

AFTER THE WAR

A SCIENCE-FICTION
ROLEPLAYING GAME
OF MEMETIC HORROR



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Genesis of Legend Publishing presents...

AFTER THE WAR

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HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND

All of you came to Polvo looking for a new beginning. You came from somewhere else; the decadence of old Terra, the discipline of Mars, the freedom of the Belt, or an Alien world.

You survived the terrible galactic war which marked your body and soul. A war against an infectious idea, a memetic virus known as The Song.

You came to Polvo looking for a refuge, a hope, and an opportunity. You thought you were joining a community of strangers, and built a home.

Terrible things lurk in the wreckage of the war and the shadows of your minds. It's up to you to keep your people safe ***After the War.***



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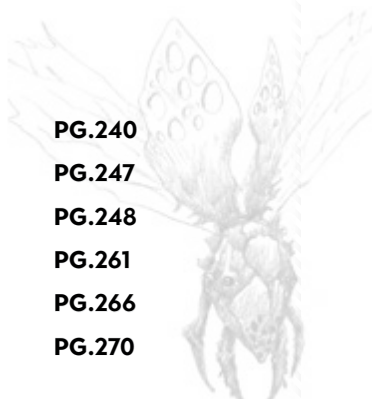
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01

INTRODUCTION



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SONG OF THE STARS

Humanity has always heard the siren call of the unknown.

We reached for the stars, built ships, stations, and colonies in the outer dark. First contact went impossibly well, and we joined the larger universe. We met our teachers, the Permancer, and the other alien species that fill the void. Humanity's utopian dream of peaceful exploration was born.

Then we heard THE SONG. It was a sentient melody encoded into atoms, a dark-matter drum beat of intelligence and hunger. This memetic virus stole our free will, enslaving our minds to spread itself. The Song raised every species' basest instincts to a crescendo, and humanity bowed in zealous servitude. The unified multi-species Fleet became a battlefield, as the crew aboard every ship and world were controlled by The Song. Entire nations of humanity rose as one, to assimilate the rest of the universe into the alien hive-mind.

Each ship taken became part of the Great Choir, a colossal, mobile transmitter array designed to boost the strength of The Song in any system it jumped into. Worlds sang. Worlds burned. Ships, worlds, and societies shattered. Those who survived were given the choice to kill those they loved, or let the universe join the hive mind.

Our salvation was also our destruction. Black Sky Industries developed a distributed intelligence based on Illuvian technology, as a memetic counter-virus to nullify The Song. The Tormenta virus worked too well, transforming a third of its victims into violent and ravenous monsters. Black Sky scientists knew the risks, but were willing to pay the price.

The Great Choir chased the refugee flotilla from the ruins of Earth to the distant world of Polvo. That is where Tormenta was unleashed and transmitted to each ship. One by one, the Great Choir vessels fell. Tormenta spread to every ship and world the Fleet had visited.

The sentient virus killed itself, burning through its hosts on the evening of its only day of life. The war started with a single voice rising from a trillion throats. It ended with the quiet, numb sobbing of the last humans standing.

A decade later, Fleet has dwindled from a multi-system nation-state to a handful of outposts serviced by less than 200 vessels, constantly monitored by Permancer peacekeepers. The struggling colonies are watched with paranoid zeal, with mandatory testing for symptoms of The Song. All of settled space is still crouched, ready, hands on their weapons.

On Polvo, the graveyard of the past and garden of the future, life went on. The planet was affectionately nicknamed Dirt. And like the survivors who found their way to the world, the name stuck around. It used to be a lot of things; a human fort, a Permancer staging post, a port, a corporate science preserve, and the front line. Now it's a junk world; a graveyard for secrets, ships, and dead ideals.

Millions have fled their ruined worlds to try to build homes on Dirt foundations. Soldiers and scientists, priests and atheists, adventurers and refugees. Survivors all. None of them came to Dirt by choice but all of them have ended up in the home of the biggest second chance in the Universe.

New settlements are spread across the surface of this alien world like fragile and precious gems. The Song gathers its strength in the wilderness between settlements, while The Covenant lies empty. The political factions, from ruthless Black Sky to the reckless Free Companies, seek to control the planet. Only you can protect your new home from these threats to body, mind, and soul. If you're lucky, you can carve out a new life for yourself in this alien world.

Welcome to Dirt. Everyone starts somewhere. Your new life starts here.

THE ESSENTIALS

AFTER THE WAR is a science fiction horror roleplaying game, set on the frontier world of Polvo in the aftermath of a galactic conflict. This is a game about diverse communities of Terrans, Martians, Belters, and Aliens, who come together to rebuild their lives on this rough, frontier world. When the seductive Song or brutal Tormenta threaten your settlement, it's your job to protect your people.

Your story is centered on the settlement that you now call home, which you work to strengthen and grow. As leaders in the community, you deal with internal disagreements and external threats, because this is the only place you have left



WHAT YOU NEED



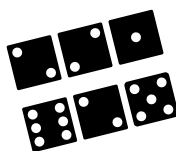
AFTER THE WAR requires a group of four to six people. One person will be the Game Master, portraying side characters, various threats, and the world as a whole. Everyone else will be players, portraying the main characters who came to Dirt for their own reasons.

You will need at least two hours of time to play each session of the game. If you want to explore the setting and tell a richer story, three to six sessions of the game are suggested.

Each player's **character sheet** describes their character's capabilities and beliefs.

The group shares a **settlement sheet** which describes their shared community.

The Game Master has a **Plot Map** sheet which they use to track dramatic threads.



You will also need a set of six-sided dice (d6). The group will need at least 24 dice, though ideally each person would have a dozen.

You should normally be using pencils, but try to have at least one pen at the table as well.

Beyond that, it's useful to have some blank index cards available to take notes, and make name tents. You will find it useful to write "Audience Mode" on one side of your name tent, and your character name on the other.

Sheets and handouts are available for download at www.genesisoflegend.com.



PLAYERS' ROLES



In **AFTER THE WAR**, most participants are **players** who portray the builders, veterans, leaders, and scholars struggling to make a difference on Polvo.

Each of you will create a **player character (PC)** who whose actions and decisions are at the heart of the story. You are the voice of your PC, with the power to narrate their actions. As a group, your characters work together to build and preserve a settlement that all of you can call home.

Each player character is a survivor, a protector, a believer, and a dreamer. Keep these roles at the forefront of your mind as you play your character.

SURVIVORS

The war was a horror of galactic proportions. Worlds sang, screamed, and burned. Colonies were enslaved by The Song, while planet-side cities were ravaged by the spawn of Tormenta. No one escaped the dark time unscathed, and everyone has their own traumas. The war tried to make you victims, but you emerged as survivors instead. You will never forget your ordeals, but you won't let them destroy you.

PROTECTORS

Polvo is a dangerous place where cruel ambition and memetic horrors lurk. Your settlements are vulnerable points of light in a sea of hungry shadows. You stand against the darkness and protect your home. You deal with ruthless factions who seek to exploit your settlement. You calm the interpersonal drama within your community through relationships and forge compromises. You stand watch for the intrusions of The Song and Tormenta that seek to corrupt your home.



BELIEVERS

Only the passionate can change the world, and change is desperately needed. Your strong beliefs give you purpose and direction. You argue in favour of your perspectives and try to convince others to agree with your vision of the world. When the world confronts you with contradicting evidence, you struggle with the implications. You share your beliefs with others, and try to lead them to a wiser path.

DREAMERS

Everyone wants something better. Prosperity so that no one need go hungry or cold. Strong walls and vigilant guards, protecting the vulnerable. Art and beauty, to replace what was lost. Families bound by love, raising children into a brighter world. You dream of a better world you can build together. No matter the hardship and horrors you face, you are driven by your enduring hope for the future.

GAME MASTER'S ROLES



One person at the table will be the **GAME MASTER (GM)**, who administers and facilitates the game. Rather than portraying a single main character, you control the setting and the people who live there. You speak for the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) of the setting. You describe the frontier world of Polvo, with all its dangers and opportunities. You offer challenges for the PCs to overcome, and questions for the players to answer.

Your job is to make a safe and creative space for your group to tell interesting stories. You collaborate with and support the players. You act as a neutral and honest arbiter who explains the rules and makes sure everyone has a fair chance to speak. You are a fan of the PCs, offering them opportunities to show their strengths and explore their weaknesses. Give every player a chance to shine, and make their decisions matter.

GM portrays the Fallout, Song, Tormenta, and Community. Keep these roles at the forefront of your mind as you administer the game.

FALLOUT

The war may have ended but it has left a lasting mark. Families were separated and broken during the exodus from Earth, Mars, and the Belt. Governments fell to civil war under the conflicting influences of the seductive Song and the rebellious Tormenta. Doomsday cults and fringe religious groups emerge as people struggle to understand the horror they faced. Trauma imprints itself on the minds, bodies, and souls of every survivor. Even this frontier world itself is cratered and littered with the wrecked hulks of fallen starships. As Game Master, portray the war and its impact.

SONG

Humans are social creatures who find comfort in groups and cooperation. Since the earliest days, we gathered around the cook-fires to sing, drum, and share our knowledge. The Song, the memetic virus from alien stars, pulls on these ancient memories to warp our minds. It glorifies service, conformity, and assimilation. It promises perfect peace and harmony if only you are willing to set aside your free will and work for the greater good. Fresh voices must join the choir, and there are many potential singers on Polvo. As Game Master, portray the instincts of conformity, assimilation and evangelical zeal.

TORMENTA

Fuck. Eat. Kill. This is what Tormenta screams into the hearts of its victims. Project Static sought to counteract the enslaving harmony of The Song through its own memetic counter-virus, but created another terror in its place. The project created Tormenta, a living war crime which promises victory, power, and survival at all costs. It screams that only the strong survive, that civilization is a prison, and that trust is a poison. As Game Master, portray the instincts of rebellion, domination, and violence.

COMMUNITY

Despite the horrors of the war and the countless threats on Polvo, there are hard-working communities trying to build a home. Terrans, Martians, Belters, and Aliens come together in these frontier settlements. They work hard, raise their children, and care for each other as best they can. Despite the small-town drama of broken promises, white lies, and quiet jealousies, the community tries to make a better future. As Game Master, portray the passionate and vulnerable people of the community who depend on the player characters.

OFFERING SHELTER

AFTER THE WAR is about the aftermath of a galactic war, and the people who survived those traumatic events. The game is here to give you the tools to tell those stories productively and safely. The game can often go to dark and vulnerable places, as *The Song and Tormenta* offer emotional and physical violence to their victims.

Some content in a game can trigger discomfort or past trauma, so be considerate. Make yourself aware of everyone's boundaries. Respect them.

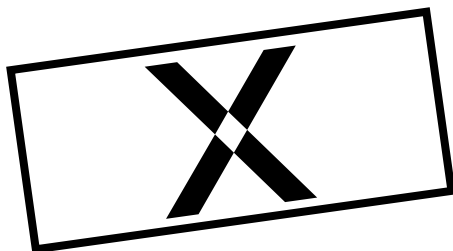
THE X-CARD

John Stavropoulos presented a tool known as the **X-Card** as a way of keeping games comfortable and fun for everyone involved. The first time you play the game, introduce the X-Card by reading the following text for the group before play:

I'd like your help to make this game fun for everyone. If anything makes anyone uncomfortable in any way, just lift this card up, or simply tap it.

You don't have to explain why. It doesn't matter why. When we lift or tap this card, we simply edit out anything X-Carded. And if there is ever an issue, anyone can call for a break and we can talk privately.

I know it sounds funny but it will help us play amazing games together. Please help make this game fun for everyone. Thank you!



MORE ABOUT THE X-CARD AT [HTTP://TINYURL.COM/X-CARD-RPG](http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg).

GOING DARK

This is a game of personal horror, where memetic forces twist our minds and trauma lies around every corner. **Going Dark** is a custom tool which is specifically designed to produce those kinds of horror experiences while enhancing player safety. Please note that this safety tool itself requires the positive and enthusiastic consent of all the players (including the GM). Many people may not feel comfortable featuring unreliable memory and psychological trauma in their games.

At any point in time during play, anyone at the table can say the ritual phrase “*Then Things Go Dark*”. At this point, we fade to black and assume that what happens next occurs off-camera. This is similar to another safety tool, known as a Veil. When this occurs, there are a few additional things to note.

None of the characters (PC or NPC) remember what happened next in that scene. Perhaps it was a traumatic event that their minds have buried to protect themselves. Maybe The Song drowned out the memories with Chorister influence, or your character just went out and got blackout drunk. Something happened to hide the events that happened during that time.

Characters might wake the next day with holes in their memories and blood on their hands. You could pretend that nothing happened during that event, or introduce lasting personal consequences depending on what you are comfortable with.

Sometimes the memories return. The player who used this safety tool may reveal what occurred during the dark period if they like. It’s often best to slowly narrate how certain fragmentary memories resurface as time passes, and use flashbacks to explore these sensitive events.

WORDS OF HATE

Humanity has a long history of prejudice, discrimination, and hatred which has persisted even despite the Union's moderating influence. That said, we don't want to harm the players at the table, so expressing these real-world social issues requires a bit of finesse.

The first rule is that you should never use real-world slurs related to race, gender identity, sexuality, ability, or faith. We are not here to hurt each other at the table, and human societies of 2255 have moved beyond these. There are slurs in-setting of course, but they have drifted to be nearly unrecognizable by current standards.

The easiest way to handle words of hate is to use something called the **Bracket Technique**. When I am running a session, I would say something like:

*"You are only defending them because you are a (**slur for Belters**)".*

I actually say the words "slur for Belters" instead of using an actual slur at the table, and it gives enough fictional distance to avoid hurting folks at the table. It also means that I don't have to invest any time in coming up with a "clever" insult at the table.



LEXICON

SETTING TERMINOLOGY

Belters are impoverished, independent, and foolhardy humans who settled in the asteroid belt, the Jovian moons, and isolated stations throughout the solar system.

Fleet were the armed forces of the Galactic Union which kept the peace and explored the galaxy.

The Galactic Union was a multi-species over-government that maintained a prosperous and peaceful galaxy.

The Great Choir was The Song's armada which nearly conquered the galaxy.

Illuvia are a non-corporeal alien species who appear as clouds of glitter floating in the air. They are ruthlessly intelligent and smug, taking pity on those primitives stuck wearing "meat suits".

Martians were colonists who settled on the red planet and strove to shape in our image. This planet was fractured by war, and unified by a single mega-corporation known as **MarsCorp** which ruled the planet.

Mercurio are an alien species whose bodies are constantly in flux. They are shape-shifters and doppelgangers obsessed with discovering new cultures and identities.

Permancers are an alien species known for their stoicism, their protective natures, and for leading the Galactic Union. The Permancers appear as angry, bipedal horses, and all use "they/them" pronouns. The Permancers are the only species that appears to be immune to The Song's psychic influence.

Polvo, also known as **Dirt**, is an isolated world where the Terrans, Martians, Belters, and Aliens have come to build new lives together. It's also harboring agents of The Song and Tormenta, who seek to infect those few survivors of the war.

Rasgado and the **Fundar** are two halves of the same alien species, collectively known as the **Riven**. Their peoples were struck by a brutal bioweapon, so contact between a Rasgado and a Fundar leads to mutual destruction.

Terrans are those people born and raised on Earth, the cradle of humanity and ancient throne of countless cultures. The planet was crowded, messy, and humanity's first home.

The Song is an intelligent melody encoded in atoms which acts as a memetic virus. The Song steals the free will of people and assimilates them into the hive-mind known as the Choir.

Tormenta is an artificial memetic counter-virus created by humanity. This force seeks to turn individuals into rage-filled, violent agents of chaos and death.

Ursa are a bear-like alien species known for their jovial nature and for an obsession with the number four. Due to their cultural traditions, they nearly always work as packs of four individuals, known as Quads.

ALIEN EARS

The Song affected each of the alien species in different ways. The Ursa had their emotions and familial attachments replaced with unquestioning devotion to the Holy Choir. The Rasgado and the Fundar were given false hope of salvation, and a certain death at the hands of their terrible bioweapon. The shapeshifting Mercurio found themselves locked into a single, unified identical form. The Illuvia, for all their seeming brilliance, were extinguished on contact with The Song. The Permancer alone were immune to The Song's manipulations, but their numbers were too few to stop the Great Choir.

RULES TERMINOLOGY

This game includes a number of specific mechanics and procedures. Each is detailed later in the book, but here are some quick definitions.

BELIEFS

Beliefs are subjective, controversial declarations that a main character holds. As a character, you believe in these statements completely, and will defend your perspectives. As a player, you look at these beliefs more critically, seeking out evidence that confirms or refutes each Belief during play. You gain Insight when you get confront your Beliefs, which allow you to share Discovery and Growth.

- **CREATING BELIEFS** on **PG.94**
- **CHANGING BELIEFS** on **PG.142**

CONVICTIONS

Convictions are created when a player chooses to fully accept or reject a Belief during a moment of growth. Convictions are similar to Beliefs, except the character is no longer willing to examine it critically. You gain an advantage in conflicts which support your Convictions.

- **CREATING CONVICTIONS** on **PG.144**
- **CONVICTION IN CONFLICTS** on **PG.135**

INSIGHT

Players receive Insight when their main character is faced with evidence that supports or rejects their Beliefs. Each character has an Insight track, and reaching certain milestones on that track triggers moments of Discovery or Growth.

- **RECEIVING INSIGHT** on **PG.140**
- **MOMENT OF DISCOVERY** on **PG.142**
- **MOMENT OF GROWTH** on **PG.144**

SCENES

Scenes are focused, dramatic events where many main characters interact. A Scene begins with a **Platform**, is driven into action by a **Tilt**, and ends when its **Question** is answered. Scenes always include collaborative roleplaying, and may also include one or more Conflicts. The point of a Scene is to confront your Beliefs in order to gain Insight.

A Scene begins with a Platform, is driven into action by a Tilt, and ends when its Question is answered

- **FRAMING SCENES** on **PG.129**
- **THE ACTOR ROLE** on **PG.132**
- **THE AUDIENCE ROLE** on **PG.138**

CONFLICT

When two people in a scene disagree on what should happen next in a Scene, it triggers a **Conflict**. Each participant declares what they want to happen and rolls a number of dice based on which Traits are relevant. Whoever gets the highest total gets to narrate the outcome, and suffers a point of Strain.

- **CONFLICT RULES** on **PG.134**

TRAITS

Traits represent various experiences, skills, or identities which help someone win Conflicts. Each Trait has a list of situations where it would normally apply; you can expand this list during play.

- **ORIGINS**, where they came from, on **PG.64**
- **WAR STORIES**, what they experienced, on **PG.74**
- **PROFESSIONS**, what they do now, on **PG.84**

STRAIN

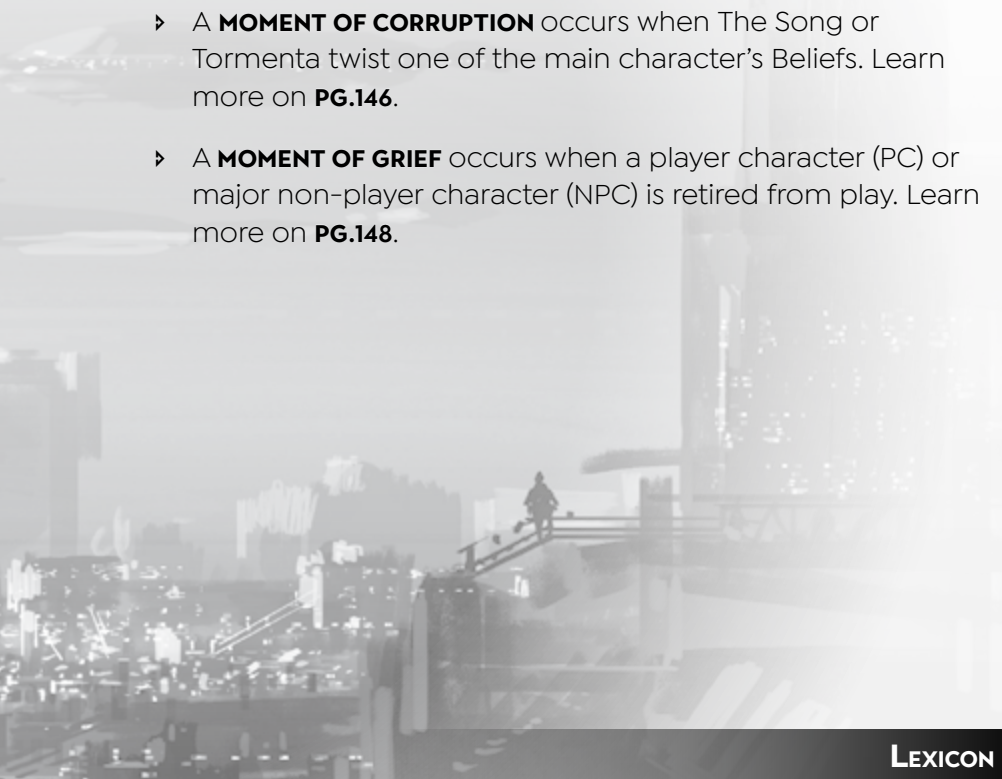
Strain represents the accumulated stress, harm, and trauma a main character might suffer during play. You receive Strain when you choose to re-roll during a Conflict, or when you win a Conflict. Each point of Strain makes it harder to succeed in Conflicts, and can lead to your character's retirement from play.

