomes a topic, the elves downplay the threat and promise to look into the matter (along with complimentary services to buy silence).

Krux government was democratic in the past, but their dire circumstances forced them to follow the strongest leader. By necessity, many krux followed their leader and work as harmoniously as possible with each other. Major crimes met with death as the punishment and even petty theft would result in death. Law became so brutal among krux that unresolvable disagreements between individuals ended with the death of all parties involved. The krux reasoned this prevented the conflict from becoming cancerous and utterly destroying the species. As life has stabilized and the krux have grown in population generation by generation, this absolute law has relaxed considerably. The thought of warlike krux having a fundamental difference of opinion with the krux wishing to live peacefully in Subterranea would have been ludicrous two generations prior.

Ecology

From the cultivated ecology wrought by the elves mingling with some native species, through miles of

poisonous and otherwise deadly gaseous oceans, to the strange environments of the krux and the planet's core, Ekmodious is four almost mutually exclusive worlds.

General Flora and Fauna

The planet's relative impermanence made it difficult to sustain plants with root systems. Instead, floating beds of plant life stay aloft with small sacs of heated air, hydrogen, or helium allowing them to stay above the major cloud line and receive sunlight. Specialized plants developed to convert various harmful gasses, including methane, ammonia, and the typical carbon dioxide, to oxygen. This oxygenation and the staple, yet bland, sustenance they provided allowed the krux and valians to thrive.

The elves took a softer approach with the indigenous plant life than they did with other species and left the floating plants alone. They almost eliminated the fuluine, an ammonia-to-oxygen converting plant with thick, grasping vines the elves found to be a nuisance. When the air became intolerable after they destroyed a fuluine bed, they realized the plants were necessary for clean air, especially since their plants only converted carbon dioxide. The elves have undergone research to crossbreed their plants with the indigenous plants, so they can safely eliminate bothersome or unsightly species (such as the splotchy gray-green methane converting blistel).

Flora becomes scarce the deeper one travels within Ekmodious, but the large planet holds surprises, such as the gaseous ocean's glak, an orange sargassum-like plant which feeds on pockets of arsine. The plant renders the arsine inert and is surprisingly nutritious, if one can get past its bitter flavor. Below the gaseous ocean, the plant life radically changes in favor of fungi sustained by the solidified gasses. These fungi were instrumental in keeping the krux alive and they have become a farming staple for the krux.

In terms of native fauna, the planet's upper layer features the greatest diversity, comprised mostly of avians, but also non-avians with fleshy membranes which allow them to glide for hours in the layer's varying winds. Among the elves, the cootou is the most popular. This colorful bird mimics humanoid speech and becomes luminescent at night. During their mating seasons, their glow intensifies, creating magnificent sights in the tops of the trees. The vant are marsupials with blue-green striping giving them some camouflage among the clouds. They have oversized ears they use along with their membranes to catch wind and control the direction of their flight.

The elves introduced several species from their home worlds to act as beasts of burden and to populate their hunting preserves.

Below the outer layer, corporeal animal life gives way to air elemental creatures which swim the clouds like schools of fish. The vanaya look like large, gray catfish and swallow anything in their path, but their insubstantial forms pose no danger to those swallowed by them. Since air elementals require no sustenance and are unaffected by the poisonous air, they thrive on Ekmodious, succumbing only to larger predators plying the oceanic layer.

Subterranea's elemental creatures transition from air to earth and rarely water as the planet's composition changes. Most of the elemental creatures are lumbering, slow brutes which present very little threat to prepared krux. As good fortune for the krux (and a sign for them to start worshipping deities again), a reptilian creature the krux dubbed the janxx survives by feeding on the fungi present in the area. The krux managed to domesticate the janxx and use them as a source of meat and leather.

Apex Creatures

While Ekmodious's gaseous ocean contains most of the planet's predatory creatures, all inhabited layers have inherently dangerous creatures, and one major threat comes from beyond the planet.

The **slooyoss** is species of gigantic slug reaching the size of a small asteroid. The slugs' broodmother drifts among the asteroid field adjacent to Ekmodious and it sends its spawn to devour organic material and return to it. Roughly every ten years, a slooyoss arrives in the planet's upper atmosphere to feast on the flying creatures unlucky enough to be in its path. To counter the creature's incursions, the elves leave chum in the extreme upper atmosphere to satisfy the massive creature and prevent it from diving deeper. Before they were forced out, the krux would try to kill a slooyoss and feast on its flesh (after cooking out impurities) and use its tough hide as supplemental building material.

The **scranth**, the species from which valians evolved, still fly the skies and drain the blood of unfortunates they encounter. However, mostly due to strong resistance from the valians and krux (and later, the elves), the strangely adaptable scranth have altered their diets to consume the essences of air elemental creatures, and many have all but disappeared into the gaseous ocean.

In addition to intelligent air elementals, such as belkers and mephits, which have made the ocean their home away from the Plane of Air, animalistic air elementals cruise the oceans just below the outermost level. They behave similarly to sharks and whales and feed on smaller air elementals. However, they occasionally breach the clouds to attack ships or individuals flying too close to them.

Population Centers, Landing Sites, and Points of Interest

The planet's outer layer is a welcoming and lush paradise, enhanced by beautifully colored clouds lapping at the edges of the land. Just below the welcoming surface is a deep and vast cloud ocean. Emerging from beneath the ocean, one finds the bizarre and truly alien scenery of the subterranean land near the core.

"Surface" of Ekmodious

Green landmasses surrounded by gently dancing and swirling clouds (which also conveniently cloak the mountain ranges) grant visitors a stunning first impression. Depending on the time of approach, the Azure Eye also makes a visual impact. Arriving spacecraft crest over towering sequoias keeping spaceports from view until the last minute. Transit from spaceports is via small passenger flying ships or wheeled caravans along well-maintained roads. Within the landmasses, everything is shaded by trees, but sky vessels allow visitors to rise above the canopy and experience the planet from the sky.

Velyrian Station

Ekmodious's largest spaceport, **Velyrian Station** serves several thousand visitors per day. While this count is minor compared to other galactic spaceports, it is positively bustling for the elves and their staff. Shunts funnel energy from descending and ascending spacecraft below the landmass, which incinerates those foolish enough to wander into this area in the Warrens. Velyrian Station was originally the only spaceport on

Ekmodious, since the elves wished to limit disruptions from loud vessels. At the insistence of wealthy patrons who preferred to arrive at their ultimate destinations as soon as possible, the elves accommodated them with smaller spaceports on the other landmasses. However, they still set a strict schedule for arrivals and departures to reduce disturbances.

Velyrian Station is an ultramodern hub surrounded by a mix of redwoods and tropical trees. Beyond the tree line, modernity falls away into a utopian vision, seemingly cut off from the rest of the galaxy. While contact is possible from anywhere on the mainland, it is slower, and guests must make their way to Velyrian Station (or another smaller spaceport) to receive communications close to real time.

Security seems lax at the spaceport, and weapons of all sorts are allowed beyond the station. However, as the planet grows in popularity among a select clientele, the elves try to ensure the safety of their guests as unobtrusively as possible. Trained psychics (typically mystics with the empath mystic connection) stand just out of view at the arrival gate and scan the thoughts of arriving guests. Anyone who seems like a threat is quietly pulled into a detention room where he or she can receive a more thorough probe.

Draconis Imperialis

Currently the most popular draconic gambling establishment, **Draconis Imperialis** is owned by the adult lunar dragon known as T'Shol'Vistra (Vistra when she takes human form). The increase in activity on Ekmodious attracted the traveling dragon's attention, and she observed different dragons working together and with humanoid creatures. As a newcomer, she carefully insinuated herself among the other dragons and decided to develop her own gambling hall. The Draconis Imperialis featured similar games to the other halls, but the lunar dragon discovered others enjoyed observing high-stakes games and would part with their money for the privilege. As a relatively new (by draconic standards) innovation, this sets Draconis Imperialis apart from the others, increasing the popularity of her establishment.

Perhaps because she doesn't wish to incur the wrath of the other dragons, Vistra doesn't engage in the subtle sabotage prevalent among them. At least while she has the upper claw among the dragons, she also views such activity as unnecessary. However, she employs several psychically endowed individuals to prevent sabotage of her games.

Like many dragon halls, Draconis Imperialis has its share of secrets. First and foremost, Vistra doesn't lair in a nearby mountain range; rather, her hall has a hidden teleporter she uses to transport to any one of Ekmodious's moons. She lairs on the dark side of whichever moon she chooses, and she also teleports to locations where humanoid activity takes place (building sites of communication relays and the lunar space station), mostly to satisfy her curiosity. Finally, Draconis Imperialis houses a lab, hidden behind several secret passageways and cypher-locked doors, where she oversees studies on the planet's liquid core. This includes an attempt to replicate the material despite not having an actual sample, but the dragon hopes to find an intrepid explorer willing to travel to the planet's core.

Tempest Station

Several exploratory missions to the center of the Azure Eye failed spectacularly, with the destruction of every vessel attempting to traverse the intense storms just outside the Eye's "pupil." Tempest Station was the most recent attempt, and the elves designed a technologically advanced craft designed to withstand intense winds and destructive lightning (along with its attendant thunder). It appeared to be a failure just like the previous tries;

even though the craft was not visibly destroyed, it appeared to sustain damage and communication cut off when it breached the storm wall.

The researchers managed to repair or seal off the station's damaged sections and have carried out their studies. Their major discovery is the complicated link between the planet's core and the storm, where the storm's ebbs and flows are tied to the core's power output. They have yet to uncover the purpose for the storm, since it appears to merely destroy everything in its path. While they conduct their research, they also work on the communications array to reestablish contact with the outside world. Unknown to the research team, time flows at a slower pace within the storm's center; every three days passing for them is equivalent to two days on Ekmodious.

The Warrens and the Vast Ocean

Ostensibly the most hostile locations on Ekmodious, the Warrens and the gaseous ocean, which reaches the planet's "surface," are deadly for the unprepared. However, there are a couple of places where lucky visitors can go where they can receive a temporary reprieve from the ever-present danger.

The Undermarket

Guilds control most of the Warrens, and they are less than inviting to outsiders. If accidental visitors are fortunate, they might stumble upon guild members who will happily relieve them of all their valuables but return them to safety aboveground. Warfare is subtle between the guilds, as few can afford open battles in the tunnels, but murder is a way of life here. However, near the center of the Warrens, the Undermarket serves as neutral ground and any troublemakers are put down quickly by the well-paid and trained guards whose allegiance is solely to the black market.

Visitors with the coin to spend can find nearly any illicit item here, including weapons, drugs, and poisons. The Undermarket's activities have spread beyond the confines of the Warren. Operatives elsewhere in the galaxy slip contraband among an unsuspecting mark's items; since the mark is unaware of the illegal goods, he or she passes psychic scans which would otherwise pick up on someone's anxiety about delivering contraband. A planet-side operative then relieves the mark of the item and brings it to the Undermarket.

Schylla Oasis

Despite elven efforts to close the portals leading to other planes and worlds, the hostile environment in Ekmodious's ocean prevented them from disabling portals within it. Fortunately, the krux did some of the work for them as they attempted to cut off the planet in a desperate attempt to stop the influx allowed by the portals, but several remain open. **Prince Akkanbari**, an enterprising djinni, maintains a bubble of fresh air extending from the portal he now controls. With the increase in traffic in the poisonous aerial ocean, he sees an opportunity for customers who will pay his demanding prices for safety. Prince Akkanbari has several djinn subjects as well as a contingent of air elementals who keep the area free of predators. He also offers travel to the Plane of Air for those who truly wish to flee the planet, with a warning that the plane can be a treacherous place and he makes no guarantees of safety beyond the portal.

As the djinni grows his power base and extends his influence in this layer, he has gained the notice of elves who seek an alliance with him. Thus far, he has ensured the terms work to his favor, especially since he controls the sole assuredly safe location in the cloud ocean.

Subterranea

Apart from the core, Ekmodious's only other layer is a weird underground land where the gaseous ocean gives way to solid ground. Breathable air is hard to come by here, without resorting to some combination of technology and magic. Likewise, the extreme gravity requires external means to overcome. The only intelligent indigenous species is the krux; their bodies have adapted to the gravity, and they have begun the slow process of adapting to the atmosphere. They still require rebreathers to remain oxygenated.

Krux-Hinn

As the krux flourished in Ekmodious's underground, they spread out across the land and established other settlements. Krux-Hinn is the central locale for the species and serves as the capitol for them. Travelers who manage to survive the journey see odd buildings shaped like termite mounds. Krux are cautiously welcoming to humanoids without elven features — they are openly hostile toward dragons and accursed elves. In spite of their xenophobic tendencies, they sympathize with those obviously struggling to survive the harsh environment, but they also ensure travelers are not elven agents. Once they have reasonable assurances, they equip visitors with braces and rebreathers to help them out and then encourage them to leave Krux-Hinn.

As the krux regain their industrial advancements, Krux-Hinn has added a quadrant for several buildings where they produce manufactured goods, primarily metal tools, but also weapons and armor. These buildings belch smoke which settles to the ground, making this quadrant virtually uninhabitable. Fortunately, the smoke eventually solidifies, allowing the krux to collect it and transport it away from the city. The city's outskirts feature a sprawling field of pale mushrooms, the krux's staple crop. Several fenced-in ranches used for raising the reptilian janxx have become recent additions.

The city is amicably divided among the warlike krux and those who want to move on with the new status quo. **Pentan Varx** serves as the civil leader, and **Daxxus Prol** is the krux war leader. For day-to-day matters, Varx is the city's authority, but she turns control of the city over to Prol when something threatens it. Thus far, those threats have been mindless or bestial earth elementals. The city intrigues intelligent earth elementals, as it is a relatively recent development for frequent elemental visitors to Ekmodious's underground. The krux have given their blessing to elementals wishing to reside in Krux-Hinn.

Wormlands

A large plain, covered in massive holes, divides the krux settlements from the subterranean layer's main mountain range. The holes are smooth, as if something drilled through them, but they open to a chaotic arrangement of tunnels. Once immediate survival became less of a concern, the krux explored the tunnels and encountered massive, partially melted corpses of rocky wormlike creatures. The tunnels travel for miles, and the krux haven't had the opportunity to explore more than one mile in, so they do not know if living worm specimens exist further down the tunnels. They set up outposts at the very edge of the plain so they can remain vigilant against attack by the worms.

Blue Beacon Mountain

The strangest feature in the underground is the tall mountain from which an intense blue light emanates. Travelling to the mountain to locate this beacon seems

Planetarium

impossible, since the distance to the mountaintop never decreases as one moves toward it. The krux suspect a passageway within the mountain leads directly to the planet's core, but they have not been able to devote the resources to first reach the mountain, let alone explore its interior.

Other Points of Interest in Ekmodious's Planetary System

Ekmodious shares a planetary system with six other planets and the remains of a seventh planet which has the nearest stellar orbit to Ekmodious. The planet also has thirteen moons, all but one of which is uninhabitable. Seven of the moons are seismically active, so shifting land and volcanic eruptions disrupt attempts to erect structures. The furthest moon is encased in ice, and the remaining moons have no atmosphere.

The Proximate Chain

Three of Ekmodious's moons orbit the planet in a tight grouping which seems to defy physical reality as none of the moons has collided with one another. The lead moon is 60 miles in diameter, the middle moon is 50 miles in diameter, and the final moon is 30 miles in diameter. The Proximate Chain also exhibits strange behavior in its orbit, which is a regular sinusoidal wave which reaches to the middle of each of the planet's hemispheres. Elven astronomers are fascinated by the moons' odd behavior and have varied theories explaining it. The most prominent theory speculates on a buried intelligence (artificial or natural) guiding the moons' course, but none of the theories have been able to explain the purpose behind it. All the same, the threat has driven elves to develop a contingency involving powerful telekinetic magic, which they intend not to use proactively until they are certain there will be no disastrous consequences.