- **STRAIN IN CONFLICTS** on **PG.136**
- **REMOVING STRAIN** on **PG.142**

MOMENTS

A small interlude which takes place between scenes, typically only involving one or two PCs.

- When a **MOMENT OF DISCOVERY** is triggered, you learn more about the main characters while removing points of Strain. Learn more on **PG.142**.
- When a **MOMENT OF GROWTH** is triggered, the main character accepts or rejects one of their Beliefs, gaining a Conviction and a replacement Belief. Learn more on **PG.144**.
- A **MOMENT OF CORRUPTION** occurs when The Song or Tormenta twist one of the main character's Beliefs. Learn more on **PG.146**.
- A **MOMENT OF GRIEF** occurs when a player character (PC) or major non-player character (NPC) is retired from play. Learn more on **PG.148**.



INSPIRATIONS

The Expanse, by James S.A. Corey, is a major inspiration for the setting, with Earth, Mars, and the Belt in political conflicts. That's when the aliens show up. *Cibola Burns* is particularly relevant.

The Belle Dame Apocrypha, by Kameron Hurley, are three of the nastiest, best books you'll ever read. A female bounty hunter struggles to hold her team and herself together on a planet ripped apart by institutionalized war.

Star Trek, by Gene Roddenberry, presented a peaceful galaxy where dozens of alien species have come together to form a utopian United Federation of Planets. The Union and Fleet are directly inspired this hopeful vision of the future.

Firefly, by Joss Whedon. Everybody knows that the war is over. Everybody knows that the good guys lost. Firefly presented of a rag-tag group of folks trying to live on a frontier while dealing with their trauma from the war.

Mass Effect, by Bioware, presented the mind-twisting corruption of the Reapers, inspiring the memetic horror of the game. *Mass Effect Andromeda* was a specific inspiration, emphasizing building colonies on the golden worlds.

The Spark Roleplaying Game was our first game and the foundation for this one. The core elements of this game such as collaborative scene framing and challenging of Beliefs come from Spark.

Apocalypse World, by Lumpley Games, has inspired countless games, and this is one of them. The "Day in the Life" approach for the first session is directly pulled from Apocalypse World, as is the emphasis on the fragility of communities.

Dream Askew / Dream Apart, by Buried Without Ceremony, is a masterwork that presents consensual design, complex community dynamics, and marginalized identities.

How We Came to Live Here, by Galileo Games, presents an indigenous community that explores the internal tensions and the external dangers threatening its survival.

Dread, by Dig 1000 Holes Publishing, uses a Jenga tower to inspire a feeling of suspense and a push-your-luck mechanic which was the foundation of the Strain mechanic.

02 SURVIVOR STORIES



- 02.01 Terran Interviews
- 02.02 Martian Interviews
- 02.03 Belter Interviews
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- 02.05 Scheduled Interviews

POLVAN NEWCOMERS STUDY

The Initiative recognizes the significance of these early years on Polvo for galactic history. Countless pre-Song records from Terran government records or Martian corporate databases were lost in the war during the haste of the evacuation of 2244. As such, Director Liu has approved a series of in-person interviews with key figures from across the Polvo settlements.

The purpose of these interviews is to record the personal upbringing of the applicants, their experiences during the war, and how they have adapted to life on Polvo. Future researchers should note both the interviewers and the interview subjects had personal experience with the traumatic events of the War of The Song (2243-2245) and should take care to account for potential bias. The text of each interview is presented verbatim for future researchers and transcribed for textual analysis.

These interviews occurred in person between March 13th, 2251 and June 3rd, 2254. Each story was recorded during in-person interviews on site, with audio recordings sanitized according to the standard safety protocols. Unique interviewers were used in each interview to minimize the chances of memetic exposure or interviewer bias.

The majority of interview subjects consented to submit genetic samples, which have been acquired for the active intergenerational trauma research study 27-9-5B3.

Dr. Miriam Cohen
Oghma Initiative Co-Curator



ALEX LUNETT

RECORDED BY MARY ROSE VALENTINE —
THE LIGHTBRINGER CAFÉ, NOVA CHICAGO

Where are you from?

I grew up on Earth, from a disintegrating family that lived just outside of Chicago. It wasn't always that way. I remember a time when we were happy as a family, and even our frequent political debates were good-spirited. My parents were as paranoid as they come, though, and I was lucky they let me go to the "indoctrinating" public school. Our family fell apart in last few years before the war, as love gave way to hate and to anger. Then, the war took what was left of my family and tore it to shreds.

How did you experience the war?

I started losing my patience with my parents as I became more independent and began to value trust. My dad trusted no one and always ranted about how the government was colluding with the aliens. He even built his own receiving equipment to listen in on transmissions to Earth and lost his job for his troubles. I think the first rational thing my mother did was leaving him. But she didn't take me. I think she suspected me too.

In my last few days at home, my dad changed. His crazed ranting, now more frequent, was punctuated by strange humming. Only two or three notes here and there, but he had never done it before. The tune was strange, intriguing, and otherworldly. I read enough on the feeds to put two-and-two together about what he was picking up on his receivers.

A day or two later, warnings and evacuation orders were sent out. I was in my room blasting music on noise-canceling headphones and trying to figure out what to do. I wasn't sure if my dad would be willing to leave, but he approached me first with a creepy smile on his face.

We went to the closest evacuation point together and I was on edge the entire time. It was so **unlike him** to follow the government's directions that I knew The Song had him. I didn't dare ditch my headphones. I'd noticed that he seemed to change when he got away from the receivers, so I tried taking the headphones off, but he hummed another note or two and I jammed them back on. The Song was already in his head. During the boarding process, I made sure to get jostled away from him. I couldn't be around him anymore. He tried to stay near me, but we boarded different evacuation shuttles. Now I'm here, on Polvo, finally my own person. It's a feeling I've been missing for years.

What are you doing now?

There are so many organizations that want Polvo to be another insignificant pawn for their empires. But we can't build a new civilization where autonomy and cooperation are mutually exclusive. Us refugees are more than Dirt.

I'm trying to organize a regional council of leaders as a framework of a future government, so we can start building ourselves up. If we let someone else do it for us, they control us. If they lure us in and we give our autonomy over, how are they any better than The Song? I am trying to lead and organize the people so we can build our own foundation for our new civilization.

ALEX LUNETT

*Alliances are Better Than Subjugation
Self-Governance is a Human Right*

Terran

Political
Community

Silence

Rendered Aid

Leader

Organizer

PHOEBE SPARKS

RECORDED BY JACQUELINE BRYK — LOWBROOK SETTLEMENT

Where were you from?

Earth, originally. North America, the northern end of the Appalachian mountain range. In the foothills, though. My parents were animal farmers – sheep and goats mostly. Sometimes we grew corn, if the weather was kind. We had an orchard too, apples and sour cherries. I wonder if it's still there, if any of the seeds survived. I was six when we left, but I still remember the taste of those apples. They were always clean and sweet.

When you were six? That's early.

When you have to watch the weather for your livelihood, you learn to know when storms are coming. The Song was the biggest storm we'd ever heard. You could hear it coming from light-years away. The newscasters talked about it like it was something on the other side of the universe at first, but we knew better. Storms from Canada could cross the lake in minutes and smash up your windows if you got careless. Nor'easters on Earth would rage against your house, but were mostly just noise if you kept the fire going and the roof in good repair. Summer storms, though, would throw themselves against your walls from the inside and outside unless you kept a window cracked to equalize pressure.

It wasn't just my family, though. The McAllisters, the Aliens, even the Harrisons who owned the big factory farm down the Mohawk Valley, they all saw it coming. People think farmers are stupid, but we're not. We learned to read the winds as well as books.

The winds?

It’s a figure of speech. The winds of change, I guess. We were some of the first people out.

Is your family still farming, but you’re not?

They are, yes. I was of more use to the government. See, I learned to read the winds – but in space, there’s no winds over the grasses. It took us years to get here, so I learned to read the winds of people, how they move and change against each other. I finished my education in one of the first schools on Polvo. I saw the mushroom cloud from Covenant Yard. I already knew how to read the twitch of an eyebrow, the inflection in someone’s voice.

Tormenta and The Song are both subtle, see. The howling zombies were just cannon fodder. My job is finding the pressure from inside that might send our entire house crashing down. They like pitting us against each other. If someone’s acting odd, they must be infected, right? But what if they’re not?

How do you tell?

I keep the windows cracked.

INTERVIEW NOTE: The subject smiled and gestured out her window, where the storm rages over Covenant Yard.

PHOEBE SPARKS
Words are Weapons
Change is Survival

Terran	Silence	Leader
Agricultural Community	Echoes	Diplomat

NAT THADIKORN

RECORDED BY ELIZABETH CHIAPRADITKUL — SUN STATION

Where are you from?

I grew up on Earth – Bangkok, Thailand – skyscrapers and filth for as far as the eye can see. For me, it was perfect. Between the dusty streets and bright lights there were places of pristine silence; quiet noodle stands, hidden monasteries, lazy avenues. For all the bustle of the city I always felt a supreme sense of calm.

My mother died when I was 10, and I became a monk following the tradition. Most kids only do it for the funeral ceremony but I remained there for eight years. My conviction didn't come from faith, I'm not sure I am even a believer now, but from the time spent on introspection. Introspection to finally lose a sense of self and focus on higher thoughts, I'm not sure I really did that at all, but it brought me peace.

How did you experience the war?

It was brutal and hopeless, so I tried to do work that would make things better. I was a therapist to the survivors, the soldiers, and the people who mutilated themselves so they couldn't hear The Song. It felt like for every wound I patched up, the Great Choir would rip open five more and pour pain into my patients through that infernal Song. I'd lost that peace I cherished so long ago and I was about to give up. That was when command offered me an opportunity to be, "an invaluable asset to the war effort." In that moment I felt hope again..

That's how I met Francis Duffy – the man who saved us all.

My job was seemingly simple; speak with Duffy and perform the psychological tests to obtain Duffy's consent for hosting Tormenta. Many people forget this is something we actually did.

Since the end of the war people are so busy hailing Duffy as a hero, they conveniently forget that he wasn't actually a willing participant. He was so drunk that I doubt he even knew what he agreed to, or perhaps he didn't care until it was too late. We were so very convinced what we were doing was right. The first moment I realized what I'd done was when Duffy's screams pierced through steel walls while he was uploaded with the Anti-Song.

What are you doing now?

I need to better myself if I am really going to help people. Before the war I heard people comment about how doctors think they're gods, but I am a darker thing. What do you call someone who messes around with people's minds? Am I a devil?

Even devils can heal people. To pick up the pieces of broken memories and piece them back together. I just want to feel right again. I'm older, wiser, and I realize now that there is no quick fix to anything.

Slowly it feels like I am crawling back to that place – 10 years old and entering the monastery for the first time.

NAT THADIKORN

*Self-reflection Brings Understanding
Every Life is Important*

Terran

Faithful
Community

Dissonance

The Hero

Scholar

Psychologist

NAMID SOULIERE

RECORDED BY BY KATE BULLOCK —
NEW HAMMER VETERANS HOSPITAL

Where were you from?

I grew up in Six Nations and went to school in Hamilton, Ontario. It's part of Canada. We have one of the best medical schools around. But that's not what most people want to know when they ask where I'm from and where I went to school. I'm not your average medic. My education took me all over the world, to some extent. The minute I breathed the word *healer* I was sent to the academy. The only way to truly study medicine, and travel to where I wanted to exist, was to gain citizenship. My auntie knew this. So I went.

I would always find some way to fix whatever problem I faced. From Traditional Medicine to Qi Gong to Ayurvedic to Traditional Chinese Medicine to medical acupuncture and neurokinetic therapy, I did it all. From enigmatic energy therapy to the most pure science modern medicine could offer. Maybe it's why I heard The Song so well and understood it so easily, it wasn't that new to me. Music healing was something I learned in college. The Song was like that, but different.

How did you experience the war?

From... the wrong side. This is the question people really want to know that everyone seems keen to silence. No one wants to remember. We straighten our shoulders and say we can't remember, that the Tormenta blew it out of our brains. Trauma has the best stealth I've ever seen. I was on Feynman Station, stationed there with my now ex-wife. I'm a medic in so many ways, but Feynman was an easy ride. Not too many injuries, healthy bodies and healthy minds and healthy hearts. It was a station designed for innovation and invention. Saying they discovered The Song is wrong; they were the first victims. You

don't discover your partner is abusive, your partner hurts you and you learn pain. The Tormenta spread through my mind electrically, synapses firing, nerves twitching, and the brain just being engulfed. It didn't hurt. It's that moment when you think there's another stair and there isn't. Momentary suspension of time. Until you wake up a monster.

What are you doing now?

Healing. It's what I was made for. The Song has come and gone, but I can still feel its rhythm. It lets me lock into those patterns that still sway the mind and tug at the heart. I can't heal the trauma, not really, but I can help the body and the mind release what it's holding from when it was enraptured.

The body has a natural rhythm to it. The Song disrupts it and makes it match The Song. Every heartbeat, blink, and breath is to The Song. Tormenta disrupts it long enough the body fights back. But it remains. So I stop the rhythm and reset it. And I hold silence. There's no point in speaking about what I remember or how I feel today because my fellow survivors aren't ready. When they are, the wave of silence will break and a new Song will be born. A song of healing.

NAMID SOULIERE

*Healing Through Community
The Song Lingers*

Terran

Citizen
Community

Overture

First Contact

Veteran

Medic

IMANI SYENE-RENAS

RECORDED KHAALIDAH MUHAMMAD-ALI —
A ROCKY ISLAND WITHOUT A NAME

Where were you from?

Nowhere particularly notable, I assure you.

Mother was a professor of xenobiology, a controversial subject, even then. Father was an artist and a prolific if largely unpublished, author. We traveled across the continent like nomads, wherever mother could find a teaching post or Father could find a gallery willing to display his unique style of art. By happenstance, I was born in Yaounde, Cameroon, three weeks ahead of schedule in the bathroom of the Musee La Blacktitude.

You may have heard of my father. He was known simply as Askia? He drew or painted his dreams, all yellows, oranges and reds, the annihilation of Terra. Some called him a prophet. Others called him a harbinger. His entire collection of paintings and sketches has been stored in the Polvo archives. For this, I am grateful because I can barely recall him. Or Mother. Shortly before we fled Terra, I received a package with my father's writings. It's some of the most lovely, yet lonely and painful poetry I've ever read. There was also a single letter to me, dated some eleven years earlier, from my mother.

How coincidental... no... portentous, that both my parents were immune to The Song. This presented certain dangers, so for my protection they sent me away to friends in Egypt when I was eight years old. I haven't seen them since.

Uncles Lail and Tahir raised me with as much love as I would've gotten from my parents. They saw to my every need, and being great believers in education sent me to boarding schools around the globe until my own affliction became manifest. Then, they brought me home and hired the best tutors to educate me until I gained admittance to the University of Cairo.

How did you experience the War?

I was one of the The Lucky Few. Yes, one of the twelve who not only created but launched the anti-Song.

I was also despised and suspect among my peers. Don't look so surprised. By the time we launched, my visions were no secret and neither was the fact that I am the child of two people with blessed immunity to The Song.

I am the aberration they needed.

Have you ever hated a thing you needed? Ever hated a thing you loved? It is a strange and ugly dichotomy.

I spent the majority of the War alone in my cabin. I slept there. I ate there. I prayed there. I did my work there. It kept the peace.

What are you doing now?

I'm still alone, mostly.

I receive visitors on occasion from those who believe I have the special sight. I do have visions, but I don't believe I can tell them anything they don't already truly know.

And, I am ill. Cancer, it seems. I'll get treatment in due time. It's just that the tumors seem to be speaking to me.

IMANI SYENE-RENAS

Science Confirms the Existence of God
Those who Listen Shall Hear

Terran

Academic
Community

Dissonance

The Stolen Plans

Leader

Prospero

KRISHA CHOWDHURY

RECORDED BY JASON PITRE — BLACKHARBOR SPACEPORT

Where were you from?

I was born and raised on Hellas Plantia, in one of the southern polar domes. My father worked childcare in the crèche, so I had the rare luxury of a parent watching over me as I grew up. All I remember of my mother was tugging on her dark dreadlocks with my tiny hands. Father said she had left for a job with the Sculptor Division, and that was it.

I was always the best student around, and found myself placed on the management track at an early age. By the time others were going on their first dates, I had an internship with Minerva Division. By the time others started families, I was auditing subsidiaries and liquidating assets for the benefit of MarsCorp. It was easy work, and the Corp paid me well enough for my troubles. Life was corporate politics by day and a vicious drug habit by night.

I told myself that it was fine. I deserved it. There was nothing wrong with a bit of Red Sand to ease the tension headaches. It was medicinal, or so I wanted to believe. I told myself a thousand lies to avoid the truth—I was a junkie.

How did you experience the war?

Well, I was coordinating the purchase of a mothballed Fundar space station.

No. Sorry.

You deserve the truth.

Truth is, I don't remember any of it. It's got to be one of the most terrifying feelings for any woman to have. One moment, I was sampling some product on a transport shuttle for a business trip.



The next thing I knew, I found myself lying on the floor of the cargo bay of a fleet vessel in a degrading orbit over Polvo. The entire war was swallowed by this vast hole in my memory. I have no idea where I was, what I did, or what happened to me. The only thing I know is it was bad.

Fleet cleaned me up. I think they saved my life in the process. They gave me some kind of hope for a better future for all of us, and kept me from focusing on my selfish needs. They gave me the tools to survive, and a goal worthy of my talents.

What are you doing now?

Fleet is trying to make a real difference. They want to rebuild the critical infrastructure of the Union so the trade networks can be restored. They want new medical stations to handle the wounded. They want to re-establish democratic norms and diplomatic ties between the various species. Fleet is our last, best chance for peace.

Thanks to Fleet, I have a chance to be a part of something that matters. I'm working as their agent on Polvo to manage humanitarian efforts and aid programs. I want the people of Polvo to know that Fleet is looking out for them. Together, we can build a better galaxy for our children.

KRISHA CHOWDHURY

*Fleet is our Redemption
Drugs are a Weapon*

Martian

Minerva
Division

Overture

Prelude

Builder

Agent

PALMER VAISEY

RECORDED BY MELODY WATSON —

RED DUST CONSORTIUM HQ

Where were you from?

New Berlin, Mars — an old hab-dome in the Borealis Basin. Never mind the name. I've seen pictures of the old Berlin and they don't look anything alike. But every Martian has a dream, and building a better city was ours.

Growing up, everyone I knew worked in Cornerstone Division. Engineers, mechanics, welders, architects. People who take nothing and make it into something worth having. But I was better with people and ideas than my hands. Got myself a job supervising an assembly line and eventually ended up managing the whole damn precinct. Things were good. MarsCorp was at its peak and we were all riding high on the wave of success. I believed we were going to make a world better than any other.

How did you experience the war?

The war was a bad time. Not just in the obvious ways. Those who escaped The Song, we nearly lost our hope. Our faith in a better tomorrow, our faith in MarsCorp. And MarsCorp had done everything for us — fed us since we were children, treated us when we were sick, housed us and gave us purpose. Without them, we had nothing.

I was lucky. Star Lift got me and a couple of other New Berliners off the planet before the Choristers broke through. But I saw the footage. I wish I hadn't.

You bet I signed up to help build a weapon against The Song. We were turning asteroids into bombs. Basic exo-mining work, honestly. The hard part was filling them with their human payload.

Have you ever been up close to someone with Tormenta? They... don't move like people. They're like an imitation of a person from an old animation. And I recognized one of them from back home. I got too close and I think she recognized me too.



I still don't know how she broke free. She didn't make it far but, fuck, it's easy to forget how much blood is in a human body.

I, uh, I'm sorry. I just need a moment.
I don't talk about this very much.

What are you doing now?

I keep busy. Don't sleep much anymore. I don't like where my mind goes when I let it rest.

Now I'm Director of Communications for the Red Dust Consortium. Where there's people, there's commerce. That's why some of the towns down this end of Polvo set themselves up as corps, with shareholders and boards instead of citizens and councils. A little while back they merged, creating the Consortium. We're mostly Martians. We remember how good it was back in the glory days.

Mostly, I'm responsible for our multimedia content. It's an exciting time! We're investing in tech that's going to spread our brand further than ever.

Why do I care? Because we need to remember. I don't mean the war. Not the bad parts at least. We need to remember that we won – that we won by making hard decisions and being a part of something larger. If we can do that again, the future's going to be better than we ever could have imagined.

PALMER VAISEY

*Loyalty Demands Sacrifice
Free Agents Cannot be Trusted*

Martian

Cornerstone
Division

Dissonance

The Battle of
Amboso

Leader

Storyteller

SOPHIE HEMBRECHT-PHANN

RECORDED BY ERIKA CHAPPEL — STRASBOURG STARPORT

Where were you from?

I was born in the Arcadia quadrangle, that chunk supposedly closest to liquid water. When I was a kid, the teachers said the gullies would run with water again, but Sculptor Division never did get that working.

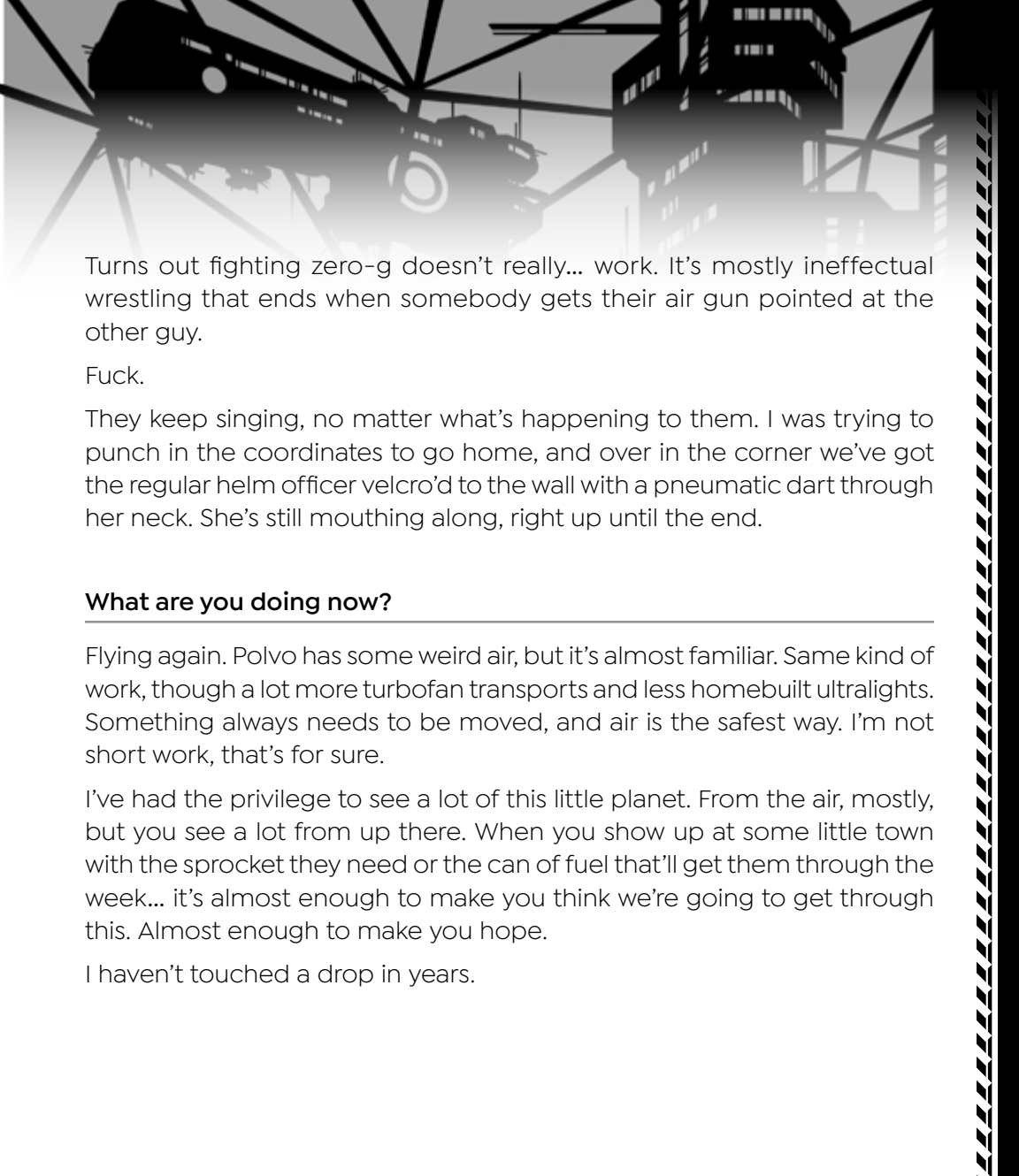
One of the lovely things about Mars, once they started thickening up the atmosphere, was that it was easy to fly. You could just about hold out your arms and take off. We built these little ultralights, Plexiglas wings and CO2 engines, a fire extinguisher hanging under a plastic kite. They flew easy enough a child could do it. Safest thing in the worlds. At one-third gravity, if you crashed, you bounced.

I spent my teen years skimming the gullies carrying circuits a few domes over and drinking to excess. You know, kid stuff. Got a knack for it. I guess I got addicted. Space piloting is nothing like atmo, but I didn't know that when I signed up for Armada and they threw me into navigation. Flying in space is... math.

How did you experience the war?

Still, I was good enough that I served six years plotting courses for frigates before getting transferred to the *USF Endeavour* as a reserve helm officer. I spent my time double-checking trajectories and drinking in a supply lockup. Never got the hang of space, but I got really good at drinking bubbles of gin in zero-g.

That's where I was when it went down. I'm lucky as hell Bashton found me before the singers did. They were looking for weapons and instead they find me, drunk off my ass in a locker. Next thing I know, I've got a pneumatic pistol, noise cancelers, and I'm glad I paid attention to the MSL classes. We were about two dozen, mostly engineers who were working down near the rad shielding, and we had to push up four hundred meters of ship to the bridge and try not to rupture the hydrogen tanks doing it.



Turns out fighting zero-g doesn't really... work. It's mostly ineffectual wrestling that ends when somebody gets their air gun pointed at the other guy.

Fuck.

They keep singing, no matter what's happening to them. I was trying to punch in the coordinates to go home, and over in the corner we've got the regular helm officer velcro'd to the wall with a pneumatic dart through her neck. She's still mouthing along, right up until the end.

What are you doing now?

Flying again. Polvo has some weird air, but it's almost familiar. Same kind of work, though a lot more turbofan transports and less homebuilt ultralights. Something always needs to be moved, and air is the safest way. I'm not short work, that's for sure.

I've had the privilege to see a lot of this little planet. From the air, mostly, but you see a lot from up there. When you show up at some little town with the sprocket they need or the can of fuel that'll get them through the week... it's almost enough to make you think we're going to get through this. Almost enough to make you hope.

I haven't touched a drop in years.

SOPHIE HEMBRECHT-PHANN

*You Fly or you Fall
Hope is my Drug*

Martian	Overture	Veteran
Armada Division	Bashton's Children	Pilot

DR. MAX GAGE

RECORDED BY SARAH SALTIEL —
GREENHEARTH AGRICULTURAL STATION

Where were you from?

My family is a long line of farmers. I hated it. I never understood why they dedicated their lives to a bunch of leaves. My dad, he... sorry... he always dragged me on walks through the agricultural domes on Mars. He'd touch each plant and call it by name... as if he was saying hello to an old friend. Sorry, this... he... it's a hard memory for me.

He was brought from Earth to fill Mars with plant life. Most of my life was spent training to work in the Sculptor Division alongside him. He would always say to me, "Maxie, you've gotta understand that plants hold the key to life. They've been around so much longer than we have. Doesn't matter that they can't speak, they communicate with each other just the same — all life is connected like that."

I... I can't say that I really listened to him. I wish I had.

How did you experience the war?

I got infected in the earlier waves of The Song. Like most, my time infected is a blur. Like when your eyes try to focus on one thing and you feel like you should be able to see it, if you just strain a little harder, but no matter how hard you try, it stays just out of focus. Sometimes I'll see people on Polvo, and they'll look so familiar, as if they were a part of me. I'll know we shared The Song. Those are the people that I stay away from. No offense to them...

I just... I may not remember much but I know that the things that we did were horrible beyond compare.



My family got infected with The Song at the same time. There was peace in that, I think. We stayed together even when we lost, well... ourselves. Tormenta worked on me. I came to in a makeshift hospital ward that some of the survivors had made on our ship. My mother was sitting right beside me. My father and my little sister though, they... I...

Sorry, I don't think I can talk about this anymore.

What are you doing now?

My mother and I live on the outskirts of our community. She just wanted to move on and she's found some people that she can spend time with... and I'm happy for her. She doesn't approve of my work. But I know the truth. The Song is alive, not just in dark corners and the wild – it's still inside all of us. It lies dormant but it's still there, and it always has been. I've taken up my father's work now. I've been studying the plants here – the xenobiology is unlike any other that I've ever seen.

I think that studying the plant networks is the only way to understand how The Song works, how it spreads. I'm working on building model of human networks based off of my findings. The Song will come back, and I will be ready this time.

DR. MAX GAGE

The Song still Lives Inside Us
The Song Travels Through Humanity

Martian

Sculptor
Division

Silence

The Landing

Scholar

Xenobiologist

CORTESA SINGH

RECORDED BY FRANCES ROWAT — SILTON REPOSITORY

Where were you from?

The Belt. Parents planned against a kid but the pills didn't work, and they wouldn't sign me over to MarsCorp. Started flying our mining skiff – the *Stendahl's Promise* – at fifteen. Wasn't legal, but we fixed the pilot logs, and I clocked enough hours to start paying down the company debt.

Lost my leg and dad died in a space grit shower. Other Belters got us back but the Promise needed repairs. My cousin Orsina fixed our maintenance logs so MarsCorp couldn't deny the death benefits. Patched the Promise up, shared what we could with those who got us home.

Orsina taught me Bradbury. Old Earth writer, before space flight. Told stories that ended with Earth gone and Mars being where we moved past the worst of what people did to each other.

You seen MarsCorp? All us little lights out in the black and they're sucking us dry on contracts and margins.

Bradbury weeps.

So MarsCorp probes got lost and their systems broke and their scales weighed heavy and paid out extra and we'd share it round. We were close to getting caught, when the war started.

How did you experience the war?

War, hah. leaking massacre. Scrappy little ships what couldn't cross a galaxy on the Oort Line, and what came for us—

Orsina and me stripped the Promise down to fuel and power, clad on extra armour, swapped scanners for weapons. I flew, she was gunner. Got through a Chorister hull, but half our weapons were blown clean off. Rest stopped firing. Wanted to think they'd run dry. We weren't getting back anyway.

Gearing up to run the *Promise* right into the Chorister's guts when Orsina... Didn't hear her coming. Was wearing Bashton's Ears. She used a medkit sedative. Woke up too late.

People talk about Earth and Mars. Not about what it was like out in the black, after. Tatters of the Line stretching all the way to the belt. The frozen air, leaking.

Understand it. Known her since we were too young to work. If we'd have been dying over nothing, fine, but... Promise could've slowed that Chorister.

Haven't seen Orsina since I dropped her on the *Calabrese*. Don't know if she's on Dirt or off on a Permancer ship or what. Haven't checked. Got nothing to say to her, now.

What are you doing now?

Fixing shit. Haven't had time to take Promise off-world since I got here. Dirt's pretty easy. Breathe free, step outside free... even water's free, just leave enough for others. So much give here.

Sloppy or unlucky can kill you, but the belt taught me a lot that's useful. Sinkhole at Jadoc? My filter masks kept the kids breathing long enough to get fished out. Webster flood? I welded the bridge that held. It's not just scrabbling out here. It's building. Dirt's...

We've got a chance here. Something new, like Bradbury dreamed we could be on Mars. Fleet's holding on. Dirt's building up. Kids from the sinkhole're doing okay. Couple still have bad dreams, imagine they heard things.

Dirt's home now, right? It's ours, free and clear, thank the Permancer. Sure they meant well. Only. Have dreams myself sometimes.

Bradbury said things about free dirt.

CORTESA SINGH

*No-one Gets Left Behind
Never Abandon your Post*

Belter

Resistance
(Bradbury Weeps)

Crescendo

The Oort Line

Builder

Engineer

INTEGRITY 'TEG' SOH

RECORDED BY KATHERINE INSKIP — NOVA SHENZHEN

Where were you from?

My earliest memories are of 21 Lutetia, back before it became a debris field. Ma Jameson had a gang of five of us, small enough to get in deep and lay probes for the drill-bots. She kept us out of sight, and we got fed most days. After she disappeared – bought her way off-rock, or fell afoul of a Marshall or another miner, I don't know which – we did what we had to stay alive. Stole air tanks and slurry-packs. Sabotaged the drill-bots when they got too close. We made it a whole forty-four days before turning on each other.

I don't like to remember what came next, and I can't remember what came after... that. But somehow, I ended up in a hospital pod on the Glorious Message: nine years old, legless from the knees down, and missing several months worth of memories. The Padres fixed me up pretty good, and in the decade that followed, they gave me their faiths, a first name, and an education. Two of the three stuck, and no-one really minded that I never found a Calling that suited me. I trained as a medic instead, specializing in life support and medical prostheses. I had good friends there, before the war.

How did you experience the war?

The Message didn't last long, but a few of us got out. I ended up seconded to the Tormenta project. Basic surgeries and maintenance, low-pressure life support prep for the volunteers, amplifier attachments, organ bypass. Other things, too, if a volunteer's courage failed. I knew better than to ask too many questions.

What we did, it needed doing.

I told myself that every damn day, choking it down with whatever platitudes of scripture I could stomach. The volunteers my team sent out, not one of them died before they needed to. They'd chosen to be there, and we were duty-bound to make sure they saw that through, no matter how much they screamed and begged. We held their hands and thanked them for their service, then we caged their crippled minds in a prison of their flesh. By the time they were ready for loading onto the shuttles, most couldn't seem to sense anything beyond their own suffering. I tried to believe that was a blessing, but all too often one of the volunteers would meet my eyes and I'd know.

The Padres are wrong. There's no grace in that kind of suffering. And there's certainly no dispensation for all the things we did.

What are you doing now?

Still saving lives, supposedly, but even with my background there's a limit to what a wreck-runner can do. I scavenge whatever I can, go where I'm needed, and keep my eyes open. Maybe one day I'll find a purpose to it all, or a god I can believe in, but I don't hold out much hope.

Maybe it'll be something better than damnation... I don't hold out much hope for that, either. But Polvo's given me friends again. I guess that's something?

INTEGRITY 'TEG' SOH

*We are all Damned.
Friendship Never Lasts*

Belter

Steward
(Padre)

Dissonance

The Chase

Builder

Wreck-Runner

DANICKA GONZALEZ

RECORDED BY KIRA MAGRANN — TORTUGA POINT

Where were you from?

My parents died when I was pretty young, so I was bounced around from home to home around the stations, y'know? When you're raised that way it's easy to get in with the "wrong" kids. When you gotta be tough to survive, you learn things like stealing, bullying, and ship jacking. I remember the first ship me and my friends decided we were gonna hijack. I'd always seen the docks, and the ships, and even been scooted around in a passenger boat or two, but I've never seen anything like this luxury jet. Smooth plastic interior, bio-inserts for natural air, and the top speeds it could reach... weren't fast enough to avoid the authorities.

We all spent time in juvie but after that I knew what I wanted to do. Fly through the system in my own ship, on my own time, and live in a little piece of freedom away from the stations. It turned into a full-time job, and I moved mostly legal goods around between the stations in the belt, and even a few outposts. I was saving up for my own luxury ship some day. It was all I wanted back then really, to fly fast and free.

Silly dreams, looking back.

How did you experience the war?

I was in the first wave, out at Feynman Station. I was doing a long distance haul of basic supplies to the outpost. It was pretty routine and boring. When it happened, I couldn't exactly understand what was happening at first. I saw what was happening to everyone else and... thought maybe it was an earthquake? But that didn't make sense in zero-g so then I thought, maybe something hit us? But at that point it didn't matter, and I just ran frantically around the station trying to help as many people as I could and drag them back to my ship to get out of there.

When we got to the dock though, my ship had been horribly damaged in an accidental crash. I was trapped there until the rescuers came. Longest week of my life.

After that I just acted as civilian transport trying to rescue people from each specific attack. I'd never been military trained, but growing up in space had its advantages, and I was specialized at station evac. To be honest, I couldn't have imagined doing anything else. It was just... what had to be done. I had to get people out if they couldn't get out themselves. Guess that's some heavy personal baggage, right?

What are you doing now?

Basically I move goods in space for people who need them. Loosely it's trade, but I'm not doing it for the money. I'm doing it to make sure people on Polvo have what they need. I don't spend too much time on the ground, and I like to keep moving, so this is the best thing I could be doing right now. I think a lot of people wanna make a buck off suffering people who need things, but I've been there and ... I just want to help people get what they need, even if that means sneaking past the fleet or moving "illegal" merchandise. We're what's left, and we don't got time to squabble about economies or fair trade. We have to survive.

DANICKA GONZALEZ

*Some Things you Can't Outrun
Trade is More About People Than Things*

Belter	Overture	Builder
Transporter (Urraca Ships)	Feynman's Sentinels	Trader

OTSO MESIKÄMMEN

RECORDED BY ALEX ROBERTS — VULCAN'S BONEYARD

Where were you from?

You might not believe it, but I was born on an asteroid. My parents were miners, part of a very strong 256-square pack. My early years are just a mess of searching, confusion, never feeling like anyone was really attending to me. I wasn't happy until I grew up, and seven friends and I broke off into our own pack. We booted around for a few lazy years, living on nothing, sleeping with each other and being as stupid as you really ought to be at that age.

I felt called to family the moment I met my daughter, Hyvä. Her birth-mother Mielikki and I were linked in Häät soon after. Hyvä's star-mother was with us until she passed, and we were a three-legged dog until that sooty old beast Rusko showed up one day.

How did you experience the war?

The four of us were young and full of love, convinced the war couldn't touch us. It did, literally, at its crescendo: we were knocked out of Polvo's orbit as the Great Choir rained down onto the surface. To be honest, we were pretty wrecked after our... how shall I put this... hasty landing? Hyvä almost didn't make it. Fixing the ship didn't matter at that point, especially with all those humans milling around, infected with Ukko knows what, desperate and scared. Nothing mattered besides keeping the four of us together and safe.

There are jokes for situations like that, you know. They say the best time to laugh is when you have no reason to. Well, I don't have any jokes for you. I remember that time only with a terrible, overwhelming fear.



What are you doing now?

I liked New Hope at first. Hardscrabble folks, dragging each other into an uncertain future. A Padre told me this verse, something about beating swords into ploughshares. That's where they say my people came from, you know – the Otava cluster of stars, the Plough. There we were turning a whole fleet of swords into ploughshares, and every other survival tool besides; it all seemed to fit. But, the politics break my heart. Humans would rather fight over three chairs than build a fourth one. We decided to get some distance before those ploughshares turned back into swords.

We keep to ourselves mostly, out in the boneyards. I can't stay mad at a human, but I can't think of them as harmless anymore, either. I'm happy to be in a quad that loves being out there, exploring, hauling, sniffing around and striking gold every once in a while. In our line of work, you really feel like you've earned what you get. Even when it isn't much. We love each other and we back each other up. And every once in a while, we make the trip into town together. My friend runs a bar in town, says he doesn't get why we live like this, hand to mouth.

We get by just fine, there's more to survival than just what our hands do.

OTSO MESIKÄMMEN

*You Survive With Your Heart
Big Groups Make Big Problems*

Alien

Ursa
(The Forebearers)

Silence

The First Town

Builder

Salvager

EDEN HORIZON

RECORDED BY JAY ILES — PORT RIMWARD

Where were you from?

Wherever people are! Sure, I can trace the trail of my life all the way back to the quicksilver waters of Mercurio, but you've never met a Doppel if you think that's what defines me.

I was a traveler. Sometimes I'd be the pilot taking ships from port to port; other times I'd be cargo, wanting to soak in the ambiance of the passenger hold.

Why? Because every place I'd visit, I'd find someone living in a whole new way. I'd seek out the fringes, the avant-garde, the churches and bars, looking for someone I'd never seen before.

I probably make it sound romantic, but really I was an addict. I was so focused on finding and becoming novelty, then I'd wring it dry and find something else. Before too long I found I ended up with no assets, no family, no roots.

How did you experience the war?

I tried to keep it at a distance. Other cultures found the Choristers terrifying, but for us it was utter oblivion. Not just losing will, but losing the ability to change. I've seen Doppels who were taken by it — but only from a distance. They're locked in one identical form still, and I don't know what's more terrifying — that they can't change, or that they don't want to change.

Where was I? Ah, yes, the war. I fled deeper and deeper into

Human space, begging lifts on ships or piloting others if I had to. We all know that wasn't enough. I was on Earth when it became clear even the centre could not hold, and as luck would have it my ship was still in orbit.

Belonged to a merchant called Davlan Ort who'd hired me to bring them the last leg in from Jupiter. They wanted to be the first one aboard, of course, but their heart gave out—they made me captain as they died. I put on their face when I fly, to remember.

It was chaos and panic, but I got as many folks from that starport aboard as I could before the Fleet arrived and destroyed everything. It was too many. We had to make some real hard choices in the journey out, and it broke my heart.

What are you doing now?

In a way, I'm lucky—everyone's story is unique now. Maybe it always was, but it's easier to see when this is all that's left. I still travel from place to place – the shuttle's useful—but I spend my time listening to everyone and learning their stories. If they consent, I add them to my repertoire.

Then I use that understanding to find wounds and traumas in the community, and try to heal them. I become a mirror in which the whole community can see themselves, so they can see a way towards healing. It works more often than it doesn't.

EDEN HORIZON

*A Face is a Gift to be Honoured
If You Can't Save Someone, Learn Their Story*

Alien

Mercurio
(The Doppels)

Crescendo

The Star Lift

Scholar

Sociologist

JAESSA GAI PHAETHIAS

RECORDED BY SARAH DOOMBRINGER — BLACKROCK BASE

Where were you from?


The dark side of Eynides, of course. With the rest of the Fundar, stashed away in the darkness, a safe distance away from our Rasgado kin. It's nonsensical, really, to think those weeping downers are the best ones to tend to our crops and animals. No wonder all our food tastes so bitter.

I mean, I don't mind all that much. I'm just much happier training. Going on night runs with a full pack and extra ammo, harvesting redmoth venom to work into our armor, you know. Useful stuff that not everyone can do. It helps me ignore that hole, the knowledge that I'm not quite, well, not quite whole. I thought I could run away from that feeling. Thought if I got far enough away from Eynides I could ignore knowing there's a Rasgado out there I'll never be able to meet, the only person who could fill that hole inside. That's why I took my last commission, and ended up... well.