Varalnae

Varalnae, Ekmodious's only habitable moon, has a medium equatorial orbit. It has a breathable atmosphere, albeit with a slightly higher concentration of oxygen, and hosts several species of plants and a diversity of animal life. Those who have explored Varalnae feel the moon's composition is not a natural occurrence, but they have yet to find any signs of inhabitation by intelligent life forms. Those with psychic sensitivity also sense something "off" about the world, like it is filled with spirits unable to communicate with the physical world. No one has found any concrete evidence for the existence of these spirits, though. The elves remain cautious about using the moon, but they have commenced with plans to create an "air tunnel" leading to the moon, one which accommodates the strange orbit of the Proximate Chain.

The Shattered Planet

An asteroid belt further from Ekmodious Prime orbits the star and is the nearest feature of interest outside Ekmodious's moons. One of the larger asteroids holds the slooyoss broodmother, but none have been able to explore the asteroids to find the creature, since it unleashes aggressive, yet short-lived, slooyoss to protect itself from intruders. Based on spectrographic analysis, the former planet contains deposits of valuable metals, especially those useful for the construction of

spacecraft. The elves are hopeful they can find brave or foolish adventurers to destroy the broodmother and allow for mining of the asteroids and have put feelers out to attract them.

Adventure Hooks and Campaign Seeds

Despite the elves' effort to create an ostensible paradise on Ekmodious where no one needs to worry about their safety, the planet has plenty of opportunities for adventure. Most of the initial adventures are set on the planet's surface, but more powerful parties can take on adventures beneath the surface, eventually uncovering the secrets of the planet's core. Suggestions for adventure ideas and combining them into campaigns are below.

Everflight II

One of many eccentric guests to Ekmodious, **Bellavia Uverhallen** (female gnome mechanic 7) has a goal of circumnavigating Ekmodious in a sky zeppelin, something no one has attempted previously. She started with the elven design and added her own set of features to withstand the storms generated by the planet. Her first attempt failed as *Everflight I* disintegrated in a storm. She counted herself extremely lucky at her rescue by a valian family whom she managed to convince to return to one of the mainlands.

Undeterred by her failure, Bellavia oversaw the construction of *Everflight II* and she seeks a crew for her latest attempt, which coincides with the characters' arrival. This adventure hook allows the characters to receive an overview of the planet and its surface hazards and encounter valians, predatory avians, and breaching air elemental creatures from the ocean below.

Heist

Someone from the Warrens hires the characters to relieve one of the dragons of a priceless gem, which is secured within a supposedly impenetrable vault. The party receives a map of the complex, but the mission requires them to infiltrate the vault from within the gambling establishment. The heist seems simple enough, especially if the characters can credibly gain entrance to the gambling hall (money simply works, but fame from circling the planet works in lieu of this). However, the characters run into complications such as mistakes in the map, either accidental or deliberate, psychics, and a chance encounter with the hall's owner in a restricted location.

To Rescue a Prince

An avian delegation arrives on Ekmodious, and a valian family sees a resemblance to one of the First Flight in the prince (or alternatively, a bird demon from a horrifying story). The family manages to sweep the prince away, escaping the prince's bodyguards and flying elves. As tensions have recently risen with the valians, the characters are called in to safely return the prince to his people. This hook involves negotiation, but the party could resolve the situation with guns blazing. Succeeding diplomatically gives the characters potential allies in later adventures, while hostile action opens a greater rift between the valians and the elves.

Distress Signal

Tempest Station has finally managed to send a signal out from the center of the Azure Eye. The elves have a prototype vessel built to similar specifications and offer the characters a substantial reward for taking the vessel into the storm and retrieving the original crew or at worst any data they collected. The trip is fraught with danger as the party must deal with powerful lightning which penetrates the vessel's shield, shattering thunder, and violent air elemental creatures capable of breaching the ship.

The second breach of the storm's center awakens a creature within. This creature could be an agent of the ancient race which eradicated the creators of the terraforming device and seek to destroy all their works. The center of the storm acted as a stasis trap for the creature and a warning device for all other potentially interested creatures, but the intrusion disabled the trap. Alternatively, the creature could be an outsider attracted to the release of power when the characters breach the storm. Either way, they find the crew of Tempest Station, but the creature possesses members of the crew at random to sow discord and murder the NPCs or the PCs from hiding.

Rogue Moon

An otherwise ordinary slooyoss event goes horribly awry as the creature ignores the chum tossed its way and heads straight for the Proximate Chain. All available bodies, including the characters, are sent to intercept the slooyoss, but it strikes the trailing moon pushing it into the planet. The elves initiate their emergency telekinetic procedures, only to discover their device has been sabotaged (perhaps as the result of events set in motion by a previous adventure). Now, the characters must successfully arrest the moon's descent, discover the saboteur, repair the device, or some combination of the three, before the moon strikes one of the landmasses — such as the one currently occupied by the party.

Voyage to the Center of Ekmodious

A deep planetary probe has returned telemetry data indicating a path to the planet's core. If the characters have proven themselves in any of the previous adventures (except, obviously, the heist) or have general recognition for their deeds, they receive invitations to travel to the planet's core, primarily as bodyguards. This particular hook can take the characters on several adventures, as they navigate the planet's ocean and deal with its perils, traverse the krux's territory (potentially defusing a nasty situation if the party accompanies or contains elves), and then reach the core. Apart from the dangerous gravity and the strange flow of energy, the characters must contend with an ancient creature seeking to destroy the last of the terraforming devices.

If the party reaches the core and discovers its secrets, the adventure could continue as the device is replicated or exploited, potentially threatening other worlds.

Chapter Nine:

Sassaria the Ocean World

Physical Description

From space, Sassaria is a deep blue and white jewel, hanging suspended in the void. While it is slightly larger than Earth, Sassaria's lack of heavier elements actually makes its gravity slightly less, and its atmosphere is rich in oxygen, providing visitors with what has been described as an "invigorating" experience.

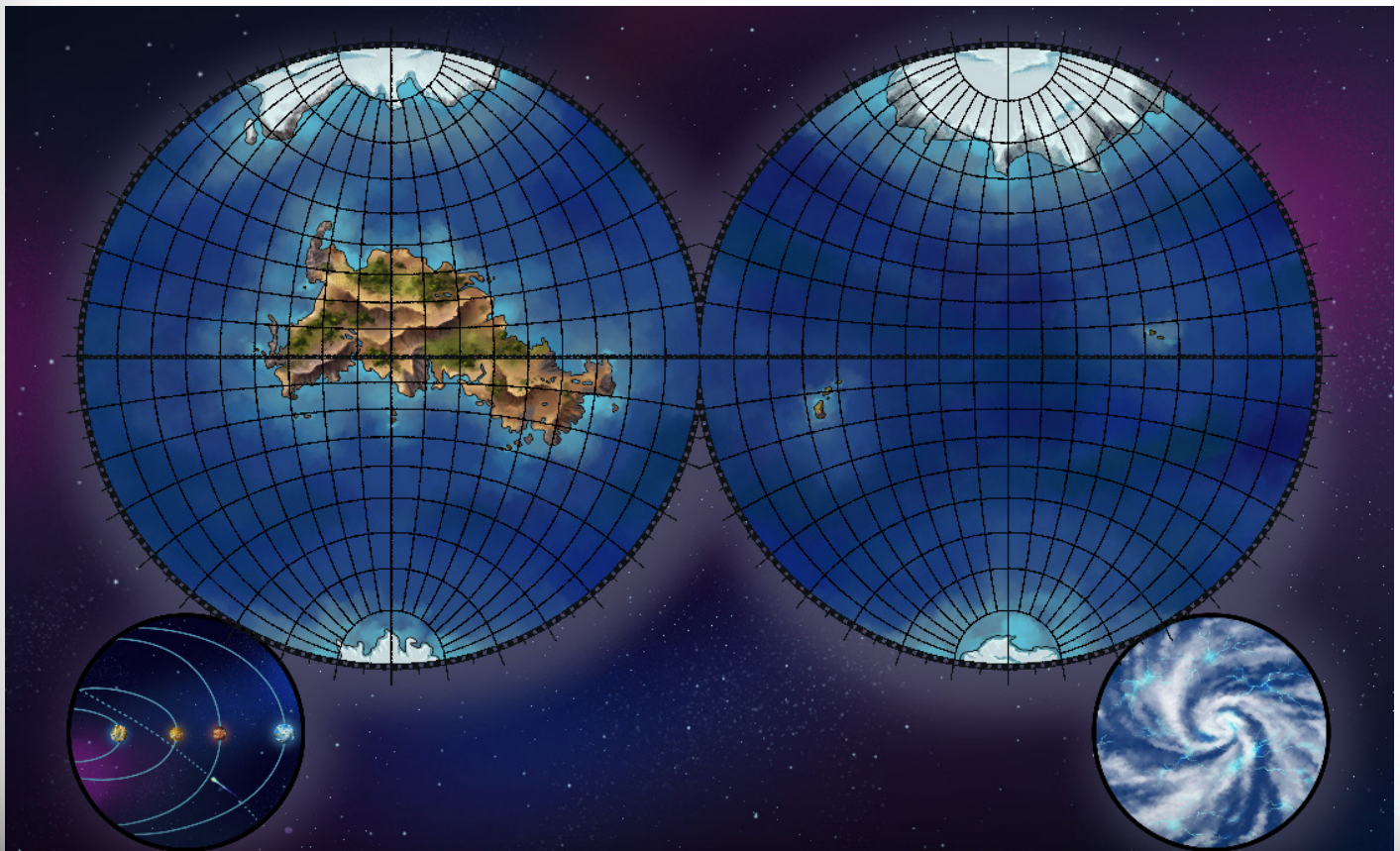
Sassaria is over 90% ocean, with only a few scraps of land providing enough area of a single settlement, a modest-sized spaceport and a handful of isolated research stations. It is in these scattered settlements that most of the planet's air-breathing population lives, busily surveying and mapping Sassaria's unique and fascinating geography. Its handful of hardy inhabitants are mostly scientists, with a scattering of military personnel and a growing number of advance staff for the corporations that have recently taken an interest in the planet.

As a water world, Sassaria has a complex climate. Temperature averages are normal — ranging from below-freezing temperatures near the world's polar caps to hot and humid tropical conditions closer to the equator, but vary greatly during the world's 422 day year. Seasons are extreme due to Sassaria's significant axial tilt, which ranges from 25–30 degrees. During winter the ice caps expand to cover as much as a quarter of their hemisphere, then shrink to almost nothing during the summer. Water temperatures also vary significantly, giving rise to massive

storms that rage out of temperate zones and into equatorial regions during local fall and winter. Summer is generally temperate, but surface temperatures can rise to over 104 degrees Fahrenheit near the equator, making work and travel in these regions difficult. Spring is not without its hazards, for huge rainstorms sometimes sweep the oceans and the land, causing flooding and landslides. Both the spaceport and research stations are built to withstand the powerful weather, but loss of both lives and property are not unknown during powerful storms.

The largest landmass above sea level is **Ionian**, an island of approximately 50,000 square miles harboring the planet's sole spaceport and all major settlements. Much smaller islands are scattered across the planet, supporting 15 research stations of various sizes. Sassaria's permanent population is around 20,000, though it varies depending upon scientific and governmental activity, sometimes to double its normal size. Most inhabitants live within **Halcyon City**.

It is the geography that lies beneath Sassaria's waves that fascinates scientists, for it is truly a vast world, and current research has done little more than scratch the surface. Ionian and nearby islands are located on a large shelf of relatively shallow seas (averaging 65–650 feet) that also harbor unique life forms and geographic features. Beyond the Ionian shelf the oceans are all but trackless, with an average depth of over 16,400 feet. Some large trenches are over 65,000 feet deep — their true depth is not known, as no manned submersible presently on-world is capable of going that deep and



so far, no remotely piloted vehicle has been able to go beyond the 65,000 foot limit without malfunctioning. With the construction of the deep submersible *Adrianna*, plans are being made to explore some of the deepest portions of the ocean, in search of both abyssal life forms and additional mineral resources.

The regions surrounding the Ionian Shelf are slowly being mapped, and this work has revealed a vast underwater world, with mountains, canyons, plateaus, and fascinating “rivers” of warm or cold water circulating throughout the region along well-defined routes. The planet’s flora and fauna are of sorts seen nowhere else in the galaxy, and are the subject of intense scientific scrutiny.

Civilizations, History, and Current Status

Sassaria actually has two histories — a recent history that is well known, and a second history that took place in the distant past, well before most modern sentient species even existed. As this second history is known by no one besides the strange creatures who dwell in the unexplored depths of Sassaria’s oceans, details are listed in sidebars, while the main text deals only with those elements of Sassaria that would be known to its modern-day visitors.

Current interest in the world began about 50 years ago when the survey ship *Azimuth* first mapped the system and described the world. Named for the wife of the *Azimuth*’s captain, the planet was subject to an extensive orbital survey before the first exploration vessel, the *Halcyon*, was allowed to land. Establishing **Halcyon Base** on Ionia, the Sassaria Survey Expedition (SSE) mapped the island and all known landmasses via remote drones before venturing beneath the surface of the ocean. The sheer depth and volume of the world-ocean has prevented a comprehensive survey — so far only a tiny portion of the planet has truly been explored and mapped.

The explorers discovered a treasure trove of data and unique phenomena such as the cold and warm water “rivers,” and vast underwater formations of surprising regularity that suggests either unknown geological processes or — in the opinion of some — sentient design. As years stretched to decades, Halcyon Base grew to Halcyon City, with a permanent population of about 20,000. In addition are 15 island research bases and six underwater facilities, each with staffs ranging from 10 to 100. Life on these isolated stations is challenging and dangerous, but there is never any shortage of applicants whenever a new position becomes available.

Sentients

Sassaria is an unusual planet and the focus of considerable scientific curiosity. Its human population consists primarily of scientific and research personnel, with some business interests investigating the planet’s resources and a small military presence that provides security, search and rescue, astrogation services, starship maintenance, and so on.

These researchers and other personnel are primarily human, but many other species may be encountered as well, including lashunta and il’kir’aan from Silvarus. Visitors of all professions come here as well, in a variety of capacities, though most are associated with the scientific and military services.

Some researchers believe there may be other sentients on Sassaria. In the planet’s northern waters, members of an otterlike species, dubbed the **tasryn** by researchers, have been seen swimming in formation, communicating in a barking fashion that may well be a true language, and even using tools and weapons. Extreme conditions and deep winter freezes have prevented further investigation, but new expeditions are being planned to determine once and for all whether the tasryn are indeed intelligent. If they are, Sassaria’s entire status may change, and major restrictions could be placed on scientific and economic activities.

There may be other sentients on Sassaria too — it is indeed a vast world, and some aquatic species have exhibited behaviors similar to the tasryn. It’s entirely possible the world harbors multiple sentient or proto-sentient races.

Sassaria does not surrender its secrets easily however, and its darkest and most terrifying mysteries have yet to be investigated. The most potentially devastating of these is the fact that there is one truly sentient species on the planet, hidden in the depths of the oceans and nursing a deep hatred of all other living things.

The Ythri

The scientists investigating Sassaria (and hence any PC adventurers) are unaware of the horrifying threat lurking in the planet’s deep oceanic trenches.



Planetarium

Millions of years ago, the planet was home to a highly advanced aquatic alien race known as the **ythri**. Preferring planar exploration to space travel, the ythri sought out alternate realities for colonization, making contact with many exotic intelligences, including some entities so utterly alien they shattered the Sassarians' collective sanity, destroying their once-great civilization and driving the survivors into the deep abyss. Aeons later the outsiders have arrived to explore and exploit the planet, and now threaten to disturb the surviving ythri, who have grown still more hostile and incomprehensible.

Physically, ythri are radially symmetrical and resemble enormous sea anemones, with elongated trunks nearly eight feet high and four to five feet in diameter. A ythri's flesh is thick, leathery, and highly resistant to damage. A cluster of sensory tentacles crowns the creature's anterior (or "head") terminating in either black eyespots or lighter patches that can detect minute vibrations in surrounding water. A ythri possesses about a dozen of each, and those that are lost are replaced within a matter of days. In addition to the sensory tentacles, a ythri has 10–20 manipulative tentacles that can extend up to 10 feet, allowing the creature to grip and manipulate even tiny objects with ease. At the posterior ("tail") end are shorter, tougher locomotion tentacles mixed in with cylindrical tube-feet tipped with suction cups that allow the ythri to move over rough surfaces, up sheer inclines, or even move entirely upside-down.

A ythri does not have a "brain" as it is understood in other species, but instead possesses a sophisticated, decentralized neural net that spreads across its entire body. Ythri possess several large clusters of these nerves that can act independently and keep the creature functional even after taking significant injuries.

The surface world and the stars beyond held little interest for the ocean-dwelling ythri. Instead they sought expansion and conquest on other realms of existence, using their highly advanced arcane technology to open planar gates, exploring adjacent demiplanes and other realities with an eye toward expansion and, if necessary, conquest. As the millennia passed ythrian technology created a network of gateways between water-based worlds, providing them with a dimension-spanning empire. Ythrian colonies thrived in worlds where sentient creatures were unknown while elsewhere the ythrian's armies overwhelmed and enslaved ill-prepared and technologically inferior sentients.

The ythri's explorations were not without hazard, for strange entities dwell on distant worlds and in the spaces between them. Contact with such entities, and the sheer strain of venturing into utterly alien, inimical regions began to have an effect on the ythri. Always a cruel and selfish race, the ythri's planar explorations planted seeds of their own destruction in their cold and calculating intellect. The vastly powerful elder creatures of the distant planes and the black void were at best indifferent and at worst openly hostile — as generations passed some ythri actually turned to the worship of these strange entities, slowly driving their once-great civilization deeper into irrationality and madness.

In the end, it took only a matter of days for the eons-old ythrian society to collapse into anarchy and destruction. Gateways malfunctioned, cutting off colonies. The horrific entities of the dark places were drawn to Sassaria — some reveled in wanton destruction, others sought to fulfill ancient and incomprehensible schemes and gain power, while still others shattered ythrian minds and culture simply by their proximity and utter alienness.

The destruction was complete. Those ythrian cities and artifacts that remain are so infinitely ancient that they appear as nothing more than weathered geographical features, though some are so durable their interiors remain intact, though Sassaria's new inhabitants have been lucky enough to never discover this.

The few surviving ythri retreated into the depths, crawling through the slime at the bottom of the darkest

ocean trenches, dragging what remained of their miraculous technology along with them. There they dwell to this day — mad, vengeful, and unbelievably ancient. They have seen the coming of the world's newest masters, and in the depths of their madness-ravaged minds, the ythri feel only resentment and murderous rage.

The technology they brought with them still functions. Some of the old gates lie dormant in the depths, awaiting activation, and these may still allow communication with the alien entities that helped destroy ythrian society. Some of the creatures who once served the ythri still dwell in the abyss alongside their masters, equally insane and utterly devoted. Though they are but a mere shadow of their ancient greatness, the ythri are still powerful and terribly dangerous, capable of unleashing all-powerful and all-destructive forces on those they hate. Should they emerge from their places of hiding, their campaign of destruction and vengeance may not end at Sassaria — with the right technology and their irrational, reckless hatred of other sentients, the ythri may be able to overcome their ambivalence regarding space travel, rising up from Sassaria to threaten an entire galaxy.

Culture

Until recently, devotion to science and learning was the primary driving force behind Sassaria's surface culture. More recently business interests have begun paying attention to the world due to its natural resources, and with these arrivals have come more military forces acting in security, liaison, and support roles. Science is still the dominant goal on Sassaria, but now there is renewed focus on geology and other research with economic aspects.

This has naturally led to some conflict, with many science personnel — who have a great interest in preserving Sassaria in its pristine and undisturbed state — believing that business interests are out to ruin and exploit the entire world for its resources. While this may be true for some of the outsiders who have ventured to Sassaria, there are others who believe it is possible to develop the world economically without spoiling its unique ecologies. Some of the most dedicated scientists believe this to be a naïve and short-sighted position however, since no one knows for certain how truly delicate or resilient the planet is, given the relatively limited data available. The push to explore more of Sassaria is a result of these conflicts, and may push the scientists and others into truly dangerous territory should the world's original inhabitants be further disturbed.

The possible presence of sentients in the form of the **tasryn** and several other intelligent species may further complicate the conflict between science and economics, for by galactic law full diplomatic and social relations with any true sentients must be made before any kind of economic development is begun. Proof that the **tasryn** are sentient would throw many corporate plans into disarray, leading some less ethical business interests to consider taking steps to avoid such a conclusion — from sabotaging research on the **tasryn** to actually exterminating the species before further research can be conducted.

Technological Level

As scientific curiosity about Sassaria is considerable, and economic interest is growing, the planet is well-equipped with technology — often the best available. Of course most of this technology is in the realm of exploration, surveying, and scientific testing, with weapons limited to those used for self-defense, and vehicles of a civilian or governmental nature. While there is a military presence on the world, it functions

in a support role, providing vehicle maintenance, search and rescue, and transportation.

The world's largest settlement, with a permanent population of over 20,000, is the scientific base known as Halcyon City, where most modern technological devices and support can be found. The Halcyon Spaceport is small but well-equipped, able to repair and provision even large research vessels. The small military garrison consists of 150 professional soldiers with modern weapons, armor, and vehicles, including several high-speed patrol boats and heavy VTOL transports designed for search and rescue missions. As noted, Sassaria's military mission is not oriented toward combat, but rather toward supporting the planet's scientific and economic community.

Halcyon City also boasts significant drydock and shipbuilding facilities where ocean-going vessels can be assembled and serviced. Recent upgrades have made Halcyon's port facilities even more modern and impressive, as the huge submersible *Adrianna* is under construction.

Outside Halcyon City, research bases are also well equipped with surveying equipment, computers, and communications, but can be challenging places to live due to long stretches of isolation and harsh weather in the fall and winter. Though they are supplied on a regular basis and maintain near-continuous communications with Halcyon Control, these bases can go months without direct contact with the outside world, and rescue missions in the case of emergency may take days to arrive. As a rule, research bases are not equipped with weapons beyond those needed to defend against incursion by local life-forms, and even these weapons would not be sufficient to defend against an enraged emperor whale or leviathan shark. Fortunately, there have been very few incidents involving these frightening creatures.

Economy and Resources

Sassaria's real treasures are of the biological variety, as its complex ocean ecology is one of the most unusual ever encountered. For decades, scientists have had the world largely to themselves, carefully mapping and exploring in deliberate and almost leisurely fashion. Unfortunately, these days may be coming to an end, as the discovery of both mineral resources and possibly sentient life forms has attracted considerable outside interest.

Recent mineralogical surveys have revealed Sassaria's oceans to be rich in palladium, an element still used as a substitute for platinum in electronics and computers, and in tantalum, a strong ductile metal that is highly resistant to corrosion and chemical attack. Both of these elements can be found in undersea formations and also — surprisingly — in the seawater itself. Tantalum is especially common in the cold water "rivers" that flow up from lower depths, leading to calls for more exploration of the deep seas in hopes of actually obtaining large quantities of these metals.

Both island and undersea bases have begun to include specialized equipment and personnel to help locate palladium and tantalum resources, and also to locate any other useful substances that can be mined or refined. New submersibles with detection gear, deep core drills, and other scientific gear is being installed in some bases, and new ones are planned for deployment in deeper regions. An especially ambitious expedition into the **Curiel Abyss**, the deepest known trench on the planet, is in its early stages — the advanced submersible *Adrianna* is currently under construction in the Halcyon City dockyards, including a hull, locally-fabricated equipment, and components shipped from offworld, and is expected to be completed and ready for testing within a few months.

Government

Sassaria is governed by a scientific hierarchy, with senior directors in charge of individual research facilities and both economic and military personnel providing support. The entire world is under the authority of an appointed governor, currently **Dr. Aldeen Refford**, a distinguished academic with degrees in both political science and biology, who administers the planet from her offices in Halcyon City. Other authority on the world is by seniority and academic position — most directors are also professors or especially distinguished independent researchers working through government or corporate grants or special projects.

The discovery of palladium and tantalum in Sassaria's oceans has led to several large business interests "pulling strings" at a high governmental level, allowing an influx of business personnel investigating the feasibility of more extensive mining and refining operations. Though officially under the authority of the governor and senior scientific directors, corporate executives and employees tend to chafe at such control, and sometimes even undertake expeditions into unexplored regions of Sassaria on their own. Though this sort of high-handed behavior infuriates the scientists, there is little that can be done to prevent it, as powerful government officials are also interested in Sassaria's mineral wealth.

Ecology

Sassaria is home to a complex network of ecological systems, all interdependent and only minimally understood by the recently-arrived scientists. Billions of years of evolution in the unique environment of a world-spanning ocean has given rise to numerous species of plants, animals, and other entities from totally unknown phyla that are unique to Sassaria.

Flora and Fauna

The first 650 meters of Sassaria's oceans, known as the epipelagic zone, is home to the neo-vertebrates — creatures with the local equivalent of backbone and notochord, roughly analogous to familiar fish, marine mammals, and aquatic reptiles. Sassarian species are quite varied however, with anywhere from two to eight limbs or flippers and sometimes even multiple nerve clusters similar to brains that allow creatures to continue to function with little impairment even after significant tissue loss.

Plantlike species have likewise evolved to suit their environments. Shallow seas are home to beds of Sassarian kelp — vast matlike organisms sometimes covering hundreds of square miles and providing shelter to numerous animal species. Elsewhere, great stands of tall sea-trees can be up to 15 feet in diameter, and sprout great feathery branches up and down their length.

The deeper reaches of the oceans contain their own species as well, including members of a previously unknown phylum of life forms resembling ctenophores and sea-jellies, but present organs and cell structures that are quite different from both plants and animals. These creatures swarm in the deep and are known to be brightly bioluminescent, but very little is known of them.

The few scraps of land on Sassaria harbor species that have evolved to life on land, away from the ferocious competition of the sea. Most islands are too small to support much in the way of surface life — usually just low scrub-plants and possibly sea-avians and air-breathing neochordates that use them as rookeries or shelter. Larger islands are somewhat more fertile — some boast deeper topsoil, highlands and even rivers,

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with larger plant species, some of which may grow to 30 or 60 feet in height. Plants are primitive by the standards of other worlds, resembling giant tree ferns and club mosses. Animal species are small and similarly primitive, resembling rodents and insectivores, with a few larger predatory reptile and mammal analogues. The **ash serpent**, named for its mottled dark colors, is one of several species whose adolescent form is entirely aquatic, before transforming into the entirely terrestrial adult form.

Flying species are also common, preying on land creatures, skimming the surface of the sea for food, or diving deep and spending long periods of time beneath the waves. Some use Sassaria's small, craggy islands as safe shelter from oceanic predators, or havens in which to raise their young. One species, the **crimson wanderer**, is a four-winged, swallowtailed species that apparently never voluntarily alights on land or water, preferring to hunt, eat, and even reproduce entirely in the air.

Apex Creatures

Only a handful of Sassaria's countless species has been observed and categorized.

Sea Fang

The pack-hunting sea fang is an exothermic, fur-bearing creature analogous to predatory seals. Highly agile and almost preternaturally fast, sea fangs have three pairs of flippers and a powerful finned tail that allows them to pursue prey at high speed. Sea-fangs are also quite intelligent and use sophisticated hunting tactics when stalking prey such as the swift **arrowfish**, which can actually emerge from the water and fly for short distances, and the slow and ponderous but powerful **loxosus**, an enormous endotherm that travels in family-based schools of up to 100 individuals.



Emperor Whale

The most impressive species discovered thus far ranges from shallow waters to the dark reaches of the bathypelagic zone, over 13,000 feet deep. Originally called "god-whales" by their discoverer, these creatures have since been renamed "**emperor whales**" out of religious concerns. Emperor whales are truly massive creatures, up to 975 feet in length. Physically they bear some resemblance to their namesakes, but their



gigantic bodies are equipped with no fewer than 12 pairs of fins, as well as a great four-finned tail capable of stirring up enormous waves and swamping even sizeable vessels. Older and larger emperor whales bear great jagged callosities — massive organic outcroppings often mistaken for oversized barnacles — and these formations can grow to significant size — large enough to harbor their own ecologies, including sessile filter-feeders, schools of small fish and even colonies of dodecapods, intelligent multi-tentacled invertebrates similar to large octopi.

Leviathan Shark

Not even emperor whales are immune to predation, and these colossal beasts are hunted by the fearsome leviathan shark — great armored sharklike creatures with vast gaping maws, countless rows of jagged teeth



and long slashing fins tipped with razor-sharp tips. Leviathan sharks are probably the most feared creatures in Sassarian seas (at least so far), for they are ruthless hunters and often do not distinguish between their favored prey, the emperor whale, and research vessels with similar displacement and silhouettes.

Population Centers, Landing Sites, and Points of Interest

The largest landmass on Sassaria is the island of Ionia, which also harbors the majority of settlements and population. Elsewhere, the planet's 15 surface research stations and six undersea bases remain as lonely outposts of civilization, where dedicated scientists delve into the planet's many secrets.

Ionia

At about 90,000 square kilometers, Ionia is little more than a glorified island that provides a base for Sassaria's explorers and some land for the handful of surface-dwelling species on the planet. Surrounded by sandy beaches and rocky scublands, the central plateau is relatively pleasant, with small rivers and forests of ancient-looking "trees" akin to giant ferns and mosses, even primitive but familiar land animals akin to rodents and reptiles. The largest settlement, Halcyon City, is supported by a few other smaller bases and stations, as describe below.

Deepcore Station

Coring operations to determine the geological history of Sassaria are elaborate and expensive, so the first and largest of these was begun on land, in the heart of Ionia far from dangerous oceanic conditions. Now, decades later several sea-based core and drilling operations are currently underway but Deepcore Station continues to operate, drilling and extracting samples throughout Ionia and bringing them back here for study. So far, research has revealed much about Sassaria's violent geological past, but unknown to researchers, several recent cores contain fragments of ancient ythri technology. These artifacts are badly corroded and barely recognizable, but should a skilled researcher recognize them as the work of an advanced, sentient species, it will cause a sensation and increase demands for more extensive exploration.

Cencom Base

As Halcyon City grew so did the need for better communications with the galaxy in general, so plans were laid for a massive communications facility located in the Eros Hills, sheltered from weather and provided with geothermal energy through the underlying geological formations. Cencom Base has grown steadily for over 10 years, and is now a vast complex of antennae, generators, and communication uplinks, with a staff of six civilian and military communication experts. The link to the rest of the galaxy is vital, for it is the only place where FTL communications can be sent or received — messages from any other facilities will take months to arrive, meaning that in the case of a dire emergency, the planet could be on its own for as long as a full year. Cencom Base is secured behind fences and barbed wire, but has no other security forces.

Due to its importance the base is under official military command, with **Captain Casim Duray** in charge. A career military man with little tolerance for civilians,

Duray sees his position as punishment for past failures and considers Sassaria a place of exile rather than the scientific wonder that it is.

Windstar Point

The study, analysis, and forecasting of Sassaria's weather is an important scientific endeavor, in addition to being vital to the survival of the planet's inhabitants, for the ferocious storms that lash the surface in the fall and winter could prove disastrous unless sufficient warning is given. Windstar Point is a weather station located on a small Ionian Peninsula, with access to various automated weather facilities as well as orbital satellites that feed a constant stream of data, images, and measurements. Normally staffed by three meteorologists, Windstar Point delivers weather reports to Halcyon City, and especially to isolated and vulnerable research facilities around the clock. As with Cencom Base, loss of Windstar Point might prove catastrophic, especially during the most violent months of fall and winter. **Dr. Kaylen Mornello** is senior researcher here — this is her first position with any real authority and she is determined to do a good job, to the point that her two fellow researchers consider her to be an overbearing, humorless autocrat.

Halcyon City

Halcyon Base, the first tiny outpost on the planet has, over the past several decades, grown into a good-sized city with a population that varies from 20,000 to almost 40,000, depending upon planetary events and academic activity. The city is centered on the spaceport and its extensive maintenance facilities.