How did you experience the war?

I was stationed on one of the inner planets, one we don't name anymore. It was supposed to be an easy first time assignment for a new officer, you know? But then we heard the rumors of The Song... and by the time the Great Choir reached us, everything had already broken down, even before the first bomb fell.

People tried to be strong at first, but between supplies running out and roving gangs, it's amazing how fast everything broke down. I saw parents kill their children rather than have them starve. I saw the elderly led outside, staggering down broken roads and into the countryside to give the rest of us a break from the wild dogs roaming everywhere. We lost track of order, of law, of rank.



The worst part wasn't the assault, death falling from above randomly. The worst part was the days and weeks after, when people stopped pretending to be better than beasts. Watching grown men shove everyone else aside for the last of the water. Watching little kids picking through rubble looking for scraps until even their tear ducts were gray from the dust. They couldn't even cry anymore. The dead were the lucky ones.

What are you doing now?

I can't forget what I saw, but I have **have** to believe that we can be better. Dirt is our new chance. We may all have that core of brutality, but maybe we can try to make sure that if we are pushed that hard again, we have other options, other ways of responding.

That's why I'm still with the military. Order is the only thing that saves us from ourselves. We can spread peace through training, calmness through preparation. Hells, if following protocol can keep me from raging out, imagine what it can do for your average Terran? People need to see that they don't have to give into the monster within when things get bad. You can live with that hole inside yourself if you have to. You just have to find the thing that makes you better.

SGT. JAESSA GAI PHAETHIAS

*The Strong Must Help the Weak
Everyone has a Monster Inside*

Alien

Fundar
(The River)

Crescendo

Scorched Earth

Veteran

Officer

SCHEDULED INTERVIEWS

SUMMARIES BY DR. ALASDAIR STUART

Sean Tiskani took a vow of silence two years before *The Song* hit. It didn't matter. He and his brothers sang until their lips bled and watched so many fall before them. Now, Sean has returned to Stratos Abbey with the few survivors of the brotherhood to restore it.

Ivelisse Rivera speaks six languages, only three of which are still heard on Earth. A former UN translator, Ivelisse is now one of the four senior cabinet members for the planet. Her job as the Culture Secretary is a catch-all. She travels the world under guard and with an extensive team bringing new communities into the fold and making sure they're represented.

Professor Archie Chaudhary is not a leader. He's an academic revolutionary who founded a digital campus of cutting-edge researchers and instructors who were fed up with the insular nature of academe. Newton University is a think-tank for the world, with some of the brightest minds Polvo has to offer. Managing Newton University is a rough job that doesn't leave much room for sleep, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

Nathan Archer runs ALET 117, a SWAT team of executives who parachute into an area to solve problems, mediate disputes and get things moving. ALET teams are the public face of MarsCorp's Minerva Division. They're vital, go-getting hard-working people who are consciously deployed to the same areas they're recruited from. They are particularly skilled at troubleshooting difficult problems and people; MarsCorp will do **anything** to keep the project on track...

Colleen Tanaka knows how to fly all of them. A former squadron leader, Colleen led elements of the Star Lift, fought in the war and is done with all of them. Now, she wants quiet retirement building a better world on Polvo.

Stace Mallory held a ship that she and 4,000 other people were huddled on together with spit, baling twine, and solder. It lasted five minutes after landing. Stace has the number 300 and a clock tattooed on her right inner forearm. It's a reminder and a message; nothing needs to be perfect. Everything can be fixed for 300 seconds. And you can save lives when you do.

Janissa Okeke runs Phoenix Freight, a consortium of salvage specialists, engineers, pilots and wreck-runners. Phoenix know every fallen hulk in Polvo's Southern hemisphere. They're inventorying most of them. And when the job is complete, they're not going to sell their services anymore. They're going to sell the map.

Toby Morton was the fourth son of an upper-class English family. He followed his older sister into the service, served under her and was saved from The Song by her. He ran. He drank. And then the ships fell dirtside. Now, Toby takes security work wherever he can. He doesn't know if his sister is alive or dead. He doesn't care. All that matters is he makes it right for whoever left.

Frances O'Meara, a former Security Officer, suffered something close to a psychotic break when The Song ended. She knows she can't be around people. Instead, she guards the wreck of her old ship from people that want to pick the bones clean. The local settlement asked her to guard this prize, paying her in food, in signal, and in solitude.

Salman Rochester came to Polvo to escape. He was on a ragged, barely functional ship that fell apart five minutes after it landed. Anger was the first emotion he'd felt other than fear in months. He got up. He did something. When he sat back down, he and his fellow survivors made a town. Now, Salman is on his fifth town. He's still angry. But he's still working. And that's what matters.

Praxim Singh has an idea. He hasn't told anyone yet because that idea will get him arrested. But the more he thinks about it the more he thinks he's right; The Song, mapped to the RNA of the Rasgado, contains the cure for their virus. One day, soon, he'll go public. Until then, he busies himself on studying the curious genetic markers in the Polvan fauna.

Aleksandra Ilanova is one of countless scientists travelling Polvo, monitoring the cross-species communities growing there. She's also a Black Sky operative, quietly noting which employees have gone rogue. Officially she has to send their names in. Unofficially, she has yet to decide if she can.

Taaliba al-Majid is an experimental physicist who studies The Song. She has found consistent traces of The Song's pattern on a molecular scale, as the orbits of electrons synchronize in a particular pattern. Now she seeks to create a fool-proof method of detecting The Song's corrupting influence if she can convince the Illuvia to help.

Elizabeth Morton was on the fast track to command school when The Song hit. She fell. She saved whoever she could. And then she woke up over Polvo. Now Elizabeth runs a support group for veterans. She waits for her brother to arrive every day. She hopes he's still alive. She hopes he forgives her. She hopes one day she can too.

The Reverend Kristin Horton runs Our Lady of Polvo. Our Lady is a mission, a church and a hostel that ensures new arrivals are fed, watered and sheltered. She works closely with people like Stace Mallory and Salman Rochester, she knows everyone, and she does not sleep nearly enough. Especially as her other church, Our Lady of Song, worships something very different...

Matt Longshore listens more than he speaks and is taking the planet's collective psychological temperature. A big man, 6'5 and 400 pounds, he hitches rides around across Polvo with traders and veterans. Every time he does, he asks them one question; "How's it going?"

03 CHARACTER CREATION



- 03.01** New Beginnings
- 03.02** Your Origin
- 03.03** Your War Story
- 03.04** Your Profession
- 03.05** Your Beliefs
- 03.06** Your Name

NEW BEGINNINGS

We are all Don Quixote. We gallop headlong, clad in battered armour on a tattered horse, towards an enemy that's implacable and may not be real.

We do this knowing nothing of the battle to come, precious little of the past that preceded it, and nothing of the future. All we know is this one glorious moment of purpose. A single light we charge towards, unsure if we should snuff it out or huddle around it for warmth.

We are fortunate. We know exactly what we run towards. We know the battle is winnable and we know we will not be the ones to win it. In two or three centuries the archive will be complete; only then can our successors cease their charge, remove their armour, and rest.

Until then, we fight the good fight. We have a duty to the Initiative, to each other and to the people whose stories we will record so they can live far beyond their years.

We, my friends, are not Quixote. We are luckier than that. We are Sancho Panza, and we will spend our lives chronicling the histories of the wonderful, terrible, mad men and women who went into battle in our name and do so still.

**Professor Ignatio Flores,
Oghma Initiative Co-Curator**



CHARACTER CREATION OVERVIEW

Each player creates a primary character they will portray during the game. Each character has Six Traits, two Beliefs, and a name.

Your first Trait is your **Origin** representing how you were raised. Decide if you are Terran, Martian, Belter, or Alien. Each Origin has five options, one of which you pick as your second Trait.

Your third Trait is your **War Story**, representing the key event in the War of The Song that shaped you. You might remember the Overture, Crescendo, Dissonance, or Silence. Each War Story has five options, one of which you pick as your fourth Trait.

Your fifth Trait is your **Profession**, representing the life you have created for yourself on Polvo in the years that followed the War of The Song. You might now be a Builder, Veteran, Leader, or Scholar. Each Profession has five options, one of which you pick as your sixth Trait.

Your two **Beliefs** are subjective and controversial opinions you struggle to confirm or reject.

A **Name** and a title which describes you.

When you roleplay in a scene, your Traits give you context for decisions. When you enter into conflicts, your Traits give you bonus dice if they apply. Each Trait comes with a short description, and lists a few different ways that they might give you bonus dice in rolls.

Player characters can share Origins, War Stories, or Profession categories, but no two characters can share the specific Trait option.

*For instance, a player may choose to create a hardscrabble **Martian** colonist who knows how to keep an outpost safe. She would look at the Martian entry in the book, and select the **Cornerstone Division**. Another player could also choose to play a Martian, but couldn't join the Cornerstone Division.*

YOUR ORIGIN

Your **Origin** represents your character's background. It is your home, your culture, and your identity. No matter how much time has passed, you always bring your past with you.



TERRAN

You were born and raised on Earth, humanity's ancestral home. This crowded planet held massive metropolises, quiet rural villages, and vast swaths of verdant wilderness under open skies. You come from a wise and cultured people who maintain ancient traditions.



MARTIAN

You were born on Martian soil, and raised in one of the great domed cities. This planet was a busy corporate stronghold, surrounded by the largest terraforming project in human history. You come from a bold and passionate people who dreamed of building a world for their descendants.



BELTER

You were born in zero-G and raised in the belt. You had to fight for every bottle of oxygen, every drop of water, and every scrap of food. You never had enough, but at least you had each other. You come from a daring, resourceful, and freedom-loving people.



ALIEN

You were born on a distant world as a member of one of the Alien species who make up Fleet. Your rich culture and advanced technology set you apart from the primitive humans, who recently joined the civilized galaxy. You speak for your people and their ways.

WHERE YOU CAME FROM

Your First Trait will be one of the four Origin categories.

Your Second Trait will be one of that Origin's options.

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

CULTURE

‣ *Political Community*

HISTORY

‣ *Faithful Community*

NATURE

‣ *Academic Community*

‣ *Agricultural Community*

‣ *Citizen Community*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

CORPORATIONS

‣ *Cornerstone Division*

FINANCES

‣ *Armada Division*

HIERARCHY

‣ *Titan Division*

‣ *Minerva Division*

‣ *Sculptor Division*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

SALVAGE

‣ *Stewards (Padres)*

SCARCITY

‣ *Marshals (Mariscal)*

DISPUTES

‣ *Transporters (Urraca Ships)*

‣ *Wanderers (Vergers)*

‣ *Resistance (Bradbury Weeps)*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

FLEET

‣ *Permancer*

TECHNOLOGY

‣ *Iluvia*

HUMANS

‣ *Mercurio*

‣ *Ursa*

‣ *Fundar (or Rasgado)*

ORIGIN TERRAN

Earth was the cradle and the crown. Earth was where we started and where we could always return. Home to countless distinct peoples and cultures. It held all of our treasures, and supported nine billion souls. The planet had its faults, but it was what we had.

The planet was divided up between over a hundred nation-states and continental alliances. Each of these distinct legal and political traditions were slowly being consolidated into a peaceful world government.

The religious traditions of humanity – Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and countless others – began here. Dozens of major languages and thousands of minor ones echoed in the streets of this ancestral world.

It was a planet seemingly made for humanity, with an endless supply of breathable air, and drinkable water that rained from the sky. Massive forests, plains, and scrubland were scattered across the surface while the seas teemed with life. It was our paradise, lost.



POLITICAL COMMUNITY

You were raised in a political household, in one of Earth's massive urban centers. You grew up watching the newsnets, reading the pundits, and learning about the geopolitical machinations of the rich and the powerful.

POLITICS
GOVERNANCE
COMMUNICATIONS

FAITHFUL COMMUNITY

You were raised as a member of one of Earth's ancient religious communities. Whether you worshiped at a mosque, synagogue, gurdwara, or temple, you had a place to study religious texts and nurture your faith.

ETHICS
FAITH
THEOLOGY

ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

You were raised by intellectuals, born to the ivory tower, and educated in the finest schools that Earth had to offer. Whether you attended Cairo University, Federico Santa María Technical University, or Tsinghua University, your academic credentials are remarkable.

RESEARCH
DEBATE
TEACHING

AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY

Civilization depends on food, and the agricultural community of Earth was proud to feed us all. Whether you worked on a massive corporate orchard or an independent family farm, you know how to grow crops and tend livestock.

ANIMALS
AGRICULTURE
WEATHER

CITIZEN COMMUNITY

Citizenship is earned through military or civil service to Earth. You are one of those few who worked and bled for Earth, and had earned the privilege of voting in your civilian life. Citizens had access to the well paying jobs that were so rare on old Earth.

BUREAUCRACY
EMERGENCIES
VIOLENCE

ORIGIN MARTIAN

We thought Mars was our future. Even in the late 20th century, we looked to our neighboring planet as a second home for the human race. We dreamed of building domed cities, melting the polar caps, and terraforming the red planet into a green paradise.

The Corporations were the first to settle on Mars. Dozens of entrepreneurs built their own corporate headquarters on the planet, from Redcap Engineering Services, to Hephaestus Prospecting Incorporated. Corporate rivalries and industrial espionage eventually led to the Rust War. Domes were bombed, air scrubbers sabotaged, and squads of marines in Titan power armour fought in the airless wastelands.

When the war was over, only MarsCorp remained.

200 years later, Mars was unified along lines of commerce rather than nationality. Advanced manufacturing, military readiness, and terraforming sciences all prospered under the guiding hand of MarsCorp.



CORNERSTONE DIVISION

You were a member of the Cornerstone Division, responsible for the construction and industry of Mars. You learned how to create the tools that Mars need to thrive, from atmosphere generating towers for the Sculptors to the Titan's power armor.

ARMADA DIVISION

You were a member of Armada Division, commonly known as the Martian Navy. You earned your place on one of the Martian frigates which protected their planet's merchant fleet. The Armada watches over us all.

TITAN DIVISION

You were a member of Titan Division, the power-armour clad Martian Army. Your division kept the peace, enforced corporate law, and protected Martian interests throughout the system. Everyone knows that the Titans can never fall.

MINERVA DIVISION

You were a member of the Minerva Division, the corporate services and executive branch of MarsCorp. You solved problems and kept the planet profitable, through legitimate business ventures and more unorthodox enterprises.

SCULPTOR DIVISION

You were a member of the Sculptor Division, the terraforming specialists who worked tirelessly to turn Mars into a verdant paradise. Whether you worked at thickening the atmosphere, importing water, or raising the global temperature, your work would have made a better Mars for your children.

ENGINEERING

MANUFACTURING

TEAMS

WRECKS

ARTILLERY

SENSORS

BRAWLING

POWER-ARMOUR

ORDNANCE

NEGOTIATIONS

PLANNING

CONTACTS

CLIMATE

ECOSYSTEMS

ALGAE

ORIGIN BELTER

The asteroid belt wasn't meant for humans. It's a harsh, lifeless collection of stellar debris beyond the Martian orbit. It was also the best source of ore and rare minerals outside of a gravity well. Terran governments and Martian prospecting companies were eager to exploit the Belt. They sent robotic mining vessels and impoverished human workers to exploit it. These workers carved spaces out of the largest rocks and built small stations to live in. Air, food, water, and medicine were desperately low for generations, but they survived.

The Belt is a fractured place without a central government or corporate authority. Instead, it's an anarchic constellation of freeholds and outposts led by the brave and the desperate. They live in the void, eating protein slurry and drinking recycled water in their cramped quarters. Only the periodic visits of the missionary vessels give some measure of luxury and comfort.



STEWARDS (PADRES)

You were raised on one of the colossal, multi-faith missionary vessels which circulate among the Belt. These ships provide the Belt with essential medical support, educate their brightest, and offer a secluded monastery for those who need to seek the divine.

HEALTH

CHILDREN

TOUGH LOVE

MARSHALS (MARISCAL)

You were a Marshal, straddling the difficult roles of government, judge, authority figure, and designated adult. You settled disputes between neighboring outposts, hunted occasional murderers, and kept people as safe as you could.

OATHS

INVESTIGATION

PURSUIT

TRANSPORTERS (URRACA SHIPS)

The Belt doesn't have one homeworld; it has a thousand. You were one of the employees of Urraca Ships who traveled between these outposts to deliver mail, cargo, and passengers. You were the glue that kept the Belt together.

NAVIGATION

PILOTING

BARTER

WANDERERS (VERGERS)

You were one of the wounded and impoverished souls who searched the Belt for solace or meaning. You took freelance jobs to help where you could, but you never let yourself grow too attached. You knew how to survive alone in the dark.

TRAUMA

POVERTY

FREELANCER

RESISTANCE (BRADBURY WEEPS)

MarsCorp is the monolithic engine that will take humanity to the next stage of their evolution. As a member of Bradbury Weeps, you were the sand in the gears. You were part of the resistance to the tyrannical corporate dystopia and have Martian blood on your hands.

EXPLOSIVES

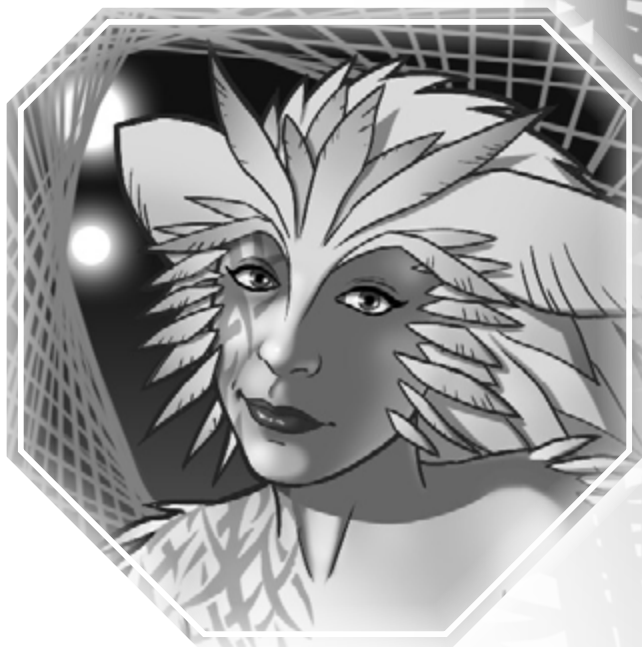
SABOTAGE

HACKING

ORIGIN ALIEN

Humanity dreamed of colonizing the empty stars for their children, but arrived to find aliens waiting to greet them. Already settled on hundreds of worlds throughout the cluster, we welcomed these *Homo sapiens* – despite the warnings of our lead anthropologists. We watched them explore and settle their solar system and held a few fertile planets in reserve for their inheritance.

The Permancer claimed that it was their duty to welcome all new species into the fold of galactic peace, no matter their war-like natures. The Illuvia deemed them as “excellent vassal material”. The Mercurio were fascinated by humanity’s incredible diversity of culture and appearance. The Ursa called them irredeemably adorable and empathetic creatures. The Fundar and Rasgado looked to the species and their history of peacemaking between nations once at ruthless war. Each of us saw something promising in humanity.



THE PERMANCER (THE KEEPERS)

The Permancer are a stoic and dutiful species resembling disgruntled, bipedal horses. You are the elder species, caretakers and guardians who brought the galaxy together in peace. Your species has the singular gift of immunity to memetic infections from The Song or Tormenta.

CIVILIANS
EMOTIONS
MEMETIC
IMMUNITY

THE ILLUVIA (THE SHINING ONES)

The Illuvia are a semi-tangible and post-organic species that look like clouds of mirrors rotating around a central point of light. You are unbearably smug, amazingly brilliant beings. You generously offer to allow humans to become Vassals, if they don't mind sharing their brains.

BEAUTY
INTELLIGENCE
VASSALS

THE MERCURIO (THE DOPPELS)

The Mercurio are shapeshifters who are driven to seek new forms. Your people are charming mimics who change faces and mannerisms reflexively, addicted to the thrill of taking new identities. No matter the challenge, you will change yourself to meet it.

IDENTITY
CROWDS
DECEPTION

THE URSA (THE FOREBEARERS)

The Ursa are a hyper-social bear-like species that always works in packs of four. You came from a stable Quad with three others, related by blood, marriage, profession, or trauma. Your people are friendly and gregarious workaholics. Your culture is obsessed with the number 4, a symbol of stability.

INTIMIDATION
STRENGTH
FAMILY
UNBEARABLE PUNS

THE FUNDAR (THE RIVEN)

The avian Fundar shared their world with their Rasgado cousins until they were divided by a terrible bioweapon. Contact between Fundar and Rasgado leads a horrific death for both. The Fundar were permitted to settle on Polvo, and theoretically the Rasgado are forbidden.

ATTACHMENT
RESENTMENT
SUFFERING

YOUR WAR STORY

Your **War Story** represents the traumatic events you survived during the War of The Song. It's something that left a lasting mark on your body, mind, and soul. It is the most important event that you participated in.



OVERTURE

You were involved in the beginning of the war. Whether you were captured by The Song's first notes, or warned the galaxy of the threat, you were there at the beginning. You should have stopped this from happening, but you had no way of knowing what would come next.



CRESCENDO

You were involved in the darkest period of the war, when our extinction seemed inevitable. The Great Choir smashed against our defenses, and bombarded the inner planets. You survived; fighting on the Oort Line, or fleeing on one of the thousands of refugee haulers in the Exodus Fleet.