Halcyon City is relatively small and most travel within its boundaries is on foot or by public transport. A series of automated electric skimmers crisscross the city, and can carry a passenger from one end to the other within a few minutes. These skimmers follow specific preprogrammed routes but can be rerouted based upon current traffic, weather, and specific events, and are free for public use. The transport network is administered and controlled from offices in the TAAC.

1. Azimuth Spaceport

Located on the heights above the settlement, the spaceport marks the site of the first landfall on Sassaria, over 50 years ago. Today, as the base has grown into a sizeable city, the original outpost is now a fully-functional spaceport with four great landing berths capable of accommodating anything up to a heavy transport or cargo hauler, repair and maintenance facilities, warehouse space, and a modern space- and air-traffic control facility. The spaceport also serves a base for atmospheric craft, from high-altitude survey drones to rescue VTOLs, long-range survey aircraft, and more.

2. Camp Silver

Azimuth Spaceport also contains the main base for Sassaria's small military garrison. Under the command of **Colonel Alen Forrester**, the military complement consists of about 100 marines and officers. The base is considered a low-risk assignment, and most of the marines here specialize in maintenance, technical support, and civilian operations such as weather forecasting, geological surveys, medical procedures, assisting with research, and rescue operations. The garrison's vehicles consist of sturdy seagoing patrol vessels, a big hybrid air-sea cargo craft and a pair of transport VTOLs modified to withstand extreme weather conditions. Weapons consist primarily of light firearms intended to deal with hostile local life forms.

The marines of Camp Silver are easy-going professionals, nearly all of whom are volunteers who have an interest in working to assist the scientific mission. While for the most part work here is pleasant due to the climate, exotic surroundings, and interesting fellow inhabitants, seasonal weather can be harsh, making supply and rescue missions especially challenging. Many is the time that imperiled scientists have been saved from ferocious storms by the marines' quick action, and relations between the military and scientific community have, until recently, been quite warm.

Since the discovery of Sassaria's resources however, the marines of the garrison have had to walk a fine line, providing security and support to corporate expeditions that may lead to industrialization and mining, which in the opinion of many scientists will spoil the pristine world. Colonel Forrester has done his best to maintain a balance between the two interests, but he and his marines are beginning to think they are being used as pawns in the struggle between scientific and economic interests.

3. Captain Theos Adamsk Administrative Complex

This facility, named for the captain of the *Azimuth*, the vessel that first discovered Sassaria, is usually referred to simply as the TAAC, and forms the center of administration for the entire planet. From a small cluster of utility trailers it has grown into a number of white utilitarian buildings housing offices, meeting spaces, computer servers, communications and satellite monitoring facilities, and more.

Governor Aldeen Refford's offices are located in the central complex hall. In the past, Refford and her staff were almost always available for meetings and consultation, but with recent activity she has been growing increasingly busy and her time is now scheduled days or weeks ahead of time. Bureaucratic concerns with both business and military matters are taking more and more resources, and Refford has begun to consider finally retiring after her decades of service. It's entirely possible that if she does this she will actually retire to Sassaria and take a position at one of the research facilities — such is her love for this ancient and mysterious planet.

4. Library

This modest facility is housed in two single-story structures but contains or has access to almost the entire breadth of human knowledge, as it is linked directly to Cencom Base's FTL communications network and has near-instant access to libraries and university's throughout nearby space. This connection is highly expensive and difficult to maintain, but quick access to information is critical to Sassaria's scientific community.

In addition to its direct link to FTL communications, the library also maintains an extensive collection of encyclopedia, science texts, historical documents, and other important items in digital form, available to all registered Sassarian inhabitants. The facility is entirely automated with no librarian or staff, and is maintained by both military specialists and technical support personnel from the TAAC.

5. University of Elherrin Campus and Research Facility

Several prominent colleges have facilities on Sassaria, but the UoE campus is the largest and best-equipped, with classrooms, laboratories, and dormitories. Both students and professors may spend multiple semesters here, and competition for open positions is quite intense. The labs and resources on this campus are also shared

with the Sassarian scientific community at large — meetings and conferences frequently take place here, as well as press conferences and announcements of major new discoveries. The university also has several of its own research vessels, ranging from several small boats equipped with cameras, depth finders and collecting gear, all the way up to the research ship *Ocean Discovery* and the long-range trimaran *Zephyr*. Both vessels spend most of the year at sea, returning only to replenish supplies and take on new students.

6. Regus Corporation

With the increase in economic interest in Sassaria, several corporations have chosen to locate branch offices or outposts here — Regus Corporation is the largest of these. Specializing in mining and construction, Regus has sponsored a number of expeditions throughout the planet, seeking more information on its mineral resources. So far the results have been encouraging, with the deep trenches and submarine mountain ranges proving to be quite rich in palladium, tantalum, and other rare metals. This multi-story structure houses Regus' offices, communications, and laboratories, as well as living quarters for the corporation's representative, **Nalren Kezun**, an experienced executive rumored to be an accomplished psychic or (according to some) technomancer.

While Regus' labs are especially advanced, they are highly specialized, focusing primarily on the corporation's economic interests. Regus' agreement with the governor required cooperation with the scientific community and full access to all labs, reports, and research equipment, but some scientists have complained they are being put off or avoided through elaborate bureaucratic means such as extensive applications and long waiting lists. A few now suspect that Kezun and Regus are hiding something, as the pace of their research has increased dramatically over the past few months. In particular, Regus has imported numerous highly sophisticated remotely piloted vehicles equipped with detection gear whose exact nature remains unknown. Regus has also provided significant funding to the construction of the submersible *Adrianna*, and has offered to allow several of its most prominent researchers and scientists to the mission free of charge.

7. Housing

Halcyon City's growing population is housed in these pre-fabricated structures — multi-storied, boxy, and thoroughly unglamorous, individual apartments are single rooms with small closets, cramped bed, limited kitchen and bath facilities, and small communication/entertainment suites. On the positive side, each has a tiny balcony looking out over the city to the blue ocean beyond, but for the most part these apartments are minimal at best.

8. Halcyon Medical Center

Like most of the other structures on Sassaria, the central hospital is utilitarian and unimpressive-looking. Nevertheless, it boasts modern surgical and treatment facilities, as well as a highly advanced immunology/epidemiology lab where Sassarian microorganisms are studied and tested to determine whether they represent any danger to the galaxy at large. So far, all such organisms have proved relatively benign, but the studies continue.

Hospital director **Dr. Tamboor Crowlen** was a pioneer of exomedicine, working on several frontier worlds before being assigned here. Highly knowledgeable, Crowlen is also considered to be somewhat prickly and hard to approach, but always advocates policies that are best and most generous to hospital doctors and researchers.

The HMC's trauma and emergency departments are particularly skilled, including several military doctors with combat experience, able to handle most major events, including accidents, attacks by local wildlife, injuries from heavy weather, and so on. Their only limitation is the relatively small size of the staff — any large catastrophe that affects more than a score or so victims will strain their capacity significantly.

9. Market

With a population that can climb as high as 40,000 Halcyon City's needs have been growing significantly, and outside vendors have recently been allowed to open small retail operations here. The new mercantile district consists of a single street lined with shops selling food, clothing, reading material, entertainment software and devices, computers, office supplies, and more. Retailers are limited to modest structures, and the sale of weapons and other potentially destructive devices is strictly forbidden. A few enterprising souls have gone further, and two new restaurants and a tavern have recently opened to significant business.

10. Halcyon Hotel

Tourist access to Sassaria is seriously limited but not entirely forbidden. Those wishing to visit the planet must apply and usually wait for several months before receiving approval. The number of applications has been growing of late, and at any one time, up to 100 offworlders may be spending time on Sassaria and most will be staying here at the planet's only hotel facility, catered to by its staff of hospitality androids. While the rooms are comfortable and clean and the small restaurant and bar are both popular even with non-guests the Halcyon is anything but a luxury hotel, despite the high prices for everything.

The Halcyon sponsors tours, expeditions to various islands and research facilities, and even sometimes arranges for guests to accompany research parties on short trips. The resources that it returns to the local economy are appreciated, and tourists are generally tolerated, for most come here with genuine curiosity and concern for the planet and its ecology.

11. Greenleaf Park

This pleasant stretch of greenery lies along the city waterfront and features a large number of Sassarian land flora, from the carpet of blue-green highland clover to the towering tree-ferns from the Ionian interior. Informative data terminals display facts about the planet and its life forms, and several small tables allow for outdoor dining and relaxation. The park is popular with students and researchers who grow weary of staring at the interior of their unglamorous apartments and labs.

12. Vehicle Garage

While most travel within Halcyon City is via the public transport network, various vehicles are available for other tasks, such as expeditions within Ionia, carrying supplies, and emergencies. This garage contains most of the vehicles in Halcyon City, available for use by authorized individuals such as senior researchers, government officials, and academic staff. They include wheeled one- and two-person cars, heavier trucks and cargo haulers, rugged all-terrain vehicles, land-sea skimmers, and civilian VTOLs equipped with extra cargo and passenger space. Obtaining these vehicles is a purely automated process, with authorized users required to submit requests several days in advance, except in the case of emergencies, in which case existing reservations are cancelled and the vehicles are made available immediately.

13. Port Facilities

Surface and undersea vessels are vitally important to every aspect of life on Sassaria, providing transportation for research personnel and delivering supplies and relief crews to far-flung outposts throughout the planet. Halcyon City maintains the only full-service port facility on Sassaria, with berths for vessels large and small. Big research ships like the white-hulled *Sassarian Endeavor* spend significant amounts of time at sea — sometimes a year or more — and return here only briefly to rotate crews and take on supplies, and these operations must be done quickly, given the sheer number of projects and research personnel on Sassaria.

Though it is the largest ship on the planet with a crew of 100, the *Endeavor* is in many ways a typical research ship, with extensive underwater survey equipment, cameras, capture gear, laboratories with tanks for larger specimens, a well-equipped geological station, advanced underwater gear, a small fleet of remotely piloted vehicles, and two manned deep-diving submersibles. *Endeavor* is currently undergoing extensive refits — old research equipment is being replaced, and a cutting-edge underwater mapping suite installed to help delve nearly to the bottom of the world's deep trenches. She is scheduled to head out to sea again in a matter of weeks, and applications for crew are being reviewed. Her mission is greatly anticipated by both scientific and corporate sponsors, for it may lead to an even greater expansion of operations on Sassaria.

14. Dry Docks

Until recently Halcyon's dry dock and repair facilities were quite limited, able to provide general maintenance and minor repairs while seriously damaged vessels were forced to wait for months or even years before offworld parts and equipment could be delivered. In the past five years however, the port's repair and maintenance facilities have expanded enormously, with two large dry docks and four smaller ones, and now repairs and refits take only a fraction of the time they once did. The docks' most prominent current occupant is the *Theosus*, a mid-sized survey ship that survived an encounter with an emperor whale and was able to limp home despite significant damage. *Theosus*' hull is badly battered and large sections need replacement, so the unfortunate vessel remains in Halcyon's dry docks while new hull components are fabricated. Her crew remains in Halcyon, nervously hoping that her mission will not be cancelled due to the delay. Several have told stories of the attack, claiming that the emperor whale was particularly aggressive and seemed to stalk the ship in an intelligent fashion before being driven off with hastily-improvised weapons.

15. Adrianna

In the past, Sassarian research vessels were fabricated off-world and shipped here in sections for reassembly. The *Adrianna* is the first ship to be largely fabricated on-world, thanks to nearby facilities maintained by the Regus Corporation, and today the vessels' sleek silhouette towers above the harbor and nearby structures.

Not only is *Adrianna* set to replace the *Sassarian Endeavor* as the largest vessel on-world, she is also unique in that she is a hybrid surface/submersible, designed to withstand the pressures of Sassaria's deepest abysses. The celebrated **Captain Norcross Vance** has actually come out of retirement to command the vessel, attracting a crew of professional mariners who are currently in Halcyon City, training with elaborate computer and VR simulators.

Adrianna's designers, a team of both corporate and scientific engineers, are determined that no portion of

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Sassaria's oceans will be beyond the reach of *Adrianna* and her 350 crew. In fact, she will also be able to reach and explore all of the world's land masses as well, with a complement of aircraft and land vehicles, but the vessel's primary function will be exploring and mapping the world's sea floor, and providing a complete survey of Sassaria's mineral wealth. Biology, climate, and similar functions will be decidedly secondary, a fact that distresses many in Halcyon City's scientific community. Nevertheless, the vessel's upcoming expedition is being greeted with unbounded excitement, and competition for berths has grown increasingly fierce. Interplanetary media groups have secured space on board to chronicle the expedition for broadcast, which also troubles the scientists who see their work being ignored or displaced by entertainment concerns.

16. Harbor

Halcyon City was chosen for settlement largely because of its sheltered, deep harbor. In the years since *Azimuth's* landing, the harbor has been dredged and a breakwater installed, providing protection from heavy seas and seasonal storms.

17. Harbor Station

At the very end of the Halcyon City Harbor is this sturdy structure, containing communications gear, navigational beacons, cameras, and other gear intended to aid in- and outbound vessels and keep a close watch on the horizon for oncoming storms or other weather phenomena. Aided by the satellite network and the sophisticated gear at Cencom Base, Harbor Station normally runs itself with little need for maintenance. Such is its importance however, that two crew are kept on site at all times, ready to repair or replace failing components, or provide aid and direct communications in emergencies.

Ocean Stations

Research facilities either can be located on small islands or may simply be floating facilities moored to the sea floor. Assignments at these stations are highly challenging, and staff may go months without outside contact. Nevertheless, the personnel who staff these bases are considered the best of the best, and there is always significant competition for every new opening. Several researchers have become famous in the academic world for their papers and research on Sassaria, leading to constant demand for new projects and bases.

Most bases are named for the formation they are closest to, or the object of their primary research interest. Several of the more prominent stations are listed below.

1. Kaden Shelf

The first and largest remote base houses over 100 personnel and is located about 185 miles west of Ionia, near the edge of the undersea shelf that it is named for. Projects here are well-established, including undersea mapping with both drones and manned submersibles, biological surveys, and climate studies. Kaden Station's senior director is the irascible **Dr. Theossa Gossan**, who has spent the past three decades of her life delving into Sassaria's secrets. Both Dr. Gossan and the base were rocked recently by the loss of the submersible *Corbin* and three crew, which had been dispatched to investigate a series of sub-oceanic tremors emanating from where the Kaden shelf drops off into the deep waters of the Fenris Abyss. Search parties have found no trace of the vessel, and the disappearance has put the entire facility on edge. A team of deep water search specialists from the Halcyon City garrison are scheduled to arrive soon, along with an advanced rescue submersible and cutting-

edge equipment, but Dr. Gossan fears conflict between her staff and the military.

2. Rocallus Massif

A single tremendous granite formation nearly the size of a continent, the Rocallus Massif is one of the most baffling and fascinating objects on Sassaria. Only a single tip of the mountain a couple of acres in area pokes its head above the waves, making a precarious home for the station and its 18 personnel. Chief researcher **Andraya Shen** oversees a highly motivated and professional staff — indeed, only the most dedicated and hardy could last more than a few weeks in such an isolated and comfortless location. A small navy of undersea drones is in constant motion, observing, taking video and still images, and mapping the huge and so far inexplicable structure. Recent readings indicating some portions of the massif are hollow were at first put down to equipment malfunctions, but since then similar readings have suggested the original measurements were indeed correct. Dr. Shen has requested additional personnel and support vessels to look into the matter further, but so far her superiors in Halcyon City have failed to deliver, forcing her to consider taking matters into her own hands and mounting an underwater expedition using only the resources at hand.

3. Soren Vent

In some regions, massive outflows of near-boiling water help to warm lower oceanic depths, attracting a wide range of strange life forms. Soren Vent is one such location, and the nearby island of Gaither's Folly makes the location ideal for a research facility. Surprisingly comfortable, the island actually has topsoil and substantial vegetation, and the research station now has 28 personnel, a manned submersible, and three surface vessels equipped with cameras, temperature sensors, mineral testing equipment, and more. The discovery of tantalum in the hot water from the vent has attracted considerable interest, and recent tests suggest that this is an especially rich source of the mineral.