DISSONANCE

You were involved in the bloody resistance against The Song, where humanity fought with every weapon at its disposal to survive. You helped the Exodus Fleet turn human volunteers into memetic artillery, to be flung against the Great Choir. You still see their faces and hear their screams in your darkest nightmares.



SILENCE

You were there in the first years after the war. Tormenta's scream drowned out The Song. The Great Choir fell from orbit onto the surface of Polvo. Some chose to rest and heal, but you knew you had to act. You were one of the millions trying to build a better future out of the carnage of the past.

WHAT YOU SURVIVED

Your Third Trait will be one of the four War Story categories.

Your Fourth Trait will be one of that War Story's options.

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

SCIENCE

‣ *Feynman's Sentinels*

EVASION

‣ *First Contact*

THE SONG

‣ *The Prelude*

‣ *Shelter in Place*

‣ *Bashton's Children*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

VIOLENCE

‣ *Personal Apocalypse*

GRIEF

‣ *The Oort Line*

REFUGEES

‣ *The Star Lift*

‣ *Fire Sale*

‣ *Scorched Earth*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

SACRIFICE

‣ *The Stolen Plans*

ANGER

‣ *Recruitment Drive*

TORMENTA

‣ *The Chase*

‣ *The Battle of Amboso*

‣ *The Hero*

SITUATIONS

OPTIONS

HEALING

‣ *The Landing*

HOPE

‣ *The First Town*

RELATIONSHIPS

‣ *Rendered Aid*

‣ *The Covenant*

‣ *Echoes*

WAR STORY OVERTURE

2243.09.01.0645

Unusual hydrogen resonance pattern from interstellar space in quadrant 4.6, the Chord Strike, is detected by researchers on Feynman Station.

2243.09.01.0753

Communications with research team are cut. Reports of personnel in EVA suits constructing antenna.

2243.09.01.1219

The USF Endeavour dispatched to Feynman Station, Captain Rafale commanding.

2243.09.01.1812

The USF Endeavour infected by The Song. Recruits evacuate using escape pods according to protocol.

2243.09.04.0240

Final survivors of the USF Endeavour escape on shuttlecraft and are immediately quarantined by Fleet.



FEYNMAN'S SENTINELS

You were one of the staff on Feynman Station, the first outpost to hear The Song. While you didn't hear The Song, you saw what happened to your friends and colleagues who did.

SIGNALS

CHORISTERS

BRAWLING

FIRST CONTACT

You were one of the staff on Feynman Station. That alien melody seized your mind and bound you to its will, turning you against your friends and colleagues. You only escaped after Tormenta was unleashed at the end of the war.

PERSUASION

COORDINATION

PLANNING

THE PRELUDE

You were one of the crew on the *USF Endeavour*, a fleet ship exploring past the Black Line on the frontier of known space. That alien melody seized the minds of your crew and bound them to its will. You hid below decks and did your best to slow the ship until they finally caught you.

STEALTH

SABOTAGE

AMBUSHES

SHELTER IN PLACE

You were one of the new recruits of the *USF Endeavour* in the middle of a Storm Shelter training exercise when the Chord Strike hit. When the bridge stopped responding, you followed protocol and ejected safely.

PROTOCOL

FEAR

DISCIPLINE

BASHTON'S CHILDREN

You were one of the survivors of the *USF Endeavour* who fought Choristers for three days before you were overcome. Commander Bashton sacrificed herself so a dozen of you could flee on one of the remaining shuttle-craft.

ATTACHMENT

RESENTMENT

SUFFERING

WAR STORY

CRESCENDO

2243.11.21.2310

*The Song has swept across settled space and
73% of the Fleet has been converted.*

2243.04.17.0932

*The Great Choir has reached the Oort Line defenses.
Holding.*

2244.01.02.2151

*The Oghma Initiative, a collective of archivists, finishes the
upload of final wills and messages from Mars and Earth
before The Song's arrival.*

2244.01.04.0121

*The Oort Line defenses have been breached, and the
Great Choir is in transit to the inner planets.*

2244.01.04.0542

*Star Lift operation complete. Refugee flotilla fleeing the solar
system prior to the arrival of the Great Choir.*



PERSONAL APOCALYPSE

You were part of the Oghma Initiative as one of the technical specialists who allowed 9 billion humans on earth to upload their final wills and messages. You gave them a voice, before it was snuffed out by the Great Choir.

THE OORT LINE

You fought on the Oort Line, the solar system-spanning ring of automated defenses which stood between Earth and the Great Choir. You were one of the 7,500 volunteers who survived the confrontation, and your efforts allowed millions to evacuate the inner planets.

THE STAR LIFT

You were one of the crew involved in the Star Lift, a makeshift flotilla which transported as many refugees off the inner planets as they could before the Great Choir arrived. While others fought on the line, the Star Lift rescued close to six million Terrans and over a million Martians.

FIRE SALE

You were part of the elite team of corporate executives, sent by the mega-corps to negotiate with the alien species who welcomed humanity. You bought empty moons, mothballed space stations, and a harsh frontier world called Polvo.

SCORCHED EARTH

When the Great Choir pushed past the Oort Line, they travelled to the inner planets to convert humanity. Those who resisted suffered orbital bombardment. You were one of the rare survivors of the assault, who managed to escape the ruined world after a year-long nightmare.

COMMUNICATIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

REGRET

WEAPONS

REPAIRS

SACRIFICE

LOGISTICS

TRANSPORT

TRIAGE

ALIENS

BARGAINING

PITY

SCAVENGING

DEPRIVATION

URBAN
WARFARE

WAR STORY

DISSONANCE

2244.01.05.2217

The Lucky Few escapes the Earth, dodging the barrage from the Great Choir.

2244.01.23.1005

Project Static releases a call for volunteers for an experimental weapons program.

2244.08.16.1351

The first test of Project Static is released at the Battle of Amboso, weakening the Great Choir.

2244.08.29.1625

Francis Duffy, Hero of the War of The Song, is reformatted into Tormenta Prime.

2244.12.20.1945

Tormenta Prime opens its eyes, and smiles. The Tormenta signal spread across the Great Choir and ships began to die.



THE STOLEN PLANS

You were on the final vessel to leave Earth, *The Lucky Few*, which carried scientists and secret research. Your ship carried the plans for a living nanotech weapon. The Anti-Song. Project Static.

SCIENTISTS
SMUGGLING
NANOTECH

RECRUITMENT DRIVE

The call went out across the refugee armada for volunteers for an experiment that might stop The Song. You were one of the hundreds of volunteers accepted into Project Static, and one of a handful that survived with your mind intact.

PASSION
REBELLION
TORMENTED

THE CHASE

The Great Choir chased the refugee armada for months. You were part of the team that prepared shuttles loaded with experimental subjects from Project Static and packed with explosives. Each shuttle bought the Exodus Fleet another week of safety.

TRAPS
CIVILIANS
BOMBS

THE BATTLE OF AMBOSO

You were part of the team that re-purposed a series of asteroids into a delivery mechanism for Project Static. Rocks filled with trillions of nanobots crashed into the Great Choir and took over a dozen vessels .

CHORISTERS
AMBUSHES
ENGINEERING

THE HERO

Francis Duffy was an abusive, violent drunk. He became Tormenta Prime, the memetic carrier that infected the Great Choir with the Anti-Song. You knew Francis, and not even he deserved what happened to him in that black-ops laboratory.

ABUSERS
ADDICTION
SHAME

WAR STORY SILENCE

2244.12.20.1615

The Great Choir began calling for help in their own voices. Screaming was heard on all communication frequencies.

2244.12.21.1728

The first ships make controlled landings on Polvo. The first town of Polvo, New Hope, is officially founded.

2244.12.28.1240

Tormenta Prime is laid to rest in Covenant Yard. A terraforming bomb is dropped on the site to contain the body.

2247.09.28.1725

The last shipment of emergency aid from the Permancer arrives on Polvo. The planet is deemed self-sufficient.

2252.03.08.1427

Small gatherings of singers are reported in the Blackrock hills. A Peacekeeper force is dispatched.



THE LANDING

You were part of the Great Choir until Tormenta freed your mind. You were on one of the first ships to land on Polvo, but certainly were not the last. Now you try to escape your past.

GUILT

SECRETS

CHORISTERS

THE FIRST TOWN

You broke ground on New Hope, the first town on Polvo. Food and bunk space were at a premium, but you finally had a home. New Hope was the model for all the other settlements to come.

STRANGERS

SHELTER

FOOD

RENDERED AID

You were there, when the Permancer came to offer aid to the humans of Polvo. You helped coordinate supplies, direct refugee traffic, and establish the official inquiry into the war.

RESETTLEMENT

REFUGEES

RECORDS

THE COVENANT

You were part of the team that interred Tormenta Prime in Covenant Yard. You did your best to bury the thing deep enough no one would find it, then dropped a terraforming bomb on top to be sure.

FORTIFICATIONS

TORMENTED

TERRAFORMING

ECHOES

You saw the signs. The slight resonances in the hydrogen of Polvo's seas. The strange behaviour of the wildlife. You are one of the few who realizes that The Song lurks in the shadows.

CHORISTERS

MEMETICS

EMPATHY

YOUR PROFESSION

Your **Profession** represents your expertise and the career that you have established on Polvo in the decade since the war.



BUILDER

You will build this new world with your own hands. It doesn't matter whether you build shelter, bridges, or trade. No, what matters is that you build a foundation for the next generation. We won't get a feast tomorrow unless we get our hands dirty today.



VETERAN

You fought in the war, and at least part of you survived. You are one of the many wounded souls whose martial discipline and military skills offer security to the people of Polvo. You know the horrors of war and the importance of keeping the peace. You stand on the walls to keep watch over the civilians in your care.



LEADER

Every society has those who follow, and those who lead. You are one of the few who guide and protect the people of Polvo. Your power comes from enabling your followers to succeed. Your responsibility is to help them make wise decisions which will unite, rather than divide, your settlement.



SCHOLAR

You established yourself as one of the great minds of Polvo. You may be a product of the great universities of old Earth, the Tharsis Institute of Technology on Mars, Permancer Mindtemple, or a Belter research outpost. No matter where you come from, you are an intellectual who deals with the larger issues.

HOW YOU LIVE

Your Fifth Trait will be one of the four Profession categories.

Your Sixth Trait will be one of that Profession's options.

SITUATIONS

PROJECTS
COORDINATION
TOIL

OPTIONS

- *Wreck-Runner*
- *Engineer*
- *Trader*
- *Agent*
- *Salvager*

SITUATIONS

WEAPONS
TACTICS
VIOLENCE

OPTIONS

- *Pilot*
- *Medic*
- *Grunt*
- *Sentinel*
- *Officer*

SITUATIONS

COMMANDS
PLANS
EMOTIONS

OPTIONS

- *Organizer*
- *Imam*
- *Prospero*
- *Storyteller*
- *Diplomat*

SITUATIONS

RESEARCH
ANALYSIS
DEBATE

OPTIONS

- *Xenobiologist*
- *Sociologist*
- *Physicist*
- *Psychologist*
- *Lawyer*

PROFESSION BUILDER

*We're building something here. Something strong.
Four strong. Eight strong. Whoever wants to be here is
welcome, and we welcome everyone who has hands to
work. Yes, we need and welcome everyone's big ideas. We
will welcome everyone who was left behind.*

*And all those who sang will one day find their own voices.
We stand. Four square. Eight square. Twelve square. Because
the foundation that we build here will support the future.
We owe our cubs a future better than the one we inherited.*

**Tantobarkley IV,
Ursan Mayor of New Inverness**



WRECK-RUNNER

You are one of the freelance emergency responders of Dirt, who go anywhere to rescue those in need. Hundreds of people each year owe their lives to the Wreck-Runners, and those debts are always repaid with interest.

TRAVEL

EMERGENCIES

DEBTS

ENGINEER

Engineers build strong bridges, plan buildings that won't collapse in the first shake, and know how to make machines that last. If you want to build a better world, look for an engineer with an iron ring.

INFRASTRUCTURE

MACHINERY

SCHEMATICS

TRADER

You are one of the new merchants of this world, whose trade networks get the settlements the goods and services they need. You are building a peaceful world, since when goods don't cross borders, soldiers do.

TRADE GOODS

BARGAINING

NEIGHBOURS

AGENT

You are a foreign agent, whether you work for Black Sky Industries, or were hired by the Permancer to watch over the humans. Your eyes are sharp, your contacts everywhere, and your loyalty suspect.

LIES

CONTACTS

FACTIONS

SALVAGER

You are one of the countless salvagers who extract priceless goods from the wrecks of Polvo. You may work in the Boneyards, pulling downed ships apart for salvage. You may even work in low orbit, scuttling old hulks into the atmosphere.

WAR-SALVAGE

ELECTRONICS

BARTER

PROFESSION VETERAN

You know the one; their watch is ended and they're no longer quite sure what to do with themselves. It's the look of someone who's spent years staring at their boots, at what's in front of them, and is only now realizing there are other places they can look.

It makes me cry sometimes, seeing them make their way in this world. Seeing them relax. But it terrifies me that some of them think freedom from obligation is freedom from duty. You know I've got loyalty to these people in my bones, we all have. They stood when we sang. They fought when we exulted.

But that loyalty is tinged with guilt and fear, when you see what happens when that duty curdles. When the question becomes not "What next?" but "What can I get away with?"

Adaeze Okezie
Mayor of New Hope



PILOT

You were a pilot during the war, and your skills are invaluable on this new world. The skies of Polvo are thick in some places with shuttles, runabouts, and heavy transports.

PILOTING
DRIVING
NAVIGATION

MEDIC

You were a medic during the war and brought those medical skills to Polvo. You saved countless soldiers and civilians during and after battles, and the work continues on this frontier world.

INJURIES
PATIENTS
MEMETICS

GRUNT

The war may have ended, but you will always be a soldier. You trained your body and your mind to fight, be it on the open field or confined hallways of military ships. You have always fought.

WEAPONS
BRAWLS
ATHLETICS

SENTINEL

You were a recon specialist during the war, someone who specialized in travelling vast distances to claim and hold territory. You find the things that matter and keep them safe.

SURVIVAL
RECONNAISSANCE
FORTIFICATION

OFFICER

You earned your field commission during the war, and led your troops as best you could. Now you've settled on Polvo and lead the effort of protecting the civilian population from terrible threats.

SUBORDINATES
STRATEGY
CIVILIANS

PROFESSION LEADER

I know you are scared. We all are. The rice blight cut into our harvest, and welcoming these newcomers will make for a lean winter. I know this year has been hard on all of us especially after we lost so many.

I need you to look past your fear and grief. These new people are just as scared this prosperous community might reject them. They also lost people, and they desperately long for a place to call home.

We are not inviting strangers or beggars into our settlement. We are welcoming our new family into our home. Now let's find them somewhere to rest because tomorrow will be a big day for all of us.

**Soo Jung Kim,
Mayor of Bashton's Hold**



ORGANIZER

Someone needed to keep the peace and guide the community. The settlement recognizes you as its leader, in either an elected or an unofficial role. This normally means calming tempers and negotiating necessary compromises.

LOGISTICS

GRUDGES

ACTIVISM

IMAM

You are a religious leader for the settlement, whether you speak for one of the old Terran religious traditions, syncretic belief systems of the Belt, or bizarre alien faiths.

BIRTH

DEATH

RITUAL

PROSPERO

You are a strange soul whose vision extends farther than most and who shares an intimate understanding of the land. The rumours say you have strange knowledge and unnatural gifts that cannot be explained by science.

See **MYSTIC ARTS** on **PG.333**.

PROPHECY

BLESSINGS

CURSES

STORYTELLER

You are a teller of stories who crafts clever fictions. You are the keeper of histories and rememberer of painful truths. You are the collective memory of the community that holds the settlement together.

MYTHOLOGY

HISTORY

FICTION

DIPLOMAT

You know how to talk to people. This is remarkably handy, particularly when you have to deal with angry Fundar or desperate Belters. You have learned how to determine what others want and need to hear.

OUTSIDERS

COMPROMISES

FORMALITIES

PROFESSION SCHOLAR

There is so much we don't know about Polvo. The Permancer owned this place for centuries, but never so much as built a single outpost here. Ms. Desroches, our sensor tech, claims that there is some low-level electrical interference to the south-east. Dr. Sing, our resident xenobiologist, claims there are major ecological niches that are completely empty. When you add that to the strange behaviours of the children, it's clear we have cause for concern.

That is why I would like to formally request a research team from Black Sky join our settlement for a limited contract to investigate Polvo. We need to know if this planet is safe for us, or if there's some kind of danger hiding in the hills.

**Dr. Hannah Müller,
Mayor of Nova Essen**



XENOBIOLOGIST

You are a biologist and ecologist, specializing in the study of alien Lifeforms. You have plenty of work on Polvo, with thousands of unknown Polvan species and dozens of invasive alien ones in our new home. See **ECOLOGIES** on **PG.248**.

XENO BIOLOGY
ECOSYSTEMS
INVASIVES

SOCIOLOGIST

You are an expert in society, culture, and identity. Your skills are needed to keep your fragile settlement working together, deal with interspecies cultural differences, and build a safer Polvo for the future.

INSTITUTIONS
IDEOLOGY
SUBCULTURES

PHYSICIST

You are a scientist who specializes in the fundamental building blocks of the universe. You may focus on quantum computing, high-energy particles, Illuvian resonators, or Newtonian physics. Perhaps you even research the Precursor technologies...

ENERGY
EXPERIMENTS
XENOTECH

PSYCHOLOGIST

You are an expert in issues of the mind and mental illness. When the War of The Song released memetic horrors, all of the civilian psychologists were recruited into the war effort. In the aftermath of the war, your skills are always in high demand.

TRAUMA
MENTAL ILLNESS
MEMETICS

LAWYER

You are a trained notary, barrister, or solicitor experienced in contracts, litigation, and criminal law. Your expertise is sought after as you establish a new Polvan legal system.

OUTSIDERS
COMPROMISES
FORMALITIES

YOUR BELIEFS

Having chosen your Traits, now create two Beliefs.

This is a game about confronting your Beliefs by finding evidence that either reinforces or contradicts your assumptions. A Belief is a subjective, controversial declaration. Each character has two Beliefs.

Beliefs are statements that the character agrees with and that the player wants to explore during play. Beliefs should be the two most important ideas, questions, or themes that motivate your characters. By creating a Belief, you are telling the GM that you would like to see it challenged during the game.

When you enter into Conflicts that directly confirm or refute a Belief, you might gain **Insight**. You will be able to spend this to ask questions, or to pay the **Price of Victory**. If you accumulate enough Insight, your character will have made a final decision on one of their Beliefs and will upgrade it to an unchanging **Conviction**.

PRINCIPLES FOR STRONG BELIEFS

A good Belief is a subjective, philosophical, and controversial statement. The conceit in **AFTER THE WAR** is that overwhelming evidence may be enough to convince someone to change their Beliefs. Statements that are obviously true or false don't make for strong Beliefs.

- ▶ Beliefs may pertain to your Origin, exploring your family traditions or childhood lessons.
- ▶ They may pertain to your War Story, driving you to either embrace or reject the horrors you encountered.
- ▶ They may pertain to your Profession, the reasons why you practice your craft, or the ethos it taught you

Use these guidelines as a starting point. You may also create Beliefs that don't directly relate to your Traits.

SAMPLE BELIEFS

Family is a Chain to be Broken.

Violence is the Best Teacher.

Only the Strong Survive

Peace Prevails

MarsCorp Knows Best

Humans are Dangerous

The Song is Divine

Anger is a Gift

Infections Must be Exterminated

Polvo Yearns for Liberty

The Union can Return.

CONVICTIONS (OPTIONAL)

Some characters may have learned lessons from their journey to Polvo. You may have accepted or rejected one of your Beliefs completely. The GM may allow you to create a character that starts the game with a **Conviction**, which represents your firm stand on the issue. Convictions are written in the same format as a Belief, but are used differently during play.

- ▶ When you are acting in line with one of your Convictions during a Conflict, roll an additional die. Your zealous passion gives you strength.
- ▶ When you reflect upon a scene, you do not gain any Insight from confronting your Convictions. Your decision is final.

Your Conviction cannot be changed through either reasoned dialogue or memetic corruption. During play, Convictions can only be created during a **MOMENT OF GROWTH** on **PG.144**.

YOUR NAME

Now that you know your character's Talents and Beliefs, you need a name. It can be their legal name, a pseudonym, or some other personal identifier. You should also create a title or moniker for your character that represents their personality.

Some examples of names and titles are...