4. Dragon's Gate

The formation called Dragon's Gate is a tremendous freestanding natural (or at least seemingly natural) arch rising 1,000 feet from the sea, from depths of over 1-1/4 miles. The arch itself is a keyhole formation, and the massif from which it rises is a single mass of igneous rock. Exactly what forces — natural or unnatural — caused the rock to rear up above the waves, then bored a gigantic hole in the center are a deep and abiding mystery, and the fact that it stands above one of the richest biomes in Sassaria made it the natural location for a research base.

The base is partially built from the body of Dragon's Gate itself, carefully anchored without damaging the actual structure, and extending out to sea on floating piers. The station is also moored to the bottom on long adamant cables and derives power from a combination tidal and solar power, with a communications array that floats on the adjacent surface.

With a permanent crew of 24 under the command of the brilliant but eccentric **Dr. Nysha Farlane**, a patrol VTOL, two surface boats, and a manned submersible, Dragon's Gate Station is one of the best equipped bases on the planet. Built low to the water, the base is deceptively delicate, built to withstand the storms that periodically ravage the region — harsh even for Sassaria.

Extensive growths of the local life forms collectively called coraloids rise up from the sea floor in eerie columns alongside the great igneous mass that forms Dragon's Gate. These columns are gnarled, twisted

structures harboring hundreds of aquatic species, providing shelter and hiding places as well as fertile depressions where many species of undersea vegetation grow, sometimes forming great thickets that can conceal both predator and prey.

The station maintains a small underwater facility on a shelf about halfway down the arch's volcanic massif. Up to four crew can occupy this cramped and precarious outpost at a time, but its location provides an unparalleled location for observation of sealife and underwater climatic and geological phenomena.

5. Blackwater Precipice

The Blackwater Abyss plunges over 6-1/4 miles into cold and unexplored depths. The research station at Blackwater Precipice is perched on the very edge of the Ionian Shelf, less than 330 feet from the sickening drop into the Abyss. Originally intended purely as an automated station that monitored currents and water temperature, Blackwater Precipice was expanded and turned into a fully staffed facility two years ago when a massive upwelling of cold water rich in tantalum was detected. Since then, living quarters and a permanent command post were added, along with drilling, coring, and sampling equipment. In addition to senior researcher **Andros Mulvin**, a dedicated geologist and metallurgist, Blackwater also houses a small team of specialists from Regus Corporation overseen by Operating Officer **Ressilian Tarq**, but the specific nature of their work has been kept secret from the scientific team. Some scientific personnel, unhappy with the presence of Regus employees, have been surreptitiously investigating corporate activities, and found several highly sophisticated deep-water probes have been sent over the edge and into the abyss, each sending back volumes of heavily-encrypted data before disappearing altogether. So far no one knows (or admits) what happened to the probes, and the new submersible *Adrianna* is scheduled to investigate the Blackwater Abyss as soon as she is fully seaworthy.

6. Rendell Core Facility

Resembling a petroleum drilling facility more than a research base, the Rendell Core houses a crew of 50. The coring unit was brought in from offworld several years ago and only recently began full scale operations, digging deep into the sea floor 1,600 feet below. The rocky surface has proven challenging, requiring specially enhanced drill heads and especially sturdy shafts. The effort has been considerable, but so far the results have proved worth it, bringing up massive quantities of information about the planet's past — its geological eras, climate, and life forms.

One of the most amazing discoveries was that once, over 50 million years ago, this portion of the ocean was above water and contained a huge variety of vegetation and animal species, including some highly advanced forms with near-mammalian physiology. The end came swiftly, for the cores also tell the story of a sudden, catastrophic flood that wiped out all surface life in a matter of weeks — a disaster of truly epic proportions. The surface species were quickly replaced, too — post-flood layers show some signs of large invertebrates that share some characteristics with modern actinarians — sea anemones. Only a few fragments of these forms have been discovered, for such species doesn't leave extensive fossil records, but their presence has been enough to excite considerable interest among the facility's biologists and paleontologists, especially since no similar extant species have yet been discovered.

7. Temple Island

The northernmost research facility on the planet, Temple Island is icebound for much of the year, and its researchers are especially independent and self-reliant. Structures are low and sturdy, and much of them are underground, providing both warmth and protection from the hostile climate. Boats and submersibles are likewise tough, and the base's repair facilities can fix or jury rig just about anything with the materials at hand.

Though it is isolated and often neglected, Temple Island is one of the most important bases on Sassaria, because it is the only one located near the territories of the mysterious aquatic creatures called the tasryn. So far these pack-dwelling otterlike life forms have avoided contact with outsiders, though some evince curiosity and even signs of sentience. It is this last that is most critical, for the discovery of a sentient species would effectively put Sassaria off-limits to economic development until its inhabitants have reached a point at which they can be approached and negotiated with diplomatically. The biologists of Temple Island are among the most devoted (and, in the eyes of some, fanatical) researchers on Sassaria, and many of them openly wish to prove tasryn sentience as a means of protecting the world from the ravages of what they call "corporate greed." Senior Researcher **Dr. Sara Macaulus** is among the most dedicated of the station's researchers, determined to prove once and for all that the tasryn are intelligent, and to make sure they are not harmed or exploited as a result.

8. Coreni's Labyrinth

In the early days of exploration on Sassaria, several key discoveries were made, including a number of strange formations dubbed "labyrinths" due to their intricate and detailed nature. Viewed from above these formations do indeed resemble labyrinths — elaborate networks of rock walls tangled together in maddening patterns that, on the surface, would confuse even the most experienced adventurer. Underwater of course, all one needs do is swim above the formation to escape it, but the very existence of the labyrinths has presented a thus-far unsolved puzzle. No one is sure exactly what natural forces created them — are they the result of unknown geological activity? Were they created by some life form as a home or refuge? Or (as some of the more radical thinkers suggest) are the labyrinths the remains of cities or other creations of a vanished race of sentients? This last suggestion is largely ignored by the scientific community at large, but its adherents are quite firm in their beliefs.

Coreni's Labyrinth Station (or simply "Labyrinth" as it's the only research base near one of these formations) was built on a small scrap of sandy land just to answer some of the more pressing questions about the labyrinths and their origin. Boasting both a small and compact but well-equipped surface base and an underwater habitat, Labyrinth Station carries on a lesser-known but highly fascinating study, with a staff of 18 highly motivated (and possibly slightly mad) researchers.

9. Piper Echo/Subecho

The research station dubbed Piper Echo is the most remote and isolated base on Sassaria. It is over two full day's transit distant even by high-speed transport — slower vessels may take days or even weeks to get here. Located on a single tiny scrap of land, Piper Echo has a crew of 40 in its surface facilities, with another 10-20 researchers in its undersea habitat, Subecho.

Piper Echo serves a multitude of functions — its location allows for easy biological surveys and collecting, the nearby Tango Seamount has provided a wealth of oceanographic, geological, and metallurgical data, and its

Planetarium

docking facilities can provide maintenance and support for even large vessels. Piper Echo is currently slated to operate as the main base of operations for the giant submersible *Adrianna* during its unprecedented expedition to the Curiel Abyss, only a few hundred miles distant.

1. ECHO ISLAND

Less than a square mile, Echo Island is covered in low vegetation, rising to a height of about 325 feet, topped by clusters of big fern-trees and club moss. There is a freshwater spring near the summit and sufficient volcanic activity to provide for a thermal power station, making the island a near-perfect location for a research facility. Shortcomings include its extreme isolation and the periodic storms that lash the island and its reliance on supply missions for food, fuel, and other essentials.

2. ECHO LAGOON

This stretch of still, shallow water extends between the Reefwall and the island proper. It contains a wealth of local life forms and is the subject of extensive research, testing, and observation in its own right. The base maintains several small research craft and one cargo submersible that are normally moored here.

Scientists also engage in recreational swimming, diving, and fishing here, enjoying its warm and relatively safe waters. From time to time larger predators may visit the lagoon and cause disruption — rather than seeing such creatures as a threat, the station scientists leap at the opportunity to get up close and personal with some of Sassandra's more dangerous creatures and their habits.

3. ECHO REEFWALL

The island is surrounded by a reef made up of the calciferous skeletons of coraloids — local organisms akin to familiar corals. The reef not only supports a vast range of life forms, some found nowhere else, but also provides the island with protection against storms. The reef itself has gaps marked with buoys allowing smaller vessels such as launches, research boats, and the base's submersible to enter, while large ships make port at the nearby floating docks.

4. FLOATING DOCKS

These big structures are attached to great pistons that are in turn attached to piling sunk into the sea floor 660 feet below. Larger research vessels can moor here and access the island via launch or VTOL.

5. STORAGE AND MAINTENANCE

A series of low, prefabricated structures near the beach contain storage for food, fuel, building supplies, tools and other gear.

6. LIVING QUARTERS

Initially, living space on Echo Island consisted of small one- and two-person shelters, but in recent years have grown into simple but comfortable apartments, with their own cooking facilities, small washrooms, computer access, and storage. Currently there are 50 units, capable of housing the entire research staff plus ten or so visitors.

7. COMMAND COMPLEX

The nerve center of the island research center consists of three low geodesic domes — one large central structure and two adjacent, connected by low tunnels, partially sunk below ground level. The main structure houses communications facilities, computers, surveillance stations, mapping gear, and offices. The smaller of the two adjoining structures contains the director's living quarters and storage while the larger houses the base's main communications array, including uplink dish and direct line-of-sight com gear.

Base commander **Dr. Belos Parnham** spends most of his time here and at the research complex, to the point that other researchers consider him something of a

workaholic. His recent flurry of activity is due to some new theories he is developing regarding the planet and its ancient history — he believes he has seen evidence of symmetry and intelligent design in the outlines of some old undersea structures. His curiosity was raised nearly to the level of obsession when some deep sea probes returned images of very similar structures at extreme depths before malfunctioning. He also believes he's seen glimpses of large unknown creatures as well, and has begun to entertain the notion that if the planet was once inhabited, some of its original owners might live on in remote corners of the ocean. He is especially interested in the upcoming *Adrianna* expedition, and has been pulling strings to be included on its crew.

8. RESEARCH AND MEDICAL COMPLEX

A second pair of domes near the Command Complex contains laboratories, specimen tanks, computer archives, and a vast collection of digital images and video footage of local conditions, structures, and species.

Isolated for long periods, the base must fend for itself in many ways, especially when it comes to medical emergencies. The base's well-stocked hospital is also located in this complex, with a fully functional emergency room and operating theater, as well as recovery facilities, diagnosis equipment, and drug synthesis equipment. Chief medical officer **Dr. Harmonia Dugan** works here with two internists and is prepared to deal with almost any emergency.

9. AQUARIUM AND PENS

Collected species are kept in these pens and underwater aquaria, where local light and pressure conditions can be recreated.

10. ELEVATOR

Piper Subecho is connected to the surface by a 650-foot-long elevator shaft that terminates at this low hatch. Inaccessible in heavy weather, the elevator can carry up to four passengers and the entire trip lasts about five minutes each way. Heavier loads, supplies, and equipment must be carried by submersible.

11. CENTRAL SERVICE MODULE

Hardened against the pressures of its 650 foot depth, Piper Subecho is constructed of the same materials as some starship hulls and intended to remain here for a very long time. The base is divided up into a series of cylindrical modules, connected to each other by pressurized tunnels.

As above, Subecho has its own command center where power, communications, and life support are maintained. Command of the undersea base rotates among senior directors, each serving for a two week shift. Central Service Module (or CS) is also home to the base's scientific lab, video analysis unit, and medical bay.

12. DORMITORIES

Smaller and less comfortable than their surface counterparts, each dorm houses up to four residents, with shared facilities.

13. MESS

Located at the junction of the five dormitory cylinders, this chamber contains tables, chairs, food prep facilities, and a couple of holovid units for entertainment.

14. POWER PLANT

The base is independently powered, with hydrothermic conduits sunk deep in the ocean floor, harnessing the volcanic forces that first created Echo Island millions of years ago. The power plant itself is sunk into the sea floor, marked by a cluster of pipes and conduits leading to the various undersea structures. Such is the importance of the power plant that it is connected to the CS by a dedicated subsurface tunnel, and constantly staffed by at least one technician.

15. AIRLOCK

Entry and egress from the base is through this airlock module, which also contains scuba equipment, propulsion units, and three armored deep-water diving suits, used for especially hazardous missions or repair and maintenance.

16. SUBMARINE DOCK

Submersible vehicles on survey, research, and supply runs can dock here. The dock contains facilities for two vessels at a time, but the station's own vessel, the two-person sub *Sprindrift* is normally here at all times.

17. SURVEILLANCE NETWORK

The base is surrounded by a ring of sensors that constantly relay data back to CS — water temperature and pressure, seismic activity, sonic phenomena, and video images of surrounding terrain. This is partially for scientific purposes, but also for safety, as some undersea activities might present a hazard to the station's inhabitants. On several occasions, this station has detected oncoming pressure waves and even a pod of four emperor whales in the vicinity, which required emergency evacuation of the base.

18. SECURITY BARRIER

Recently completed in the wake of the emperor whale incident, the surveillance network has been supplemented by a security barrier consisting of a dozen pylons linked directly to the thermal power plant, which can deliver powerful electrical charges to the surrounding water. While sufficient to stun or kill many larger creatures, these pylons would do little against creatures the size of an emperor whale or leviathan shark, though its designers hope that they will be sufficient to discourage such beasts from coming any closer.

Adventure Hooks & Campaign Seeds

While at this time Sassaria remains a planet of primarily scientific interest, adventures on the world need not be limited to research and exploration. While adventurers may be brought in as scientific crew, academic officials, or students, they may also engage in such exotic pursuits as corporate espionage and military intelligence gathering. Even stranger adventures are possible as detailed below, involving Sassaria's mysterious and terrifying original inhabitants.

The Quest for Knowledge

The most likely role adventurers would play is as students, scientists, ship or submarine crew, or related personnel, brought to Sassaria to assist in exploration and research. This can lead to many of the adventure paths described below, and can also form a significant part of a campaign in itself. Students and teachers will of course be expected to assist in surveys, biological collection expeditions, patrols, and supply runs, or may be assigned to some of the bases described above. The challenges and possibilities of such assignments include encounters with dangerous local life forms, facing hostile weather, rescue missions, and major scientific discoveries — new species and geographical features, unusual natural phenomena, and even artifacts from the ancient ythrian civilization, proof positive that Sassaria was once inhabited by sentient creatures. This last would involve the adventurers in even more dangerous activities, for further research to learn more of the ythri would follow, and possibly even lead to the discovery that the planet's original owners are still around, and have grown deeply resentful.

Into the Depths

One of the best and most obvious sources of campaign inspiration is to have the adventurers serve as crew on board the brand-new *Adrianna*, a massive submersible of highly advanced design. In keeping with the best tradition of adventures like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Abyss*, characters assist with research and exploration, discover the truth about the strange undersea structures of the ythri, encounter the incredible life-forms of the deep sea, battle the elements, experience the terror of being trapped underwater in a race against time, and even discover that their greatest foes might be their fellow surface-dwellers — military or corporate spies intent on sabotage or subverting the mission.

Wildcat Miners

While Sassaria is officially off-limits to unauthorized visitors, rumors of the planet's metallurgical wealth have been slipping out steadily, leading to interest from both governmental and corporate entities. It has also caught the attention of less scrupulous elements, including criminals, smugglers, and others, some of whom have begun to consider engaging in some extralegal activity to exploit the planet's newly-discovered resources.

Characters may be recruited to assist with a "wildcat" operation on Sassaria. Though access is restricted, the planet is not well-guarded, and anyone wishing to venture there will only have to evade some light patrol craft. As only a fraction of the planet has been explored and mapped, setting up an illicit mining or refining operation should be relatively simple, but quite dangerous as the facility would be entirely on its own, unable to contact Piper Echo for help without risking severe legal consequences.

The hazards of this approach are obvious, for Sassaria's "normal" life forms and phenomena are deadly enough, but if the illicit facility is located near a major rift with a tantalum upwelling, it may attract the attention of the ythri, who would quickly descend on the base and remove it. Even without intervention by the world's ancient masters, creatures such as sea-fangs, emperor whales, or leviathan sharks make everyday life dangerous, while undersea earthquakes, surface storms, and other natural disasters could end the wildcat operation quite effectively.

Saving the Tasryn

Though the ythri remain unknown to researchers, the discovery of the otter-like tasryn has sparked considerable interest in the scientific community. The possibility the planet may contain a true sentient species has alarmed some in the corporate world, for if confirmed, tasryn sentience would call a halt to all economic activity on Sassaria. Though most corporations would simply take their losses and chalk it up to the whims of fate, some executives might be unscrupulous enough to take matters into their own hands.

Characters may be scientists, visitors, or staff taken on to assist with work in Sassaria's northern regions, or they may simply be on-world and caught up in events. Outside entities — mercenaries, unscrupulous adventurers, or corporate security teams — have been employed to exterminate or drive out the tasryn, and the characters must either help the creatures or stand aside and allow genocide to occur. This can lead to open combat with well-equipped paramilitary forces, defense of tasryn family groups, rescue missions, and even delivery of evidence of the enemy's crimes and the true sentient nature of the tasryn.

The Dwellers Beneath

It's very likely, but of course not necessary, that most of the adventure paths described above lead to conflict with the alien and vengeful ythri. Long isolated in darkness, alone with their hatred and miraculous ancient technologies, the ythri may decide that their world's "invaders" have gone too far, emerging from the depths to assault isolated bases, capture prisoners for study, destroy important facilities, or attack research vessels and submersibles, with the goal of driving the intruders from their world.

There are several paths such a campaign could take, ranging from straight action to outright cosmic horror. In any case, it should start slowly, with minor but inexplicable events — strange visions at night or psychic flashes, unexplained disappearances or lapses in communication, sightings of unknown creatures in

the waters near the PCs' base of operations. Characters may also be biologists or archaeologists who discover proof of the ythri's origins and, more frighteningly, of their continued existence. Psychic or magic-wielding characters could make unwanted contact with the ythri. The party may stumble upon the ythri's abandoned dimensional gates and inadvertently awaken creatures best left slumbering.

Should this happen, the ythri may at last decide to strike out, using their surviving advanced technology or still-functional planar travel devices to open gates to other realities and summon the strange beings that drove them mad in the first place, unleashing these horrors on the entire sector. As this would naturally lead to an entire campaign aimed at facing the ythri and their allies, any adventures on Sassaria would be the prolog to a longer and more elaborate story.



Chapter Ten:

Kiás

The Meeting

Its mind full of ideas on how to better the fish scrubbers, Arpasha comes late to the meeting of the Circle. The clink-clink of its four feet on the bare crystal floor create an odd contrapuntal rhythm to the slow, stately melody already underway. Arpasha takes its place on the last remaining cushion in the spherical meeting room and looks out to the stars beyond in an attempt to store away fish plans and focus on the meeting at hand. Two strong themes are resonating throughout the Circle's song today. Family Paliska, the largest unit on the K2 station, is clearly advocating for an immediate search and rescue mission to recover the lost mining crew. No wonder as most of the crew was — is? — from the Paliska group. It appears several other families have joined their voices to the Paliska song. Underlying the strident tones of this song, however, a sad, cautious theme floats ethereally from several members of the Circle. They sing of previous losses and an unwillingness to endanger more kiásians. Subtle tones also point out K2's inability to replenish the landing vehicles if another mission goes awry.

Arpasha is fully centered on the cushion and has drawn in its legs, locking its body in place. It sends out a high-pitched flutter — an apology for being late to the Circle. The ripple of sound is quickly absorbed into the Circle's song and very short notes of acceptance and disappointment bounce through the sphere, bringing a brief shift to the major themes before disappearing. One of Arpasha's kin was on board the latest lost venture. A young cartographer charged with mapping out the modifications that were found in the planetside mines. Ahh — some in the room are singing the question of what might have created the new tunnels and enlarged the old. An argument over whether any of the forsaken could still be living in the abandoned underworld. This thread of song is an old one, sung between Treszka, who refuses to believe that they all died, and whoever most recently bites on to the old argument with well-trod reasons about they could not have survived. Arpasha is unsure about this, but something has been tunneling and something destroyed this latest mission as well as two others over the previous three years. It is not time for a rescue mission, but time for a war party. Waiting until the melodies are balanced Arpasha introduces a new theme into the Circle's song. This will be a long discussion.

Kiás

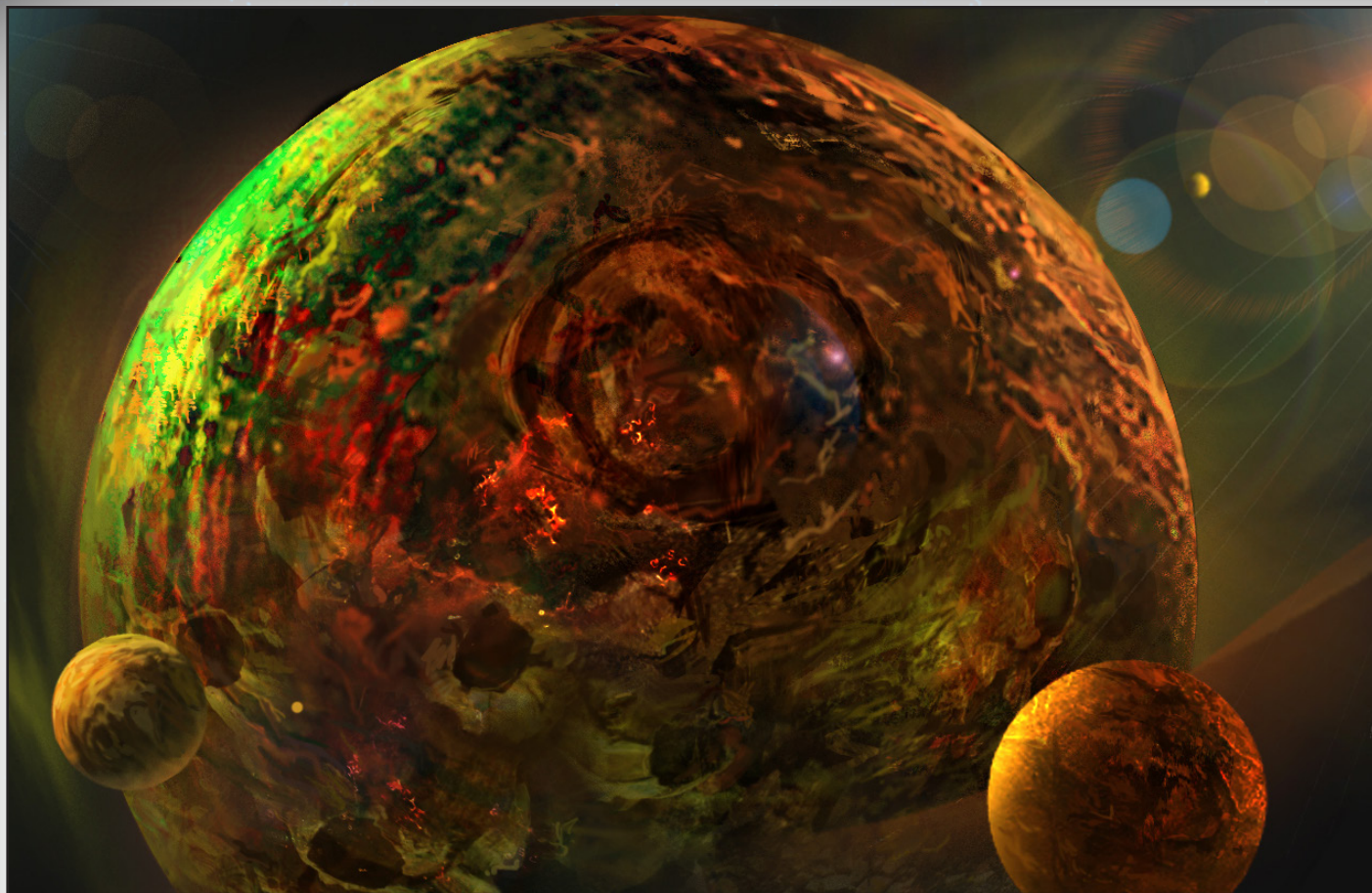
Kiás is a dead planet locked onto a red dwarf star. From the bubble station in close orbit around it, the planet runs from black to brown to red. Neither water nor life is visible from station K2. The only sign that the planet was once inhabited by a great civilization are the truncated hemispheres bulging from the surface spaced out in a thousand mile triangular grid. These mark the entrances to the great network of passages and chambers that spread throughout the subterranean regions of the planet — entrances that betrayed the promise of a new life underground. But the residents of the station know stories about what lives below the surface. They know what terrors have evolved in

the great underground spaces hollowed out beneath the surface. Before the water disappeared, before the atmosphere thinned to its current, poisonous state, the people of Kiás dug thousands of miles of tunnels and built great underground cities in an attempt to outlive their planet. But as the underground grew, so too did the difficulty in keeping the good air in and the bad air out as the hundreds of airlocks developed leaks, one after the other. Finally, in desperation, the kiásians looked upward to the sky. They built their current home — a geostationary structure of bubbles and tubes resembling the great tunnels and chambers they had carved out underground. They started late, and not all the residents could fit aboard the new floating home. Those that were left behind, the ones that survived, grew strong and bitter. They found ways to live with the poisoned air in the unchanging, underground spaces. Those aboard the bubble station forgot about the ones they abandoned and thrived in their new floating city. As the population grew their need for space increased. They needed minerals from the planet. And so they ventured back to the great underground vaults with crews and machines. Some did not return. Some did and brought back the stories of monsters beneath the surface. Monsters that had never been there before, but that seemed somewhat familiar. Monsters filled with hatred for the kiásians.

The surface of Kiás is divided into the side permanently oriented toward the red star Völös and the dark side. As the equilibrating winds vanished with the atmosphere, the temperatures on the bright side soared while the dark side rests in frozen isolation. Deep beneath the ground, the underground vaults maintain some air, and the old convection systems maintain most of the spaces at a comfortable middle temperature. There are places though that through cave-ins or new construction do not benefit from the ancient technology. These areas are either locked in permanently frozen gasses or have temperatures that blister and boil most life that gets near.

The temperate portions of the underground vaults house great lakes and areas where light tubes permit plants to grow slowly and steadily. Animals brought down from the surface generations ago still roam these areas, preyed upon only by the degenerate kiásians who survived their abandonment. Residences, temples, commercial areas, and former centers of government stand unchanged in an unchanging environment. Much of the architecture mirrors the tubes and spheres of the underground construction, and is mirrored in turn by the bubble station hanging above the planet's surface. With no sun to orient the underground construction, communities grew wildly in three dimensions. Ladders, ramps, and walkways run throughout the great vaults connecting the buildings like a great machine. The tunnels and vaults themselves are a mix of roughly cut, naturally occurring, and beautifully finished surfaces, although the vast majority remain as they were excavated. The residents of Kiás did not have time to complete the monstrous cavities they created in their world.

The three largest vault cities were excavated on the bright side of the world, about forty degrees north of the twilight zone that divides it from the dark side. The cities were known as Vaja, which housed central government, Tab, a community that developed a robust entertainment industry, and Hévíz, built on a great underground lake and former home to large aquatic



farms. They are located within a single hemisphere, with Tab about seventy degrees from Vaja and thirty from Hévíz.

Vaja

Vaja is the most orderly of the three major cities. Its spheres are arrayed with a circular order reflecting the structure of the erstwhile government. Great meeting rooms and audience chambers are in abundance, and everywhere corridors run from building to building. The structures are covered with partially completed murals representing the history of Kiás and its peoples. There are representations of oceans and croplands under a resplendent red sun and the mighty winds that kept the planet livable. Evidence of war and peace, advances in technology, and the abandonment of the surface can be found in the paintings. Within, the buildings are sedate. Elegant walls and spires separate and support the chambers. Stools covered in grey fabric stand ready before banks of analog audio recorders once used to preserve the history of governance.

Aside from government offices, there are stores, arenas, and public spaces. The residential quarters for the 20,000 former inhabitants are mostly simple but were built to last. Large parks with overgrown underground plant life are spaced throughout, supported by slender arches from the cavern floor or hanging by long cables from the ceiling. Garbage and toys left behind on move-out day remain, untouched by the intervening years. High up in the roof, some of the light wells are only thinly covered with dirt and trails of red light penetrate the darkness.

A few plants and some hardy animals have survived with the minimal solar energy available, and some have even prospered, filling out an ecological niche that didn't formerly exist.

Tab

Tab evidently grew much more organically than did Vaja, and much larger as well. At its heyday, Tab held almost 50,000 souls. No rhyme can be seen in its chaotic layout of arenas, pools, restaurants, lodges, and other expired places of pleasure. Lights of all colors still highlight the buildings, running on solar power from the surface. Carts sit ready to jet through wildly curving tubes around buildings and through the water, occasionally turning back on themselves in abrupt U-turns.

Within the buildings, reflectors send beams of light dancing through the corridors and smoke from long defunct foggers lingers in the air. There are luxurious hotels near the center of the city, and piles of squalid housing out toward the dark corners of the cavern. No natural light was permitted into this cavern, and the remaining lights do not reach as far as the slums. There is a series of four pools that once formed a 300-foot-tall recirculating fountain. Boats and other floats sit idle in the waters. The bottoms of the pools are emblazoned with reflective mosaics showing dancers and athletes.

After the residents left, small animals from the periphery made their way into some parts of the town, but the farms, once lit by artificial light, have long-since died away and with the loss of plant life, the animals, too, are nothing but piles of bone and ever-so-slowly decomposing desiccated flesh and skin.

Hévíz

Hévíz is the only city built entirely on one level. A great network of buildings and pathways floats on a lake some 37,000 acres in area. High above, the cavern ceiling is dotted with light tubes, all turned to capture the light from Völös and reflect it down on the city below. Due to their angle, many of them are only partially covered

by the surface dirt. The buildings are primarily spheres, like most Kiásian structures, but only the top halves are visible above the blue-green water. The lower halves look directly into the water, spying on what was once the largest aquatic farm of Kiás. Using water jets and tuned lights, the farmers of Hévíz attracted the swimming beasts toward their domes and then brought them in through airlock systems. Within the lower portions of these buildings are processing and packaging plants while above are the residential quarters of the former farmers.

Hévíz also has some buildings for local trade and socializing, but much of the life took place within each giant dome as the various family farms only interacted sporadically.

The Subterrene

Along with the major cities of Kiás, the subterrene comprises thousands of miles of tunnel and hundreds of smaller grottos. Many of the grottos were never fully occupied and contain only abandoned air handling equipment or transportation hubs. There are, however, dozens of towns ranging in size from a dozen interconnected domes up to a hundred. Most of them are decorated in bright colors with simple patterns. The usual village design includes one or more ponds of 12 to 24 acres and several small agriculture areas under light tube arrays. Most of the portholes to the outer world have been buried over the years since Kiás was abandoned. In addition to solar crops, the kiásians raised some parasitical and scavenger flora and small aquatic and terrestrial fauna.

During the days of construction and habitation, the people of Kiás could travel from hub to hub on a system of pneumatically powered vehicles. These cylindrical vehicles were shot from one station to the next through well-crafted tubes. Most of the cars and all the propulsion systems were cannibalized for parts to build the new space station. Smooth, unlit tubes are the only obvious remnant of the transportation system.

The darker, colder side of the planet was extensively excavated for minerals. Many of the mines were sunk tens of miles deep below the surface. Minerals from the planet's ancient past, from back when it had a molten core within and oceans above, were exploited by the people of Kiás. It is these same minerals that they still have need of. But it is also in these deep pits that the last remaining good air sank. While the methane and hydrogen rose to the surface and slowly escaped through the hatches, oxygen and carbon dioxide sank down into the deep shafts. It is to these deep, cold, and unlit places that the forsaken have gone. They were the ones not connected to society — criminals and vagabonds. People who had cut ties or been exiled, but who did not expect to be abandoned, left without thought to their survival. Many of them did not survive. Most of them, in fact, perished within a few weeks, left without the food that had been provided to them. But some persevered. For them the will to live was great, and they found the means to find food, water, and air. Deep in these pits, they have been reborn as new species and have developed their own communities. And when the deserters try to return, they find a deep, abiding hatred awaiting them.