- Estrella Zorita, Engineer of the Rosa
- Mia Cadaval, the Killer
- Rene Sáenz, the Honest Broker
- Dr. Zhu Li, Professor of Astrophysics
- Kaptan Atalay, the Gardener
- Adsiz Gurbuz, Pilot Extraordinaire
- Sevin Kocer, Union Organizer
- Professor Dayaxo, Xenobiology Specialist
- Lt. Buuxa, the Groundpounder
- Dallays, the Unstoppable Reporter

COMMON NAMES

Terran: Ahmed, Baker, Burton, Chu, Crowe, Demir, Khan, Laine, Lambert, Novak, Olsen, Richard, Smith, Sokolov, Wabadji, Wagner, Wong, Yosef

Martian: Ali, Cohen, Cross, Duarte, Egwu, Eke, Gupta, Hasan, Hinwasti, Ivanov, Khatri, King, Lau, Mbanefo, Ndiaye, Okiro, Sato, Yamada

Belter: Abbas, Alagalak, Almeida, Chan, Esposito, Lopez, Martinez, Nagata, Ng, Ojebawa, Okar, Perez, Petrov, Petrovic, Ryes, Santos, Tran, Trepanier

Permancer: Patience, Defiance, Tolerance, Temperance

Illuvian: Curie, Chatalet, Noether, Lamarr, Wu, Hao

Mercurio: Zodo, Jonis, Tali, Garcian, Remenbrant, Bleinstien

Ursan: Colanali, Garrartio, Jacostia, Nashilion, Obstigano

Fundar: Uklon, Xinos, Zertu, Rale, Taratal, Yatla, Golan

04 SETTLEMENT CREATION



04.01	Building a Home
04.02	Barleymow
04.03	Warframe Yard
04.04	Fort Bligh
04.05	Vermilion Exchange
04.06	Daedalus Station
04.07	Port Thoth
04.08	Other Settlements

BUILDING A HOME

Ignatio will tell you that the most important thing we can do is remember the past.

Ignatio is wrong.

The most important thing we can do is use the past to defend against the future.

Memory means nothing without action. An untended memorial will be overgrown and vandalized. It will be forgotten. The mistake that led to it will be repeated.

This is not a job I wanted, but I could not say no.

My specialty isn't personal testimony. It isn't even people. I don't like people. Anyone. It's something of a hobby of mine. I've spent my career getting as far away from people as possible and then this all hit.

I knew I'd failed. I should have seen it coming.

We should have planned for this.

And we didn't. And now the solar system is a memorial. And all I can do is listen to the stories of the people we failed and vow to make sure that others don't just listen. They learn. And in learning they build better walls from the bones of those we let down.

And yes, I am drinking. And no there is no "again" here.

**Professor Carina Mallory,
Oghma Initiative Co-Curator**

SETTING CREATION OVERVIEW

AFTER THE WAR is a game about found families and troubled homes. Millions of traumatized survivors and refugees from the war have landed on Polvo. These brave souls have shanty towns between fallen starships, trading posts at the crossroads, research stations and cosmopolitan cities. This Chapter shows you how to create a settlement for your own game, and how to start playing.

In this Chapter, you will select one of the settlements for your group to play in, along with the personal relationships which bind you together. When that's done, we meet the characters and discover how they live their lives. These are the eight steps in the process.

- Step 1: Choose Settlement
- Step 2: Select Industries
- Step 3: Answer Questions
- Step 4: Show Faces
- Step 5: Form Relationships
- Step 6: Make Maps
- Step 7: The Welcome
- Step 8: The First Day

STEP 1: CHOOSE SETTLEMENT

There is a remarkable variety of settlements which you might play in, varying from quiet farming communities to clandestine black sky research stations. In this step, you determine where you want to play.

Normally, you will select one of the six core settlements which are described in this Chapter, but you can also choose one of the three offworld settlements in Chapter 12.

If you want to spend a bit more time doing some collaborative world-building, you can expand on some of the other settlements on **PG.118**.

POLVAN SETTLEMENTS

The default assumption is that you are playing in one of the six core settlements on Polvo which are:

- **Barleymow:** A tight-knit farming community where rumour and small-town drama run rampant which is described on **PG.106**.
- **Warframe Yard:** A boneyard where salvagers pull scrap from fallen warships which is described on **PG.108**.
- **Fort Bligh:** A military outpost which stands on guard for potential threats which is described on **PG.110**.
- **Vermilion Exchange:** A trading post full of exotic trade goods and strange visitors, described on **PG.112**.
- **Daedelus Station:** A scientific facility where dangerous research is conducted and is described on **PG.114**.
- **Port Thoth:** A spaceport that connects Polvo to the offworld colonies and Fleet, described on **PG.116**.

BEYOND DIRT

While most of the survivors of the war, there are a number of other sanctuary worlds where brave souls rebuild. These Offworld Settlements include:

- **The Oort Line:** A Belter community of survivors amid the defenses which held the Great Choir at bay, described on **PG.318**
- **Longfall:** A colony world under a colossal plateau, where the survivors try to rebuild the capital of the Galactic Union, described on **PG.322**
- **Sargasso:** A planet torn in two, where Black Sky Industries tests dangerous technologies as described on **PG.326**.

*In this example, let's select **Barleymow** as our settlement.*

STEP 2: SELECT INDUSTRIES

Each settlement sustains itself through trade with their neighbours, and specialize in certain industries. The industries represent the different types of work that define daily life in this community. A farming town might raise livestock, grow rice, and send out fishing boats into a nearby lake whereas life in a space port is quite different. While there are five potential industries for each core settlement, select three for your game.

*Barleymow has five potential industries: Farming, Fishing, Ranching, Textiles, and Logging. The group decides that **Farming, Ranching, and Textiles** seems like a good mix.*

STEP 3: ANSWER QUESTIONS

Each settlement has four questions for you to answer as a group. Your answers will help define some key aspects of your community and the challenges that it faces.

*Barleymow has four questions and the GM asks the first one: **Your settlement is the only producer of a specific kind of good. What do you provide and why is it prized?***

The group considers that this might be the only coffee plantation on the planet, but decided against it. Instead they declare that they have found a way to extract a stunning iridescent dye from some of the local Poluan flora which is mildly bioluminescent.

STEP 4: SHOW THE FACES

Each of the Industries is represented by a non-player character known as a Face. Each of the core settlements lists sample Face characters, giving them names, jobs, and Beliefs. Take a moment to talk about the three important people.

*Mateo Martinez is a Belter Steward representing the Farming industry who believes **Nothing is Broken Forever**. The group decides that Mateo has been teaching some of the Belter refugees and orphans how to repair farm equipment.*

STEP 5: FORM RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are vitally important in this game. Each player looks at the three Faces and decides which of these their character has a close relationship with. Perhaps they were childhood friends, who fled the ruins of Earth together. Perhaps they served together during the war, or fell in love.

Tell the group why you care about this person and ask the GM to add a relationship thread to the **PG.180**

Tora the Cleric is another Belter Steward who knows Mateo very well. They were engaged to be wed, but that was cancelled during the horrors of the war. The two are trying to reconcile. The relationship thread written on the plot map is “Pre-war fiancées, trying to reconcile.”

STEP 6: MAKE MAPS

Each settlement has key locations. The old bar where everyone knows your name. The remains of a warship reworked into a makeshift hospital. The longhouses that hold the agricultural workers and their families. Each of these locations gives context to your stories, helping define the people who live there.

As a group, talk about the important places in your community. Create a location associated with each one of them. These locations need a name and a one-line description.

- Where is the first industry?
- Where is the second industry?
- Where is the third industry?
- Where do most people live?
- Where does community come together?
- What is a location that most people avoid?

Mechanico Mateo: *Mateo's machine shop is set-up in an old repurposed barn, where he repairs tractors and combines.*

If you have a bit of time and at least one artist at the table, consider grabbing a blank worksheet and drawing your own settlement map together.

Each of the six core settlements and three off-world settlements also have handy illustrated maps which you can use for your game, available at <http://www.genesisoflegend.com/downloads/>

STEP 7: THE WELCOME

Each player character arrived at the settlement at different times. One of your number either joined or helped establish the community, shortly after the cessation of hostilities. Another character is just arriving in the settlement when play begins. The others arrived during the intervening years. Discuss the order of arrival as a group, using dice to resolve any uncertainty and begin roleplaying.

THE ELDER

The character who has lived in the settlement for the longest describes what the community looked like in the immediate aftermath of the war. They then establish a relationship with a second Face character, then greet the next arrival.

THE INTRODUCTIONS

The Elder will welcome the character with the second most seniority upon their arrival to the settlement, and can ask one of the immigration questions listed below.

- How did you get that injury?
- Why did you decide to immigrate to this community?
- Who did you bring with you to the community, and what is the nature of your relationship?
- What do you have in that large grav-trunk behind you?
- You look to have a few battles under your belt. Where did you serve, and under whose command?

This process repeats until every subsequent character has been welcomed into the community.

THE NEWCOMER

One of the characters has just arrived at the settlement's proverbial gates. They have come here for some purpose, whether it be to deliver news, flee from danger, or transport something of value. That player should describe a new **plot thread** between that settlement and an NPC in your community.

Throughout the process, the GM may ask additional questions to learn more about your characters, and the community as a whole.

STEP 8: THE FIRST DAY

A DAY IN THE LIFE — CAMPAIGN

If you are planning on playing for multiple sessions, take the time to learn more about the player characters. During this step, explore how the characters act on a normal day. The GM will establish simple 2-player scenes using leading questions to give different characters a chance to interact. Some sample questions may be...

- What information does _____ need to get from _____ and why are they reluctant to share?
- What debt does _____ owe _____?
- Why has _____ come to apologize to _____?
- Why has the behaviour of _____ disturbed _____?
- What significant gift has _____ come to offer _____?
- What has _____ come to confess to _____?
- What project are _____ and _____ working on together, and what has complicated it?


Continue to play through these scenes until you reach the natural conclusion of this first session and you have gotten a good sense of the character relationships. The GM will use this information to prepare for the next session, when the action begins.

A DAY UNDER FIRE — ONE-SHOT

If you are only playing a single session, you need to get the story started with a bang. Take out your GM Plot Thread Worksheet.

1. Look at the new relationship thread that the Elder character established in Step 7 and write that down on the map.
2. The newest arrival has established a plot thread between the neighbouring settlement and a second Face character.
3. Those two Face characters are waging a quiet civil war that is dividing the settlement. Each of them is looking for allies.
4. The Song or Tormenta will be taking advantage of the situation to expand its sphere of influence and corrupt the community.
5. Start framing the first scene at the entrance to the settlement.

A FARMING COMMUNITY
BARLEYMOW



Polvo is called Dirt for a reason, and the rich loam supports many crops. Barleymow was originally created for agriculture, either by the first colonists or by the recent waves of refugees. These rural communities are cozy at best, claustrophobic at worst. Unlike many other settlements, you are largely self-sufficient and are stable enough to raise large families.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

FARMING

Piotr Młynarski, a Terran Agriculturalist who believes that *Everything has a Season*.

FISHING

Adaeze the Fisher, a Martian Sculptor who believes that *Water is Life*.

RANCHING

Penitence the Shepherd, a Permancer who believes that *Everyone is Worthy of Care*.

TEXTILES

Serafina the Weaver, a Belter Resistor who believes *Martian Uniforms are Blood Red*.

LOGGING

Naseem the Stout, a Martian Cornerstone who believes that *Home is a Right*.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Your settlement is the only producer of a specific kind of good. What do you provide and why is it prized?
- ▶ Everyone knows about the scandal which rocked the community last winter. Whose poor judgment broke a family?
- ▶ The youth don't realize how precious a boring life can be. What risky activity do they perform outside of the community?
- ▶ Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?

WARFRAME YARD



During the War, hundreds of vessels fell from the sky onto the surface of Dirt. This settlement was established in the midst of the rubble of the fallen warships. These boneyards are centres of salvage, engineering, and industry. The inhabitants of Warframe Yard try to build a stronger future from the wreckage of the war.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

SALVAGE 

Farah the Tinkerer, a Belter Marshal who believes that *Nothing is Sacred*.

ARMS 

Oruna the Goliath, a Martian Titan who believes that *The Dead must be Honoured*.

METALWORK 

Issan Bagri, a Terran Faithful who believes that *Family keeps us Human*.

ELECTRONICS 

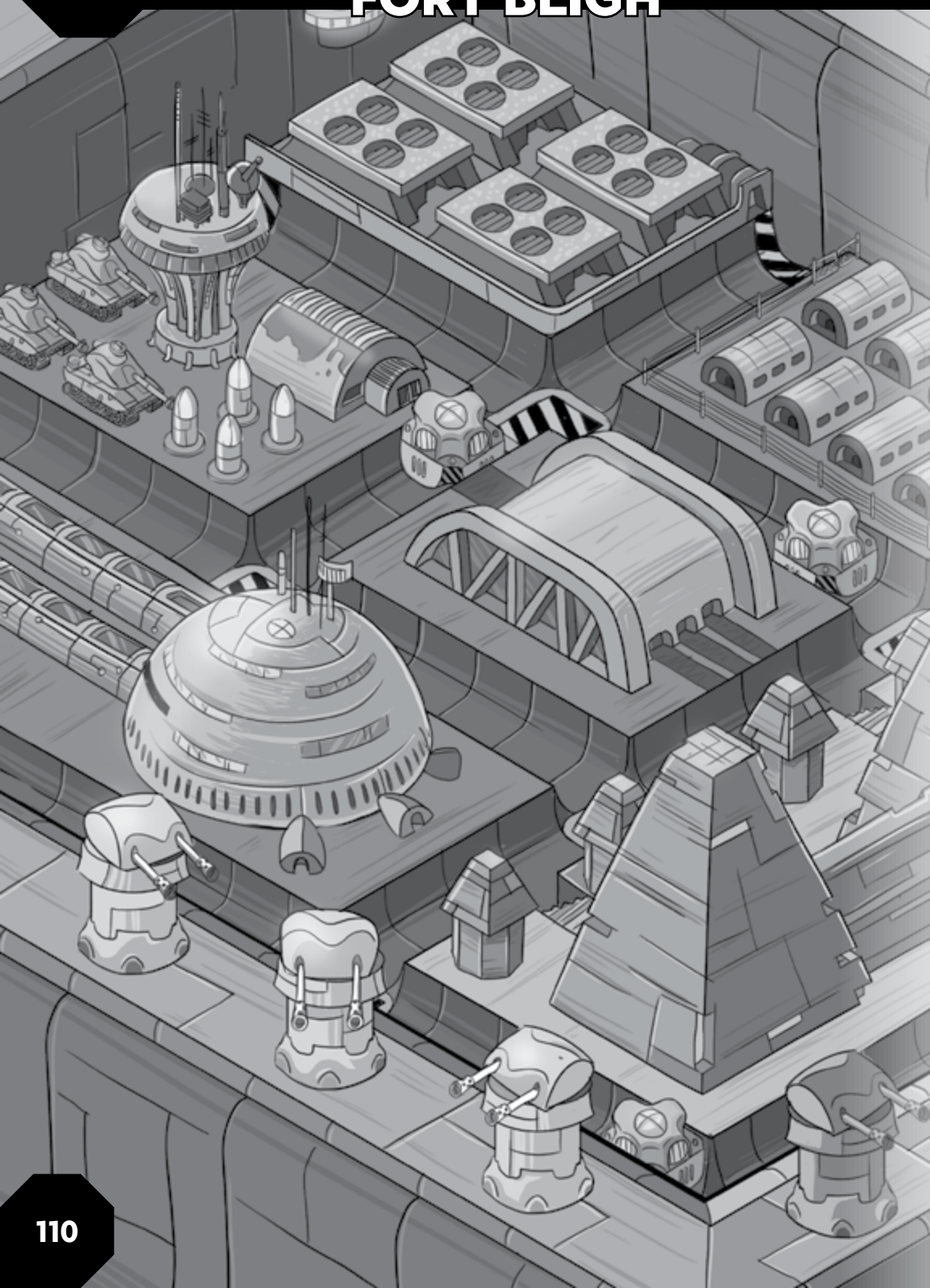
Talice, a Mercurio who believes that *Money is Freedom*.

DATA-MINING 

Cena the Runner, a Belter Verger who believes that *Information Wants to be Free*.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Your settlement is partially built from salvaged warships which plunged from orbit. Which group or business has claimed the hull of the *USF Defiant*?
- ▶ The world is sharp and cold, but your community has worked hard to make things better. How do you come together in warm camaraderie?
- ▶ The Boneyard is a dangerous place. What is the collective name for the orphans who run through the ruins, after having lost their parents in salvage accidents?
- ▶ Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?



Polvo was the site of some of the last battles during the war, with dozens of military outposts scattered across the planet. Fort Bligh is one of those military outposts, either decommissioned or woefully neglected. These military outposts are veritable fortresses, bastions of discipline which are ready to fend off any attack.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

MERCENARY

Vasna the Blade, a Fundar who believes that *Violence is the Universal Coin*.

BANKING

Nakisha the Bookkeeper, a Belter Steward who believes that *Peace is Priceless*.

CONTAINMENT

Sergeant Vigilance, a Permancer who believes that *Humans Can't be Trusted*.

MEDICAL

Dr. Jai Li, a Terran Citizen who believes that *Capitalism is Poison*.

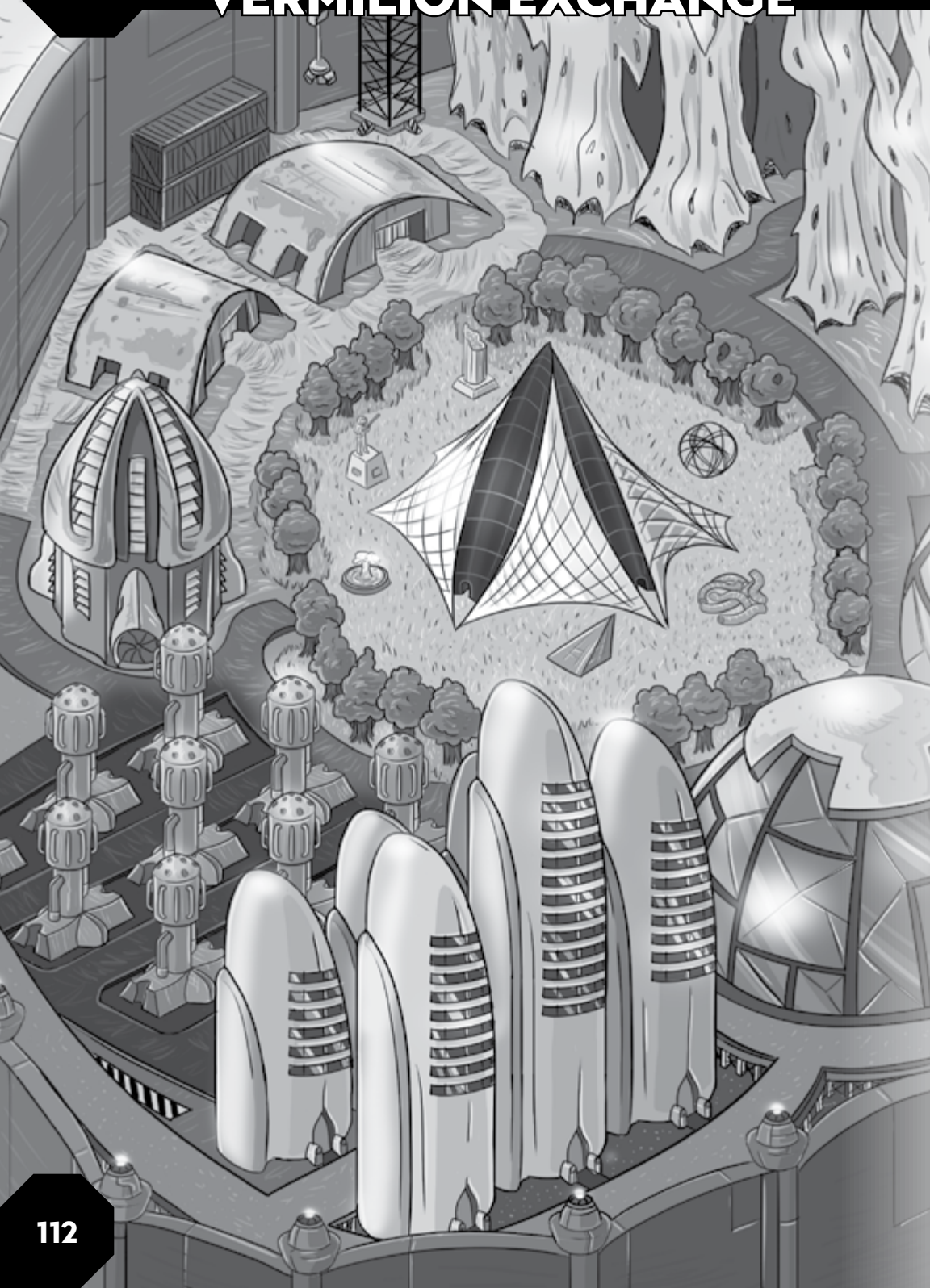
CONSTRUCTION

Private Sakine, a Martian Cornerstone who believes that *Walls Keep Us Safe*.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Was your outpost created to protect against hostile lifeforms, bandits, Tormenta or The Song?
- ▶ Your outpost has a secret holding facility buried underneath it. What terrifying threat does your outpost contain and study?
- ▶ The military outpost is home to an increasing civilian population. What new tradition or practice has taken root in the civilian population, despite the dangers it poses to military readiness?
- ▶ Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?

VERMILION EXCHANGE



Trade is the foundation of society. Hundreds of trading posts are spread across the surface of Polvo as an interconnected network of commerce. The Vermilion Exchange is a place where basic goods and rare luxuries can be found. These trading posts are diverse, multi-species bazaars, united by the principles of commerce and diplomacy.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

TOOLS

The Ebon Mask, a Mercurio who believes that *Everyone has a Price*

LUXURIES

Rabbi Esther Rubenstein, a Terran Faithful who believes that *Memories are Blessings*

XENOTECH

Rostal the Fair, a Fundar who believes that *Fair Bargains Keep the Peace*.

ART

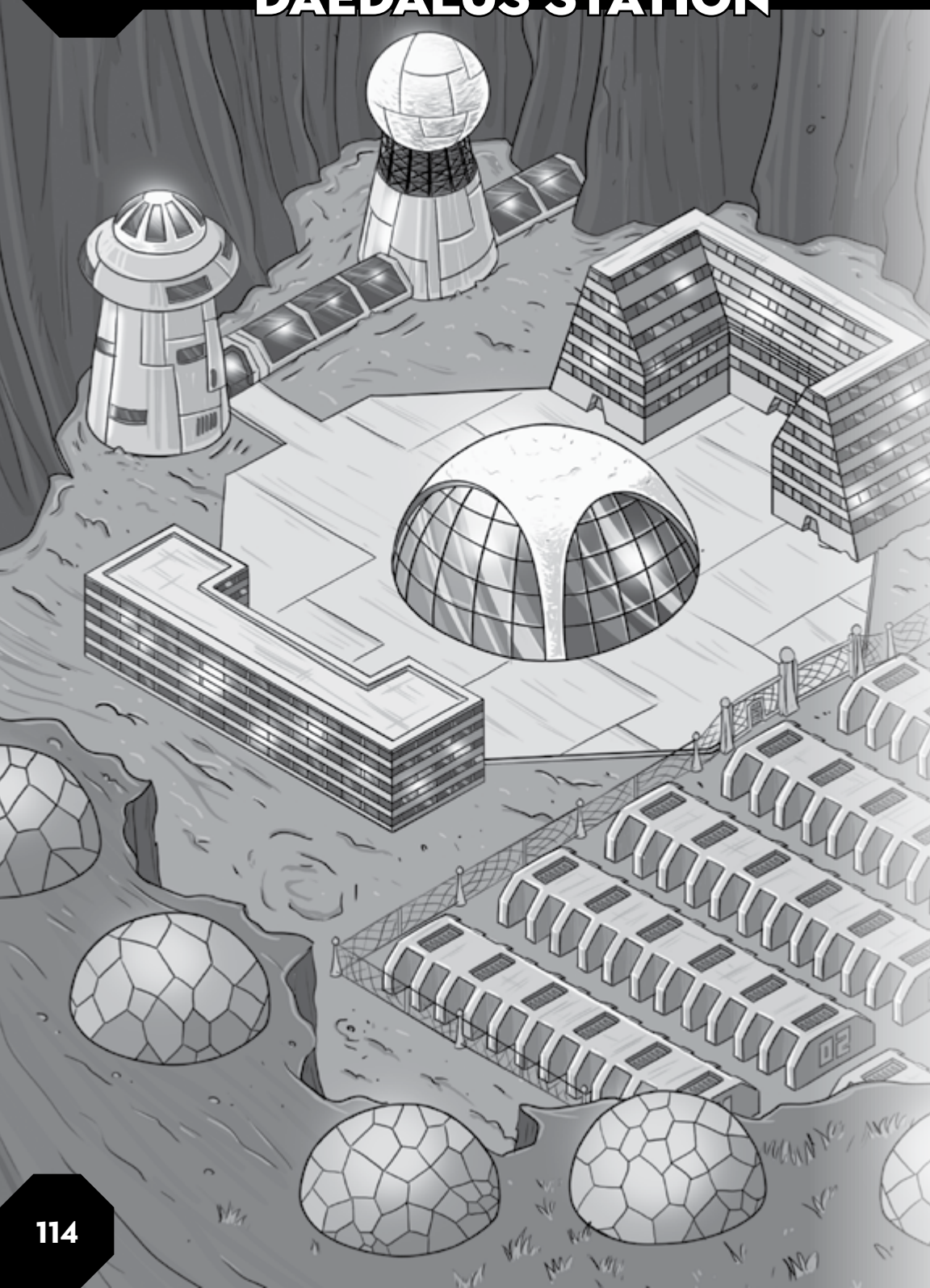
Maribel the Vandal, a Belter Resistor who believes we should *Afflict the Comfortable*

CONTRABAND

Idowu the Shadow, a Martian from Minerva Division who believes that *Nothing is Off Limits*

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Who originally built this trading post: The Permancer, the Ursa, the Fundar, the Illuvia, or the Mercurio?
- ▶ Your trading post is home to worshippers of an unusual religion. What are the basic tenets of their faith?
- ▶ What are the three rules outsiders must follow if they want to enter the trading post, and which of these is most often broken?
- ▶ Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?

A RESEARCH STATION
DAEDALUS STATION

War inevitably inspires scientific research and development. On Polvo, countless corporate research ventures, fleet installations, and government black-ops sites were built to support R&D work. Daedalus Station is one of these centers of knowledge, exploration, and experimentation. By studying the lessons of the last war, you aim to prevent the next one.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

NANOTECH 

Oppenheimer, an Illuvian who believes that *Humans are Helpless*

XENO BIOLOGY 

Professor Rilniasta, an Ursan who believes that *Ecosystems are Clever Puzzles*

MEMETICS 

Dr. Sanchez, a Belter Steward who believes that *Trauma is a Teacher*

TERRAFORMING 

Imiana the Botanist, a Martian Sculptor who believes that *Every Problem has a Solution*.

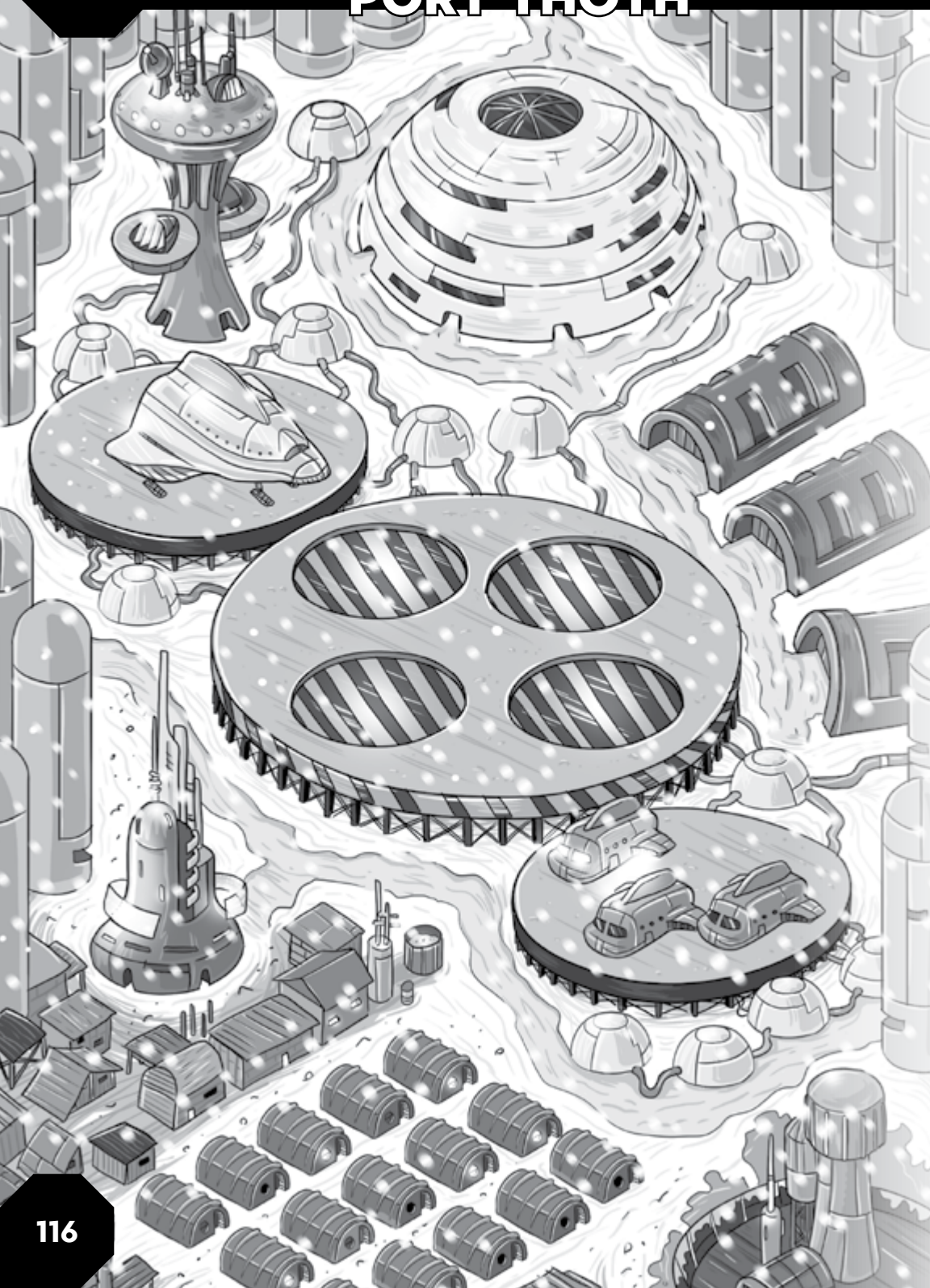
EDUCATION 

Professor Meiying Zang, a Terran Academic who believes that *Education is a Gateway*.

QUESTIONS

- Which government or mega-corporation created this research station, and what did they want you to study?
- The station's research is incredible. What new product, technology, or lifeform has your work produced for Polvo, and why is it too good to be true?
- Due to the dangerous nature of the research, the settlement has strict rules about outsiders. What does someone have to do if they wish to visit this settlement?
- Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?

PORT THOTH



There are seven major spaceports on Polvo, and a dozen minor ones littering the surface. These massive installations hold hangars and docking bays capable of accommodating the endless variety of spacefaring vessels that come to the planet. These ports also support local air travel, and function as the key transport hubs. Port Thoth is one of these busy and chaotic installations, filled with strangers and travellers.

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)



Captain Martinez, a Belter Transporter who believes that *Absolute Power Corrupts*.



Nyanjera Mwangi, a Martian from Armada Division who believes *Children are Immortality*.



Acostara the Orphan, an Ursan who believes that *Hunger Keeps us Sharp*.



Ozymandias, an Illuvian who believes that *Words are Power*.



Kuhukura Tukaki, a Terran Politico who believes that *Justice Requires Sacrifice*.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Port Thoth suffered an attack during the war. How did the war leave its mark?
- ▶ Weary travellers are a thirsty bunch. What is the famous bar at the heart of your settlement and who is the alien bartender who runs the place?
- ▶ Your outpost is home to a major criminal enterprise. What illicit activity does that organization specialize in?
- ▶ Which of the neighbouring core settlements have recently harmed your community, and how did they do so?

OTHER SETTLEMENTS

There are plenty of other settlements which are spread across Polvo's verdant surface. An enterprising GM or collaborative group can make their own custom settlements using the standard ones as models.

FARMING & FISHING TOWNS

Slaughterton

The meat processing and abattoir settlement full of tanneries and the stench of butchery.

Orchard Vale

Vast plantations of fruit trees and berry bushes with a major alcohol problem.

Neptune's Trident

A fishing and seaweed harvesting settlement on a peninsula on the western sea.

Lowbrook

A small farming town south of Covenant Yards that has recently been corrupted by Tormenta's influence.

BONEYARDS & SCRAPYARDS

The Circuit Depot

A vast warehouse complex where nearly any piece of salvaged tech can be found.

Hephaestus's Forge

The Martian-run planetary smelter which recycles composite alloys into fresh materials for civilian use.

The Dustkeeper Archive

A vault where personal mementos, art, and memories salvaged from wrecks are kept safely for their owner's eventual return.



Atlas Seven:

A major industrial facility dedicated to production of “construction suits”. Atlas Seven doubles as the local planetary headquarters for MarsCorp.

MILITARY & CONTAINMENT FORTS

Skyguard

A re-purposed Illuvian dreadnought star-cannon which has been adapted for use as stationary planetary defenses.

The Oublette

A heavy containment settlement for the worst offenders and those infected beyond salvation.

THE STAR FORT

A massive set of fortifications intended to protect a last-ditch refuge in case of planetary disaster.

Airmed Treatment Centre

The leading medical centre on Polvo, originally created to treat the countless casualties from the war. Airmed serves as a teaching hospital and hospice.

TRADING POSTS & MARKETS

Tranquil

A massive trading hub for art which is renowned for sculpture and painting.

Exod'halais

A settlement founded by a Mercurio merchant specializing in alien goods, exotic foods, cultural relics, and xenotech.

Dutchman

A mobile trading hub built into an colossal airship, slowly moving across Polvo with trade goods a plenty.

Tortuga

A floating settlement built on dozens of Polvan Flotillas and occupied by the Free Companies. Within this settlement, personal reputation trumps written laws.

SPACEPORTS & TRANSIT HUBS

Port Rimward

A major spaceport built into the rim of an impact crater left by orbital bombardment during the War of The Song.

Port Magpie

The centre of the Polvan mail and parcel service, which uses surface aircraft to deliver letters and cargo.

Skyhook Station

A space elevator that connects the top of Mount Urashtu with an orbital satellite in a shallow orbit, allowing for easy cargo lift capability.

Port Permanence

The administrative headquarters of Fleet and the remnants of the Galactic Union on Polvo. This emerald city is the heart of Permancer culture and rarely welcomes outsiders.



RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT COMPLEXES

Aurora Terraforming Complex

An interstellar colony ship with a series of isolated biospheres, now used for MarsCorp terraforming research.

The Legion's Hall

A facility dedicated to mental healthcare and memetic research, under the watch of the Peacekeepers.

Fort Stark

An advanced northern research facility dedicated to advancing the field of artificial intelligence, with the hope of crafting soldiers immune to memetic infections.

Xenolab 05

A secret Black Sky Industries facility specializing in genetic engineering, rumoured to be developing Terran-Polvan hybrids.

SANCTUARIES

The Stratos Abbey

An isolated monastery of the Catholic tradition, founded by a Benedictine friar shortly after the war ended. Over the years that followed, hundreds of Fundar converted to the Terran faith and secluded themselves within the monastic order, which is also called the Riven Abbey.

Four Horizons

A massive square settlement that is home to thousands of Ursan Quads and the centre of Ursan culture on Polvo. Every four years, a single member of each Quad on Polvo will make a week-long religious pilgrimage to the Four Horizons, though the details are not shared with outsiders.

The Hive

It began as a handful of refugees huddled around the base of Mount Urashtu in the days following the end of the war. Now it's an uncontrolled and sprawling tent city of the poor and the desperate which has spread over nearly ten square kilometers.

Dhool Ka Ooncha Mandir

This began as a small Hindu temple, which has been growing year after year as newcomers continue to build the complex. It's one of the larger religious settlements on Polvo and is surrounded by a thriving trading post.

Shackleton City

The Peacekeepers have the largest settlement on Comienzo. Shackleton City is a polar station, home to 25,000 souls. It's a staging post for all operations on world and an off world backup for the Peacekeepers themselves. Its known as the Shining City due to both the brilliant sea ice and the large Illuvian population.

05 CORE RULES



- | | |
|-------|--------------------|
| 05.01 | Fundamentals |
| 05.02 | Framing Scenes |
| 05.03 | Scene Actors |
| 05.04 | Scene Audience |
| 05.05 | Moments |
| 05.06 | Campaign Structure |

FUNDAMENTALS

Roleplaying games are all about choice. Do you choose to explore on the distant frontier, or stay close to your family? Will you confront scavenger gangs with a rifle in hand, or remind them of their humanity? Each of these choices tell us something about your characters and what they care about. The rules in this Chapter offer you structure to help you establish these choices, and discover the consequences of your decisions.

CHOICES THAT MATTER

Before you can learn about the narrative structure or the dice mechanics, we need to take a moment to discuss how you can create meaningful choices. These are choices that are complex, compelling, and consequential. Let's get into what these mean.

A COMPLEX CHOICE means there is no easy answer. Every option available to you offers a different set of benefits and drawbacks for you to consider. By examining the consequences of the choice, you can discover what your character really cares about. In order for this to be really effective, you need to have at least partial understanding of the potential impacts of your decisions. Some complex choices offer dozens of different paths, while others ask if you are willing to walk along the single path before you.

A COMPELLING CHOICE means the outcomes matter to you, both as a character in the fiction and as a player at the table. As a character, the consequences should relate to their beliefs, their history, their identity, and their relationships. As a player, the decision should draw you into your character's shoes, evoke your emotions, and lead you to think about the character's inner life. You should only make choices if you care about the outcome!



A CONSEQUENTIAL CHOICE will have a lasting impact on the story. Polvo is a big world full of desperate and idealistic souls. Every settlement has their own needs, their own ambitions, and their own internal divisions. Every corporation is looking to gain something, either building something for themselves or tearing down their rivals. Tormenta hungers and dominates, while The Song seeks to harmonize us all. You can make choices that will change the world and the people in it, for good or for ill.

Meaningful choices are the core around which the rest of the rules revolve. You establish and play through dramatic Scenes that focus on these choices. You have short Moments between scenes, where you reflect on your decisions and discover how they affect your character. These choices allow you to confront your Beliefs. You change the world through your actions, and build a better future for your communities despite the horrors of your past. Are you ready?

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Roleplaying games are a conversation. The game rules help structure this conversation so you know who gets to speak and who gets to listen. When two people disagree on what happens next in the story, the game rules help you resolve the issue in an interesting way. Mechanics help you focus the conversation on what matters for your game and gives everyone a chance to shine.

AFTER THE WAR divides game play into dramatic scenes and vulnerable moments. Each mode offers different rules, procedures, and narrative constraints, leading to richer stories.

Scenes are the bulk of play and will involve multiple characters. Three people will work together to establish each scene, declaring the initial situation, the inciting incident, and the underlying question you want to answer during play. You play your characters and describe what happens in the fiction, until two people disagree on what should happen next. The conflict resolution system tells you who gets their way, and describes some of the fallout from those conflicts. Continue roleplaying and entering into conflicts until you have answered the scene's question. When you play through Scenes, you may gain points of Strain and Insight.

Moments are quiet interludes when one or two characters are emotionally vulnerable and explore the consequences of their choices. There are four different kinds of moments: discovery, growth, corruption, and grief. Each of the different moments are triggered under different conditions .

Discovery is where someone asks a probing question to explore a character's thoughts or memories. This is triggered when you fill in your third and sixth points of Insight on the track.

Growth is where someone resolves a Belief, either by embracing it or rejecting it, earning a mechanical benefit. This is triggered when you earn the ninth point of Insight for your character.

Corruption occurs when the inhuman forces of Tormenta or The Song warp a character's Beliefs. This is triggered by the GM when they win a conflict against the player characters.

Grief represents the emotional repercussions of death of important characters. This is triggered when someone's Strain track fills, leading to death of a player character or a major NPC.

THE INSIGHT CYCLE

Every game is designed with a different goal in mind. The intent of *After the War* is to explore how Beliefs shape our decisions and how they change. Here's how the rules work to encourage these behaviours.

CONSIDER YOUR BELIEFS

Each Belief is a subjective, controversial declaration. There is no objective “right” answer for any Belief, which means you need to explore them during play.

FRAME SCENES COLLABORATIVELY

Each scene is established by the GM and two other players. This allows everyone to focus the story to address the interaction of Beliefs. If one person thinks that *Greed is Good* and another believes that *Children are our Future*, you might establish a scene that involves a merchant trader who is charging far too much for an orphan's medicine.

ROLEPLAYING BELIEFS

You play through these scenes, trying to make each of the actor characters confront those beliefs, either supporting or refuting them. That first character is forced to determine if they will really defend the merchant's greed over the wellbeing of the orphan.

You role-play collaboratively until conflicts are triggered.



ENTER CONFLICTS

When you disagree on what happens next in a scene, you engage with the conflict rules. Most of these conflicts revolve around your Beliefs. Any player acting in the scene collects one die, plus another die for each Trait that applies, and a die for each Conviction they are supporting. If the GM is involved, they roll Threat + Vector dice instead.

If a player character is losing a conflict, they can suffer a point of Strain to re-roll some or all of their dice. If a player character wins a conflict (with or without re-rolls), they suffer an additional point of Strain. Each point of Strain makes it more likely they will fail in conflicts, which can lead to The Song or Tormenta corrupting their Beliefs.

JUDGE BELIEFS

At the end of the Scene, the Audience looks at the Actor's Beliefs. They determine if those Beliefs have been supported or refuted, awarding a point of Insight for each Belief that has been confronted in either way.

TRIGGER MOMENTS

If you get your third or sixth point of Insight, you trigger a Moment of Discovery. This lets you ask questions about another character. More importantly, this allows both yourself and the character to remove a point of Strain. This is the way that you recover and improve your chances to succeed in conflicts.

If you get your ninth point of Insight, you trigger a Moment of Growth. This lets you transform one of your Beliefs into a Conviction which helps you in conflicts. It also lets you create a new replacement Belief.

FRAMING SCENES

You need to establish a scene before you can begin playing. While some games leave this up to the Game Master, The Song taught us the power of collaboration. Three people will decide on different components of each scene. The three elements of each scene are the **Platform**, the **Tilt**, and the **Question**, which need to be created in that order.

The GM creates the Platform, then chooses one of the players to create the Tilt. After creating the Tilt, that player will choose a third person to create the Question. Lastly, each player decides if their character should play in the scene, or if they should act as an Audience instead.

Feel free to readjust the order of this once the group is experienced with collaborative scene framing. The key element is that all three elements need to be established by different people. The GM may be better suited to create the Tilt or the Question as the game progresses.

THE PLATFORM

The Platform is the initial situation, describing where and when the scene occurs. It's a static description of how the location looks, sounds, smells, feels, and tastes. Think of the Platform as a photo or a holoovid of the scene, including a handy timestamp to tell you how much time has passed since we last met. You can describe locations within or beyond your settlement, as well as any people you might think would fit in. Be obvious and give a foundation for the next person to build upon.