Sentients

Three main derivatives of the original kiásians can be found in the pits underneath the dead planet. While these groups have retained a version of the Kiásian language, they lost all technological knowledge and have developed new but much more primitive tools and weapons. They have also developed deep superstitions

about the overworld and those that might visit it. As more overworlders have been seen, however, the taboos against rising to the surface are eroding, but so far the lack of breathable air has kept them all in the three main mine shafts they inhabit. While the three groups have evolved independently, all have developed means for living in pitch blackness.

Kiásian

The primary sentient race of Kiás are a quadruped species with a two part tufted body. The upper tuft contains six light sensors spaced evenly around it and an acoustic membrane on the top surface. The membrane can be used to both produce and receive acoustic signals. Within the tuft is a large signal processing and computing organ. The lower tuft contains the primary ingestive, digestive, and excretory organs, but also contains sensitive smell receptors. Each of the four tripartite limbs ends in a four-fingered clawlike appendage that can be used for both delicate and major motor activities. The two tufts are each about 1-1/2 feet in height and close to 3 feet in diameter. The limbs, 1 foot in circumference, can extend to over 3 feet in length. Aboard the bubble station, kiásians breathe a mix of carbon dioxide and oxygen, but they can handle trace amounts of most other common gasses as they have a complex filtration system between their inner organs and the outer world. They eat proteinaceous and fibrous foods blended into water. The kiásian reproduce through externally deposited eggs.

In general, the kiásians are social, living and interacting primarily in extended family groups. They identify individuals primarily through scent and the greater the familial distance the greater the difference in scent. Kiásians govern themselves through a series of councils, called Circles. There are small Circles within the family and larger ones that meet to discuss the needs of the overall community.

In the distant past, the kiásians knew war amongst themselves, but their aural communication evolved to foment unity and harmony. Discussions begin with each member of the Circle humming a certain message, the total a cacophonous wreck. As they respond to one another, the tones and rhythms blend and synchronize until harmony is achieved. At this point, the Circle has been completed and a decision reached. On a



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smaller level, this same communication system is used with pairs and triplets as they meet to determine a course of action. Those individuals with differently functioning aural processing units were exiled from the communities planetside, but supported by their family members throughout their natural lives. On K2, the kiásians no longer make room for those they consider malfunctioning. Kiásians who do not fall into a circle are repossessed by the station's recycling system.

The kiásians developed a love of bold visual art and surround themselves with bright colors and big shapes. While not very refined, especially compared to their aural receptors, their light sensors can see in both the visible and the infrared range. They do have difficulty seeing into the violet end of the spectrum as they evolved with minimal light in this band. In contrast to their bold visual arts, kiásian music is subtle. Seldom straying far from the main note, pitch bends and beats are combined in complex ways nearly incomprehensible to most alien ears.

Pawan

The pawan live in one of the deep iron and nickel mines on the shady side nearly in line with Hévíz. There they have lost all sense of sight and have developed precision echolocation in response. In addition, using acoustic energies in the far subsonic range, they can communicate with each other over long distances with a modulated frequency-based signal. Their upper tuft has grown to almost 7 feet in diameter and has nearly absorbed the lower. Their legs have strengthened and claws densified to enable them to grasp onto the vertical surfaces of their home. The pawan have become exclusively protein eaters in their evolution, occasionally even eating each other's eggs if other sources of food dwindle compared to their own numbers. When the kiásians retreated to pits, prior to developing into their current species, they brought with them land-based animals and non-solar flora. These latter pull energy from the trace radioactive elements locked within the planet's core.

A Pawan Lair

A few hundred miles outside of Hévíz, deep in an old iron mine, a group of seventy pawans make their home. They have long since expanded the carefully drilled tunnels in a seemingly haphazard manner. Long, rough passages turn abruptly, frequently backing on themselves and even corkscrewing around and passing through the circles. Chambers are organically shaped but were all dug out piece by piece. The pawans do not live tightly. Typically, only two or three are found within any hundred-yard radius. They are, however, in constant contact through their subsonic waves. While no longer meeting to form Circles, the pawans are almost continuously sharing and refining thoughts for survival.

There are several chambers with water pools, and there is a slow trickle of fresh water coming down through the rocks to these pools. The pools support life, and the pawans have carefully nurtured them to ensure that the life is self-sustaining, as this is a major source of food for them.

In addition to the pools, there are two large chambers with terrestrial life. The first is near the upper entrance from the caves. Shaped like a three-dimensional lemniscate, it is home to a herd of six-limbed, blind, furry creatures known as nyúls. Nyúls grow to 12 or 15 inches in length and run with a smooth stride. The walls of this chamber are covered with a non-sentient, non-motile life form that pulls energy from the planet's radioactive minerals. The grasslike life is the food source for the nyúl, which in turn feed the pawan.

Much deeper below the mines, the pawan discovered a veritable treasure trove of radiation and carved out a

chamber in the shape of an artist's palette. Over 260 feet in width and approaching 65 high, it has become a veritable dark jungle. Multiple plant forms include grasses, vines, and trees — all feeding on terrestrial radiation rather than light from the sun. There is no light in any of these chambers, but even if there were, these plants would be a deep brown, nearly indistinguishable from black. Within this rapidly growing jungle live several animal types, some feeding off the plants and others off each other. The pawans are the primary predator and enjoy the challenge of a good hunt. Every once in a while, the predator becomes prey and a hunter does not return. It is possible, of course, that the predator and the prey were both pawan; much can happen in the deep jungle.

Aside from these areas focused on raising food, the chambers of the pawan would seem mysterious to most visitors. Even the kiásians, with their higher frequency communication, might not pick up on the long scale subsonic standing waves throughout their chambers — at least not until one of them stepped into a nodal location and was vibrated into a jelly. The pawans not only know where these locations are, they can modify them to some extent by moving themselves and the large number of seeming randomly placed boulders about the chambers.

Waj

The waj were inhabitants of the towns around Tab. Most had been removed from the Circles due to a medically-based inability to harmonize. After the desertion, they found naturally occurring crevices that allowed them to drop deep below the carved out structures. As time passed and they interbred, their acoustic membranes toughened even further. They eventually lost the ability to communicate aurally at all, but have developed a powerful sonic blast. The waj are able to control the blast to some extent, and have disintegrated portions of their underground vaults to create larger living areas and have even worked out methods to trap certain gasses as they are released from the surrounding rock. They also use their blasts to turn proteinate into digestible jellies. Waj typically live alone, only meeting occasionally for mating or defense.

Azis

The azis are perhaps the most dangerous of the forsaken kiásians for they have developed the ability to survive for long periods in the thin atmosphere of the upper caverns. Given the opportunity, it is possible they could even manage for short periods of time on the surface.

Their bodies have shrunk, leaving them only 3 feet in height, and their audio communication has consequently moved into the supersonic range. Because the sonic waves don't travel well in the light air, the azis have also learned to communicate through foot tapping and have developed a sort of running tap dance that allows them to move and communicate at once. When necessary, they can run with the soft parts of their claws down making almost no noise at all. The azis travel in packs of ten to twenty although where abundant food is found, gatherings of up to fifty may be seen. They regularly dine on remaining aquatic life and also eat from the abandoned vegetative life. The azis tend to live a nomadic existence, reducing the food supply in an area to almost unsustainable levels before moving along to the next. At various times they have occupied both Hévíz and Tab.

K2: The Bubble Station

One-hundred-and-seventy-five miles above the surface of Kiás, locked directly over the entrance to Vaja, floats the great outpost of the kiásians. Comprised of 22

primary and dozens of secondary and tertiary spheres, the Bubble Station houses the kiásians and all their livestock and farms. The largest spheres are about 300 feet in diameter, and the entire station occupies a volume approximately 3/4 of a mile across and roughly spherical. The shells are made from a transparent crystalline material. Tubes of the same material connect the spheres. Each sphere is portioned off from the others by multiple bulkheads; the most important spheres have up to five. The bulkheads have doors operated by sonic codes, some of which are known only to certain inhabitants and others of which are common knowledge. In general, most of the doors are left open most of the time. The area between the bulkheads can be evacuated to improve audio security or to deal with any unpleasant or deadly gasses. Each sphere has its own air handling system connected through exclusive piping to the master filtration system.

1. The Center of Power

The first bubble built remains at the center of the great floating colony. Initially containing manufacturing, life support, medical bays, and all else necessary to the survival of the new station, this 165-foot diameter sphere now houses the primary chamber of harmony where the clan heads meet to decide important events. Its history is maintained in great murals painted within the crystalline globe. The chamber is bisected by a metallic plate. Beneath the plate, their noise isolated with vacuum insulated chambers, are the great gravity machines that are used to lend the governmental meetings the weight of authority that comes when the full Circle is seated. Interspersed between them are the digital recorders that store the modern musical consensuses reached by the Circle.

The top half of the chamber is filled with circles of tiered benches radiating out from the center in staggered lines. Each bench is covered with its occupant's unique colored pattern, in stark contrast to the muted council benches of the home world. Near at hand are four basins lined with a soft, sound deadening material where the kiásian can set its legs. Suspended above the benches are a great series of acoustic panels, precisely designed to bring sound from all the seats to the center and back out, so that each member's voice is spread uniformly throughout the hall. Above these panels are carefully muffled air handling systems. These generally pull air from the central air filtration system, but in times requiring great secrecy, the entire central orb can be acoustically separated from the rest of the colony for up to twenty hours with a full contingent of 620 kiásians, or proportionately longer with fewer.

2. Accounting

Life in a space colony requires detailed records and plans accounting for food, air, waste, entertainment, construction, and all the small pieces allowing a tight, isolated community to survive and thrive. The details of this are housed in the accounting sphere. Bureaucrats volunteered from most all the families are housed here, each in its own sound-proofed floating cubical. The 10-foot cubes are packed in tightly. Most have only one free face — the one with aperture hatch — but the edge and corner cubes have additional free faces and those on the outermost edges and corners have windows in the free sides that look out to the other spheres and the universe beyond.

Other than the few with windows, the cubes are all pretty much the same. Each consists of a simple bench with claw grips and a workstation. The accounting computers are controlled audibly and use harmonic-based processing to calculate the needs of the colony

and how best to keep the entire system in balance. The units communicate to one another through cables running in parallel with the air cables and power lines snaking between the layers of cubes.

At the center of the accounting department is the central computer, its great storage banks filled with data from all the many other departments necessary for the operation of the Bubble Station. Triply redundant and powered by its own generators, the system is designed to withstand complete separation from the rest of the colony. The kiásians working there would only survive a few hours, however.

The accounting chamber is approximately 130 feet in diameter and made with an older crystal formation that is not quite as transparent as much of the rest of the station. While there are nearly a thousand cubes floating within, generally only a third of them are occupied.

3. Festival Chamber

The kiásians have had to completely recreate their traditional celebratory marches and songs to operate in a free-falling sphere instead of the wide open spaces of prior generations. Previously, they took advantage of great distances to play with sound traveling through space and even developed magnetically levitated vehicles to race them around creating Doppler effects that harmonized differently with the various groups of celebrants. Within the Festival Chamber, the kiásians float in space and project their voices through tubes toward reflecting surfaces hung to create echoes or active dampers that kill the sound only to re-emit it elsewhere in the chamber. Key locations in the chamber are reserved for the guests of honor where they can hear the perfect combination of repeated and looped sounds.

In addition to the aural extravagances, the Festival Chamber contains great colored coherent lights which shine through the sphere and deep into space. During the annual celebration of the creation of their new floating colony, and occasionally on other important holidays, large amounts of dust are dropped into strategic locations on the shadow side of the station so that the lights have a backdrop to play across. Otherwise, they simply play across the orbs of the station, spreading the optical joy.

The Festival Chamber is the largest sphere of the station. It has a diameter of 360 feet and could fit the entire 30,000 residents of the station with plenty of room to spare. However, the most technical festival music cannot be created with more than a couple thousand members present, as the sound pathways get clogged up.

4. Gardens I & II

The two 100-foot garden units occupy places of privilege on the sunny side of the station. They consist of layers of hydroponic frames alternating with light guides. The plants grown are exclusively for nutritional purposes and consist of only a few species of dark, leafy greens and a low bush blackberry that contains most of the minerals required by the kiásians.

The garden spheres are near to the waste processing facility (see **area 9** below) and the water system pulls most of its nutrition from it. Some additional material is required from time to time and is supplied from stores brought in during colonization. Some of this material has recently gone bad following an oxygen leak, and replacement ores are needed soon.

Self-propelled robots conduct all the gardening work, harvesting the continuously ripening berries and renewing leaves in a slow, steady process. The produce is sent to the nearby kitchen (see **area 6** below) where it is pulverized and blended together with the products of the aquaculture tanks (see **area 5** below). In addition

to the standard harvesting machines, there are a few sensor bots that check water and air quality and send data to the air filtration systems in (see **area 10** below) to help keep the balance of gasses correct throughout the station.

5. Aquaculture I & II

The aquaculture pens are relatively small — only about 60 feet in diameter — and the two each contain different types of water representative of those found in the basins underneath the planet's surface. The two pods are on the opposite side of K2 from Völös, the central star. Within each, tubes run like refrigerator coils from the entrances to the various parts of the sphere. The kiásians use their traditional fishing technology of water jets and tuned lights to attract fish to air locks along the coil. From here, the animals are carted to the kitchen (see **area 6** below) for processing.

Tank I contains acidic water rich in iron and manganese. The edible species living in this heated bath are long, eel-like creatures called **angols**. The adults of the species are typically a bit over 3 feet long and have double-helical fins winding the length of their cylindrical bodies. Their corkscrew movement is effected through rippling of these fins. Angols are attracted primarily to light in the near infrared spectrum. Swimming within the tank as well is an entire ecosystem designed, ultimately, to keep the angols fed. These range from deep-water plant-like algal growths to small aquatic invertebrates through to the penultimate level of czotésta, a flat brown creature of about 1 foot in length and 1 inch width. The czotésta eats its prey by wrapping it up and dissolving nutrients through its side wall. The angols typically wait until a czotésta has wrapped up a particularly tasty morsel before swallowing the entire two-for-one treat.

The second pen contains a basic solution of magnesium sulfate and bicarbonate. Within this salty brew live the disk fish known as **lemezhal**. These creatures are about 8 inches in diameter and less than 1/2 inch thick. They have a single body opening centered on their undersides through which they ingest the tiny invertebrates that are their food. The outer walls of the fishing tubes are continuously scrubbed by robotic wipers to prevent the scaling that builds up from the water. The inside of the crystalline sphere has become completely opaque over the years, and every so often a diver is sent in to chip out the residue and grind it up to be redissolved in the water. There has been much debate recently in the Circle about the cost and potential benefits of installing an automated cleaning system versus the risk of disturbing the balance in the lemezhal tank. So far each meeting has resolved in a "no" vote, but discussions have lengthened and it is likely that the pitch will shift before too long. If that happens, there will undoubtedly be lengthy discussions about which family's scrubbing concept should be adopted.

6. Kitchen

The kitchen of station K2 has blenders. Lots of blenders. While there is some home preparation of food, almost everything consumed in the station is blended in the central kitchen. Within the 100-foot diameter sphere are four rectangular prisms each with six segments between 6-1/2 and 10 feet in length. The first prism handles the incoming plant materials from the gardens (see **area 4** above). The second deals with the acid fish, the angols, while the third processes the lemezhal. The fourth prism is fed by the other three and prepares the final edible concoctions from the aged output. While all four blending lines are fully automated, requiring only monitoring, the fourth has significant manual oversight in order to verify the continuous quality of the

great varieties of blends eventually produced. Outside the prisms are drying, rinsing, and aging tanks. These processes provide the real subtleties in the kiásian cuisine as various seasonings are added and sugars are allowed to ferment or oxidize. A few of the tanks are reserved for items used in the great feasts that require months or even years to get to their final state.

7. Solar Farms I-III

Evenly distributed about the outer perimeter of the space station are three sets of solar arrays. Unlike the other sections, these are not enclosed in crystalline spheres but are open to space. They do however each front on a small, 65-foot sphere that houses electrical switchgear. Typically two of the three farms and their associated electrical gear are in use at any one time while the third is being cleaned and checked. As most everything at K2 runs on electricity, keeping the power up is one of the more critical missions. In particular, if all three generators were to go down, the station would slowly run out of breathable air, with only the central sphere being able to continue under its own power for longer than a few days.

The solar arrays themselves are arrayed in large arcs and each one spans about 90 degrees around the station. The switchgear is located at one end in a double hulled sphere. Large cables run in ducts along the tubes from the switchgear spheres to the inner spheres and then branch and rebranch to provide power to the entire station. While the electricity usage is carefully monitored to allow quick detection of faults, like almost everything else in this communal society, there is no charge or concerns of individual over-usage. Sudden changes in power draw at any location will be noted almost instantly and the minders will communicate with the sector where the bump or drop was noted.

8. Medical Bay

The kiásians are a fairly robust species and have few pathogens with them on K2. The medical center deals primarily with physical accidents and most commonly tends to anglers who get careless while bringing in food. The bay is housed in a 90-foot sphere. Individual medical pods line the outer surface of the sphere while the center houses medical supplies. There is a constant low-volume melody vibrating through the center that is believed to calm and center the patients. There is very little evidence it works, but nobody has complained loudly and the tradition is a very old one. Medical science is advanced and includes significant automated laser procedures. Artificial limbs and organs are not used as even the kiásians have been unable to fabricate ones that perfectly match the tonal qualities of natural body parts, and the early trials all ended up causing mental instability and eventual violent insanity. Drugs are also uncommon due to the strong filtration system inherent in the digestive system, but some medicines are introduced directly to affected body parts.

9. Waste Processing

Very little is ejected into space from the K2 station. Everything from biological waste to used up paint containers end up in the collection of 10-foot spheres that make up the waste processing plant. Connected by a complicated series of pressurized tubes, the pods have mechanical, chemical, and radiation based treatment. Once separated and processed, the biological waste wends its way to the aquaculture pens (see **area 5** above) and the gardens (see **area 4** above). Mechanical waste is sent to manufacturing (see **area 11** below) or the chemical lab (see **area 18** below). Energy for the

processing center comes from burning waste gasses, although there has been debate whether the excess carbon dioxide produced is worth it. So far the kiásians have not found a more effective means to break down some of the materials. The waste processing plant is entirely automated, and located on the dark side of the station, far from the residential areas.

10. Air Filtration

One of the major drains on the solar power plants (see **area 7** above) is the great air filtration and modification systems. While much of the process is handled through organic plant-based reactions, the lack of solar energy means the plants rely on other forms of external energy. Rather than feeding plants, the air exchange organelles have been excised and are kept active through direct electrical current. In addition to separating molecular gasses into their components, the air system has large filters to remove unwanted particles and helical fans to move the air throughout the station. Air is pulled from the various spheres and sent first through the filters and then through a rebalancing system where the waste gasses are removed and the mix rebalanced. The refreshed air is then sent back out in a continuous cycle. Incoming air is finely monitored and the presence of smoke or unexpected particulate matter engages an alarm system and workers are dispatched immediately to the offending sphere.

Three parallel air filtration systems are housed in a 30-foot sphere adjacent to the center of power. While it is completely automated, three workers are present to monitor all operations and enact any needed repairs or modifications. Each system has a dedicated power line from the solar farm (see **area 7** above) running along a separate path.

11. Manufacturing

A 100-foot sphere divided into cubes makes up the manufacturing center of the K2 station. Along with machining and electronics, there is a bay for making the crystalline material used in the spheres. There are both automated lines for making items regularly used and worn out and shop space where custom and artisanal items are manufactured by kiásians. Amongst the most highly prized of these latter are personalized acoustical reflectors made to match an individual's tonal range and musical style.

The largest cube in the sphere is set aside for building vehicle parts. While the landing craft and land exploration vehicles are assembled in the vehicle storage area (see **area 12** below), the drives, chassis, and internal finishes are all made here. Vehicle manufacturing had been at a stand-still for many years as there had been no need to increase the landing fleet, but the recent attacks severely diminished the available crafts. The technologists are not only working feverishly to replace the craft but are trying to develop improved vehicle armor and weapons. Without a new delivery of raw materials they will be hard-pressed to rebuild — and they are very nervous about sending any of their remaining craft on a mining expedition until the threats under the surface have been nullified.

The manufacturing sphere has one of the few openings to the outside. A 10-foot airlock points toward the exterior of K2 allowing for deliveries from the fleet and for the larger items to be moved to the vehicle storage bay. Tubes run to waste processing (see **area 9** above), the residential areas (see **areas 21** and **22** below), and the chemical laboratory (see **area 19** below).

12. Vehicle Storage

This 250-foot sphere contains one large ship capable of extended voyages around Kiás. Christened *N'yvon*, or *New Hope*, this is the last ship built planet side and was used to ferry the kiásians to K2 in the final days of the subterranean cities. *N'yvon* is a rather ungainly beast, designed mostly to carry large amounts of cargo a short distance. It has robust but rudimentary air and nutritional recycling equipment and could serve as a floating station for about 40 kiásians practically indefinitely. If there is a major catastrophe on K2, a select few plan to board *N'yvon* through the direct tube from the Center of Power (see **area 1** above).

In addition to *N'yvon*, there are but two craft remaining capable of traveling to the surface. They are each capable of holding eight kiásians and can support life for only about 100 hours without external supply. There is parking space for an additional three similar craft. There are also a set of four surface craft used primarily for mining. These bubble-topped vehicles each have room for a pair of kiásians. The vehicles are meant to be used with externally mounted air supplies and do not have air filtration systems — waste gasses are ported to the outside. The vehicles are powered by battery and can run for eight hours before needing a recharge. While not intentionally armed, the sonic picks mounted fore and aft could be quite deadly. Primarily hovercraft, they also have arms on the sides to provide precise movement and to maneuver pick material. They are typically used in conjunction with a series of towed open-topped hover carts that carry the ore. The vehicle storage area has six functioning carts and four more in need of repair. Each of the smaller landing craft can carry six mining vehicles with it for the trip to and from the Kiás.

The vehicle shed generally has a half dozen tube crawlers waiting to be repaired. These are used to move around the station by some of the residents and also used to carry goods from one sphere to another.

13. Incubation

The incubation sphere is perpetually awash in kiásian melodies and a bath of infrared light. Within lie the future of kiásian society — several hundred eggs await their time to hatch within this 60-foot-wide shelter. Each ovoid egg is approximately 1 foot in diameter and nearly 20 inches long. A rough, red shell protects the incipient life and can continue to do so for years. When it is time to hatch a new member of society, an egg is moved into the hatching chamber where a complex series of melodies is played, first to stir the life and then to weaken the shell. A newly hatched youngling requires several weeks to become fully ambulatory and only acquires its voice after ninety days. At that point, it can fully share in the knowledge of the society. Between then and death, there is little further physical change although their mental abilities continue to deepen with the subsequent years.

The sphere itself is not only well-guarded with both living and automated defenses, but can support its precious cargo for up to six months without connection to any of the other spheres. It has a small air handling system, solar power generation, electrical storage cells, and a small reactor. The systems are programmed to hatch a few of the oldest eggs after two months with no outside signal and can provide food and song for the three months required until maturity. At that point, the new kiásians would have to decide whether to hatch any of the additional eggs and might also engage the navigation system in an attempt to reach a new home.

Defenses consist of electrical, sonic, and radiation-based weapons, all with automatic targeting (sonic weapons are of course not used for exterior defenses). They will attack anything that appears to be moving

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under its own power that is not producing an appropriate audio password. The living guards change regularly and consist of two well-trained kiásians at each portal armed with sonic weapons. The guards will only permit entry to those accompanied by members of the Senior Circle. They do enter themselves beyond the sealed guard chambers.

14. Audio Vault

Like the incubation chamber (see **area 13** above), the audio vault is a well-guarded chamber of kiásian treasures. Segmented into multiple chambers and double-hulled, this sphere is shielded from most of the naturally occurring electromagnetic spectrum with passive reflectors. The vacuum between the hulls prevents compression waves from passing through and a similar defense system to that used for the incubators prevents unwarranted entry. Air is doubly filtered as it enters, and when unoccupied, the vault circulation is kept to a minimum — only that needed for temperature regulation is permitted.

The different segments of the 100-foot vault represent different eras of audio storage technology and the different quality levels required for different types of audio records. Songs that merely represent information storage — histories, agreements, technological data — are stored in the most compact form that was available when the data were archived. For modern records, this is all digital storage, while there remain some older files on analog media that have yet to be transferred. This work is the ongoing labor of a few intrepid archivists. The true gems of the collection, the great works of art, the sublime speeches from great narrators, these songs are stored on multi-track etched platinum platters along with metadata that allow playback to recreate the original audio spacings and reflections. While less efficient than the digital drives, there is nothing else known that can recreate the subtle tones of past performances.

15. Control Systems I-IV

There are four relatively small spheres spread throughout Bubble Station. Each 15-foot sphere is an office for two controllers and contains redundant equipment. In addition to having access to the master controls for air handling, door overrides, climate control, and similar systems, the workstations in the control systems operate the station's defenses. An integrated network of guided missiles, laser weapons, and projectile weapons guard against spaceships while wall-mounted electrical and sonic weapons are spread throughout the tubes to control movement between the spheres. The intense energy spent on developing these defenses is a testament to the long memories of the kiásians. They have had no contact with alien civilizations in many hundreds of years, and their current conflicts with the planet-bound offshoots of their former civilization appear to be in no danger of coming to the station. At some point in their past, however, Kiás was invaded by a trio of ships from another system. The robed, bipedal visitors were driven off after it was discovered they were weak in the face of focused concussion waves. This knowledge was only gained after the visitors had destroyed several surface cities. "Never again," the kiásians have vowed. While not necessarily xenophobic, they are unlikely to open their home to robed bipeds without some serious vetting.

16. Committees Chambers I-IX

There are eight 40-foot spheres arranged in a cube with a ninth larger sphere in their center. This complex is home to the many meetings governing day-to-day life on the station. Without the official standing of the

council chambers, these places are where the real work is done. The many committees take their turns to debate food allocation, song selection, training methods, and all the myriad decisions confronting an advanced society. Each sphere has equispaced benches attached to the inner surfaces and a centralized recording and reflecting system. The committee members take their seats and sing their thoughts, aiming sound toward selected individuals or the middle whence it is broadcast out to all. As consensus builds, more of them sing toward the center until finally the sphere is filled with a harmonious series of tones and the committee can make way for the next group of decision makers. Recordings from the chambers are sent to the archives (see **area 14** above) as soon as the decisions have been rendered to the Circle.

Unlike the Center of Power and many of the other spheres, nothing in the committee chambers is personalized and nothing is stored within. The stools are cleaned and reappointed frequently and the sphere's inner surface is kept immaculate. A buildup of grease or a stray food wrapper could render null hours of debate.

17. Music Hall (Hard)

The hard music hall is rigged with a flexible system for hanging crystalline panels in any orientation and location. During a performance in this 45-foot space, taught cables run from suction mounted rings along the sphere out to audio reflectors of all shapes and sizes. Used by the more technically minded singers, multi-layered echoes and subtle interference patterns alike can be created. Typically, this hall features solo performances, where sometimes even the audience is excluded — sound being recorded at specific locations and rebroadcast to those who wish to hear. Over the years, there have been a few duets and even a trio who performed here. The most recent duet took nearly a year to set the panels and an additional three months of rehearsal to perfect their own locations within the room. The queue for this room is lengthy and it is considered a high honor to be awarded stage time within.

18. Music Hall (Soft)

The soft music hall is much more forgiving and typically home to group performances and improvisational work. While the draperies can be moved aside to expose the sphere's inner surface, in general the room and any furnishings are swathed in luxurious fabrics, woven specifically for their sound deadening qualities. While there are various configurations, typically the audience sits around a central area while the performers occupy the periphery. The performers often move about, and the central seating rotates to allow each audience member to experience the full range of the singers.

19. Chemical Laboratory

Always in pursuit of better living, the chemical laboratory of the kiásians is a constant hum of activity. The lab was initially set up planet-side for the experiments that eventually led to the crystalline material used for the spheres. While the initial spheres created planet-side and launched are still perfectly serviceable, those grown in space and added on more recently are purer both visually and acoustically.

In its current place of honor near the manufacturing and recycling areas, the lab is used to develop new materials to absorb and reflect sound, more efficient feed for the aquatic life, and stronger, lighter materials for vehicles. In addition, scientists have created many types of dyes for artistic and sartorial uses. Despite the wide variety of new developments being pursued, the lab retains a kernel of its original mission. With the recent dangers

encountered in the planet's mines, and the general high energy cost of transporting materials from the planet to the space station, the kiásian chemists are searching for crystalline forms that use less mined ore, as well as better air filters and other survival tools.

20. Quiet Rooms I-XII

There a dozen 10-foot diameter rooms — really just bump outs along various connecting tubes — designed to provide individuals with a respite from communication. Isolated with vacuum hulls and lined with thick, sound-absorbent material, these chambers really allow one to hear oneself think. In order to keep the ambient sounds to a minimum, these chambers are devoid of any electronics and have no air vents connecting them to the tunnels. Under low activity, a kiásians can survive for eight to ten hours in one of these spaces, but would be unlikely to attempt to remain in silence for more than one or two. The exterior doors have time locks and under normal conditions open every three hours allowing fresh air into the chamber. The inhabitant would need to intentionally re-engage the seal and have the hull evacuated in order to enjoy another period of silence.

While occasionally used to enforce introspection on those who have misbehaved, the quiet rooms are more typically used by individuals trying to solve a difficult problem or recover from a lengthy debate or an overly intense musical experience. Many a brilliant work of art has its roots in the silence of the spheres.

21. Large Family Spheres I-XX

Most of the kiásians live in family groups ranging from 80 to 100 members. Each group resides in one of the family spheres. In this case, "sphere" is a bit of a misnomer as each unit comprises several spheres packed tightest together and directly conjoined with hatches rather than tubes. Typically, a larger sphere of about 90 feet is the focus of the unit and is the area for dining and familial Circles. These have stools spaced throughout their interiors and a system of pipes and tracks used to send food, messages, and other items around the space. Attached around the periphery, a layer of smaller spheres is used for sleeping, small meetings, hobby crafting, and all the other myriad activities of family life. The main sphere is painted with colors and patterns representative of the family, and many of the smaller

rooms are personalized as well. The entire assemblage is in constant harmonic contact due to the adjoining walls, and simple messages can be quickly sent to all residents. Each family sphere has two independent air supply and return ducts, and most have at least some level of localized power production.

22. Small Family Spheres I-XXVIII

As families, and the civilization as a whole, grow, new families branch off from the old. This is typically a consensual arrangement, but there have been kiásians who, while not quite abnormal enough to be permanently removed from society, were frequently unable to converge with the remainder of their family and who were effectively exiled to start a new unit. The small family units are composed of a single large sphere, the future focus for a large family group, that is subdivided as the family desires, sometimes even with temporary fabric dividers allowing for easy repartitioning. Once the family gets to 50 or so members, smaller spheres are added on to the outside and the clan can continue to grow.

Adventure Hooks and Campaign Seeds

The kiásians will pay with advanced sonic technology if the mines can be cleared of pawans.

Need new minerals for the gardens, but scary!

Recover record stones from the government offices planetside.

Recover clues of what happened to the lost exploration party.

Escort a mining operation through the depths of Kiás.

Help defend K2 against invasion. K2's defenses have only been used during trials (and perhaps against the adventurers). Some skilled leadership and a mobile warship would be most welcome.

Multiple electrical faults caused by a massive solar flare have caused a shortage of edible material on K2. Combined with their lost transports, this is a catastrophe in the making. Scavenge large amounts of food from the underground vaults of Kiás.

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