This scene takes place the following night, in the shattered ruins of a fallen fleet cruiser which plunged into the surface of Tormenta. Countless scavengers have clawed their way into the vulnerable underbelly of the beast, ripping out computer cores and emptying the on-board armory. The place reeks of ozone from countless small electrical fires throughout the hulk.

THE TILT

The Tilt is the inciting incident that drives the action. The person creating the Tilt is responsible for creating problems, threats, and mysteries which the characters need to deal with. Look to the Platform for inspiration, and consider who is unhappy with the status quo. Are there people within the settlement who might be involved? Are there corporate agents meddling in your business? Is The Song or Tormenta involved? Use the Tilt to focus the scene on particular characters and confront their Beliefs. Create more mysteries than solutions.

A young woman climbs through a melted bulkhead with a heavy satchel slung across her back. She seems like an experienced scavenger, though only the most brave or desperate will work alone on a job in a military hulk like this. As she walks out of the wreckage, you notice some dark liquid staining her left arm, and you hear her humming faintly.

THE QUESTION

The Question is the compelling element you want to explore in the story. It is the focus of the scene, directing everyone's attention toward certain issues, Beliefs, or people. Most Questions are obvious and straightforward, directly addressing the mysteries or problems provided in the Tilt. Sometimes you will want to create a more nuanced and indirect Question that addresses personal issues, identities, or relationships. The group will need to answer this question to end the scene so keep that in mind.

There are two strong Questions for the scene. The obvious question would be "What has the scavenger taken from the wreck?", which would lead to a scene of interrogation or investigation. The indirect Question would be "Can we earn the scavenger's trust?", which leads to more social challenges that might interact with someone's Beliefs.

THE CAST

After establishing the scene, each player decides how they wish to participate in the scene. They may choose to be an **Actor** or an **Audience** during the scene.

ACTOR MODE

If your character is involved in a scene, follow all of the procedures described on **PG.132**. This means that you collaborate with each other to create a story, describing your character's actions and speaking in their voice. You can make decisions, and participate directly in conflicts. You can suffer Strain, and gain Insight in the process.

- Roleplaying your PC
- Getting the Spotlight
- Participating in Conflicts
- Suffering Strain
- Gaining Insight

AUDIENCE MODE

If your character is not involved in a scene, follow all the procedures described on **PG.138**. This means that you observe the scene from outside the action. You can portray side characters with similar origins, war stories, or professions to your own. You can judge whether a player's Trait is applicable in a conflict, and decide when players have confronted their Beliefs. You can grant Insight to the players in the scene, when they confirm or refute their Beliefs.

- Roleplaying as NPCs
- Supporting the Actors
- Adjudicating Trait Use
- Ending Scenes
- Awarding Insight

SCENE ACTORS

If your character is in the scene, you are considered an **Actor** in that scene. Use the rules of this section to guide you as you speak as your character, collaboratively narrate, and resolve conflicts. Your characters are the focus of the story in this mode, so bring your passion to the table.

Most of the time, you will role-play your characters, speaking with their voices and describing their actions. When people disagree on what happens next, you trigger the conflict resolution mechanic to figure out who gets their way. When you have answered the Question, you can close the scene.

COLLABORATE

As an actor, you portray your lead character as they live their lives. You can speak to other characters through friendly banter or deep debate. You declare what your character is doing physically and mentally. You tell us whenever you stride forward to confront a stranger entering the settlement, or when you watch them warily from the shadows. Normally everything declared or described during collaboration is assumed to occur in the fiction.

You aren't limited to describing your character's actions. You can describe elements of the setting, telling us about that crate in the corner of the room, or the darkening clouds on the horizon. You may tell us the small details about the world that make it feel real, using your Origin, War Story, and Profession to guide you. Be sure to reincorporate facts, ideas, people, and symbols which were previously introduced whenever possible.

If you came from Earth, you might tell us about the small flower garden that the other Terrans are tending.

If you fled from the Belt, you might talk about the coded graffiti sprayed on the market wall.



The most important thing that you do in these scenes is to interact with other characters. You have an opportunity to challenge the Beliefs of the other lead characters by pointing out the error of their ways. You can defend your own hard-fought Beliefs from the challenges of others. Sometimes other leads will disagree with your words or actions, and this will drive the story forward.

When two people disagree on what will happen next in the fiction, you have two options.

- 1. Negotiate a compromise; or**
- 2. Use the conflict resolution mechanic**

Negotiating compromises is often difficult, but means that no-one accumulates Strain in the process. When compromises are impossible, you pick up the dice and move onto the next section of play.

When the GM proposes that the one of the Tormenta Ravagers breaks into the settlement medical clinic, Lucio's player realizes that there is no fair compromise on the table and grabs his dice.

CONFLICT

When a conflict is triggered, you use dice to help determine who gets their way. In order to determine the outcome, you;

Set goals;

Collect your dice;

Roll the dice; then

Resolve the outcome.

1 – SET GOALS

Both people in the conflict declare what they want to happen. After explaining what each side wants, the two people involved have a chance to either back down or negotiate a compromise. Otherwise, you know what the stakes of the conflict will be.

Player goals must relate to their character's actions. They can't establish conflicts which are completely outside of their character's control or influence, such as changing the weather or resurrecting someone.

Most GM goals support either The Song or Tormenta. There are only rare circumstances where the GM will trigger a goal outside of that context, and they will be rolling fewer dice in these situations. The GM can still establish that there is a storm, or that a character dies of their wounds without triggering a formal conflict.

Karya and Lucio are in conflict over what needs to happen with this strange artifact which the scavenger had extracted from the broken hulk. Karya saw how terrible some of these bioengineered devices could be during the war, so her goal is to hide or bury the artifact so that it can't cause any harm.

Lucio feels that the thing could be incredibly valuable for the settlement, especially since it seems to generate electricity from nothing. Neither Karya nor Lucio are willing to back down.

2 – COLLECT DICE

During conflicts, each character starts with a single six-sided die.

You add one additional die for each relevant Trait that can help you achieve your goal. As characters have 6 Traits, they can gain a maximum of +6 dice from this. Each Trait lists the kinds of actions that it normally helps with. Players can propose creative uses of Talents, but it's up to the Audience to determine if it's appropriate. See **PG.140** for details.

You also add an additional die for each Conviction you support or confirm with your actions. Note that refuting your Convictions, or addressing your Beliefs will not affect your dice pools. This can give you a maximum of 4 additional dice to your roll.

If the GM is in a conflict, they will choose either to portray the seductive influence of The Song, or the violent passions of Tormenta. The strength of the opposition varies depends on how they are confronting the players.

The **Vector** represents how much memetic influence is behind the conflict, while the **Threat** the number of people who are in peril. The GM will always roll 1-5 Vector dice and 1-5 Threat dice, which means that they have a range of 2-10 dice for any roll. The GM can learn more about these different levels of opposition in the GM Chapter on **PG.161**.

*Karya is a player character involved in a conflict, so she begins with one die. Because she was a **Terran** from the **Religious Community**, she gets two more dice from her origin. She fought on the **Oort Line** during the **Crescendo** period of the war, for another two dice. None of her professions help, and she didn't have any relevant Convictions. She collects a total of five dice.*

*Lucio is a **Belter** who saw the starvation during the **Silence**. He has been a professional **Salvager** with a firm Conviction that **Technology will Save Us**. He also collects a total of five dice.*

3 – ROLL THE DICE

Each side rolls the dice they collect, then counts up their totals.

Whoever gets the greatest total wins the conflict. Remember to ignore any dice which have results equal to or less than your Strain. If you have two Strain, for example, you wouldn't add any 1's or 2's you rolled to your total.

If your character is losing a conflict, you can take on a point of Strain to re-roll any or all of your dice. Alternatively, any character who is offering you concrete assistance in the conflict can chose to take that point of Strain instead. You can do this multiple times in the same conflict.

In the case of a tie, players may choose to win the conflict by taking 2 Strain as the price of victory. In a conflict between two players, the first player to claim it will win. If no one claims victory in a 2-player conflict, the GM describes an external event that interrupts the conflict.

Karya rolls 1, 1, 4, 5, 6. Since she has one Strain, she discards both of her ones, which leaves her with a total of 15.

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Lucio rolls 1, 1, 2, 4, 5. He doesn't have any Strain, so he adds up all of his dice and it leaves him with a total of 13.

$$\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline \cdot \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline \cdot \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} = 13$$

Lucio is losing the conflict, and he wants to re-roll for a chance to beat Karya. He adds one point of Strain, then re-rolls his three lowest dice, getting 1, 3, 4, 5, 6. Since he now has a point of Strain, he discards his one and adds up the remaining dice for a total of 18.

$$\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline \cdot \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline \cdot \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline \cdot \cdot \cdot \\ \hline \end{array} = 18$$

Karya could re-roll at this point, but she chooses not to push her luck. Lucio wins.

4– RESOLVE THE OUTCOME

Both sides of the conflict work together to narrate how the victor achieves their goals. The victor of the conflict gets the final say on the outcome, and can narrate freely.

There is always a price associated with conflict, and the victor is the one who pays it. If a player wins a conflict, they gain a point of Strain to represent the price of victory. If a character ever has 6 points of Strain, they trigger a Moment of Grief as described on **PG.148**.

After you resolve the outcome of the conflict, take a moment to determine if you have answered the scene's Question. If you have done so, end the Scene as described on **PG.141**. Otherwise, return to the collaboration step and continue playing the current scene.

Lucio explains how the settlement's only generator is dying, and they need the artifact to keep the light on. He understands the risks associated with alien technology, of course, but the odds of some kinds of mishap are so much lower than the potential benefits the artifact can offer. Karya grudgingly accepts that he can take the device. Lucio then suffers another point of Strain and they return to the scene.

If your character is not in the scene, you are considered an **Audience**



SCENE AUDIENCE

in that scene. Use the rules of this section to guide you as you observe what is going on in the scene. You will describe the setting, portray side characters, and judge whether characters have confronted their Beliefs. You're there to observe and support the focal characters, so bring your attention to the table.

As the Audience, your primary responsibility is to observe the scene. You listen to what the other players say, and what they do not. You consider the actions of the lead characters, and how the setting might react. You watch the body language of the players, to discover how the other people at the table are feeling. You observe, so that you learn how you can help.

The Game Master is always fulfilling this role, so there is always at least one member of the Audience for any scene.

SUPPORT

The Audience can portray side characters when needed. Take on the role of the drunken settlement guards, boisterous children, or the frustrated mothers trying to keep the peace. When one of the lead characters needs someone to argue with, give them someone to get in their way. When a tense conversation between players needs an interruption, introduce a new side character.

You are not limited to side characters. You can describe elements of the setting such as the scorching summer sun, or the crumbling concrete shelters that the characters stand beside. You have full authority to describe things concerning your lead character's Origin, War Story, or Profession. If your lead character is a Xenobiologist, you can describe some strange animal climbing on the walls when you are the audience. You can even provide facts or details about past events, when it is related to something in the scene.

ELABORATE

Each Trait lists a series of three situations where it would apply, but also has room to grow. During play, Actors have the opportunity to expand these Traits by establishing a fourth situation where a Trait would apply. Perhaps one of the actors in a scene wants to declare that the Belter Transporters are renowned smugglers, adding “smuggling” as a fourth situation under that Trait.

As the Audience, you judge if the situation makes sense for the relevant Trait. You can ask the Actor to explain how the Trait applies in situations based on their character’s personal experience. If you agree with their reasoning you can give them permission to add that situation to that Trait. Each Trait can be expanded once.

Allowing players to do world-building during play by elaborating on their existing Traits is a crucial part of play. This is how you define the importance of childcare in Permancer society, describe the food rationing of the Exodus Fleet during the Crescendo, or explain that Psychologists are bound by strict ethical frameworks.

*Lucio wants to use Tora’s **Belter** origin for a die in a bar fight. Since brawling doesn’t seem to be on the list of situations under the Belter, one of the Audience members asks how Tora used this in the past. Tora’s player describes the food riots of their youth, when rationing led to violence in the corridors of her home station. The Audience agrees, and Tora gets to use that die in that conflict. Any other Belters also add this new situation to their own sheets.*

BELTER

- SALVAGE** You were born in zero-G and raised in the belt.
- SCARCITY** You had to fight for every bottle of oxygen, every drop of water, and every scrap of food. You never had enough, but at least you had you had each other.
- DISPUTES** You come from a reckless and resourceful people who value freedom.
- + BRAWLING**

JUDGE

During game play, the Actors are confronting their Beliefs by creating situations that support or contradict them. They will make bold declarations and provocative statements in response to the dramatic situations they find themselves in. You are responsible for determining when they have confronted their Beliefs, and awarding insight.

Beliefs are confronted when the character encounters new information that confirms or refutes their assumptions. If they argue with someone else in support of their principles or take risks accordingly, consider this to be a confirmation. If they chose not to defend their perspective or concede that they may be in error, consider this a refutation.

At the end of each scene, the Audience will examine the Beliefs of the Actors in the scene. If most of the Audience agrees that a character's Belief has been confirmed or refuted, tell them to mark a point of Insight on their sheet. In case of a tie, the Game Master will make the final call.

Crisus, the Martian Titan, has two Beliefs:

Earth Needed to Burn Destruction is Easier than Creation

During the scene, Crisus encountered a peaceful settlement of Terran farmers who tend sheep for a local wool-mill. They have been able to survive due to their hard work and communal spirit. Crisus speaks to some of the farmers and hears their stories of loss during the war. She realizes that many Terrans were innocents who didn't deserve to have their homes burned in the war.

The Audience agrees that Crisus has refuted her Belief that "Earth Needed to Burn". They tell her to mark a point of Insight. The Audience determines this isn't enough to count as confronting Crisus' second Belief.

ENDING THE SCENE

Once the Actors have found the answer to the scene's Question, you are welcome to close the scene. You aren't forced to end the scene immediately, but look for a good opportunity to wrap things up and move on. Players involved in the scene should stop escalating things, and allow the drama to subside.

After the scene fades to black, examine each character's Insight track. If their track has reached one of the milestones to trigger a moment of discovery or growth, play through that now. If players choose to delay this moment until a later point, cease to mark further Insight until they do.



If you reach a **Discovery** milestone, see **PG.142**.

If you reach a **Growth** milestone, see **PG.144**.

If you decide to continue playing the game, you can move onto framing the next scene. Feel free to take a minute to get snacks or refreshments.

MOMENTS

Moments are periods of introspection, discussion, and radical vulnerability. There are four different kinds of moments, each with different triggers and impacts.

MOMENT OF DISCOVERY

Discoveries are a chance to learn more about the characters and connect on a personal level. If you have reached a discovery milestone on your Insight track, you can ask a question about another player's character's thoughts, history, or relationships. They are obliged to answer your question, either by roleplaying a discussion or narrating events. Consider using flashbacks, inner monologues, montages, and other narrative techniques to answer the question in an interesting way.

Discovery deepens bonds and adds nuance to the story. Consequently, each moment removes a point Strain from each person involved. This is the only way to remove Strain during a session, and it's a key element of play.

At the end of the scene, Lucio reached a discovery milestone on his Insight track and triggered a Moment of Discovery. He asked why Karya is so hostile to using technology to help the community. Karya's player could have roleplayed through a conversation with Lucio to talk about the issue, but she decides that a flashback would be better.

She describes herself as a teen girl, on a heavily damaged cargo ship under attack by pirates. She describes how a team of re-purposed asteroid mining drones cut into the hull of the ship, and brutally murdered a dozen refugees in front of her. She describes how her father tried to drop a cargo container on an attacker, and got bisected by a drilling laser. She describes how young Karya fled from her dying family in raw terror. After giving that horrific answer to the simple question, both Karya and Lucio remove one Strain from their character sheets.



MOMENT OF GROWTH

Growth is when a character decides to unconditionally accept or reject one of their Beliefs. This is triggered when you reach the growth milestone on your Insight track.

Each moment of Growth is played out as a deeply personal and meaningful conversation between characters. It's an opportunity to explore your character's decision and express how their perspectives have evolved. The other person will help you resolve your Belief, although they are under no obligation to agree with your decision.

After you play through this scene, your Belief will be transformed into a Conviction. If you accepted your Belief as an absolute truth, copy the text of your former Belief onto the Conviction section of your character sheet. If you rejected your Belief, write a new Conviction that describes your new view of the world.

When you have finished writing your Conviction, erase the old Belief from your sheet. Create a new, replacement Belief to represent a new issue that you want to explore in play. The replacement Belief needs to still be a subjective, controversial declaration.

Unlike a moment of Discovery, you do **not** remove Strain after a moment of Growth. The GM may choose to waive this restriction if they want a gentler game.

Finally, reset your Insight track by erasing all of the points marked on it, so you can begin your journey of self-discovery once more.

*Karya had held the Belief that **Polvo is our Only Home**. She decides that events during the session confirmed that Belief, and that she is no longer struggling with the issues associated with it. She writes that down as a new Conviction, and replaces it with a new Belief that **Technology is a Drug**.*

*Lucio held the Belief that **Violence is Abhorrent**. After a Martian marine saved his settlement through heavy firepower, Lucio rejected his former Belief outright. He wrote a new Conviction of **Violence is a Necessity**, which represents his new, unshakable perspective.*



MOMENT OF CORRUPTION

The biggest threat on Polvo isn't failure. It's the seductive promise of The Song, which twists your minds and steals your will to serve its ends. It's the raging, violent passions Tormenta thrusts into your hearts. It's both of these memetic viruses that can infect anyone who lets down their guard. Whenever the Game Master wins a Conflict, they can choose to cede their victory in order to trigger Corruption.

During Corruption, the player who lost the conflict achieves their goal, narrates the outcome, and pays the price of victory as if they had won normally. They then pass over their character sheet to the GM, who will get to alter one of that character's Beliefs. How the Belief is altered depends on which memetic force the GM is using in the conflict. If the GM had been representing The Song in the conflict, they will alter one Belief to align with the ideals of conformity, servitude, and evangelism. If the GM had been representing Tormenta, they will alter the beliefs to align with the ideas of rebellion, dominance, and violence. While the GM can replace the Belief completely, the best GM's will twist the meaning subtly by changing one or two words. The character is not consciously aware their Belief was corrupted, and will rationalize any change in perspective.

Corruptions are horrific and brutal violations of the character identities. They are the horrific elements that destabilize Polvo, and erode the foundation of your settlement. That's why consent is essential for the players and their new Beliefs. If the player vetoes a corrupted Belief, the GM must offer an acceptable alternative. Players are still able to reject these corrupted Beliefs during Growth, so these changes are not permanent.

While Karya was trying to keep a group of chorister-cultists from entering the settlement, she lost a key conflict. The GM agreed and triggered a moment of Corruption. While Karya narrated repelling the polite cultists, a soft melody crept into her mind. Karya held the Belief that **Liberty Protects the Pulnerable**.

The GM originally proposed changing it to **Slavery Protects the Vulnerable**, but Karya's player was very uncomfortable with it and vetoed the change. The GM then proposed **Liberty Makes us Vulnerable**, which Karya's player is much happier with.

Karya returns to the settlement, and speaks at the next town hall. She argues loudly that a curfew is necessary because of the chorister threat. She warns that the settlement needs strong rules and discipline, otherwise The Song would infect the community. She isn't even aware that she is serving the malevolent force with every word.



MOMENT OF GRIEF

Polvo is a rough frontier, and there are many dangers on this alien world. When a main character fills the 6th Strain on their character sheet, it's a sign that someone will be leaving the story.

By default, reaching 6 points of Strain means that someone will be retired from play. Normally this means that your character dies, disappears, or is permanently incapacitated. If your player character has a strong relationship thread with an NPC, you may decide that they are sacrificed instead. This is a narrative decision, meaning that it's the player's choosing and not the character.

Grief occurs after the tragic scene concludes, where each main character reacts to the loss by answering one of the following questions about the fallen character. Each player selects a different question to answer for the group about the fallen character.

- *What did you never get to say to the fallen?*
- *What single moment with the fallen will you never forget?*
- *What will you never forgive the fallen for doing?*
- *Which of the fallen's burdens do you take on as your own?*
- *Why do you blame yourself for the loss of the fallen?*
- *What do you wish you had never said to the fallen?*
- *What will the fallen be remembered as forever?*

The questions allow your characters to mourn, to reflect, and to heal. After all the answers have been shared, each character clears all the Strain they accumulated.

Rodrigo fought off the Tormenta-infected bandits who were raiding the settlement's medical bay, protecting the dozen patients by sealing the entrance behind him and facing the monsters with a ready blade. He won the conflict and repelled them, but suffered his sixth point of Strain in the process. This triggered a moment of grief at the end of the scene, because he refused to sacrifice his husband's life (side character) instead of his own.



Lucio's player looked at the list and selected "Why do you blame yourself for the loss of the fallen?" He tells the group that Lucio blames himself for arguing against stronger settlement defenses and a militia. His pacifist ideals got a good man killed, and he has blood on his hands.

Karya's player chooses another option from the list. Karya says Rodrigo will always be remembered as a hero, and that the settlement board has agreed to name the medical bay after him.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

AFTER THE WAR can be played in a single session, a handful of sessions, or a year-long campaign, but the rules change a bit.

ONE-SHOT SESSION

A one-shot session is when you run a single game for your home group or at a convention. In order to get the best use of a limited amount of time, consider using pre-generated characters, and beginning your session with settlement-creation. The first hour of gameplay should be spent on making your community as a group, while the remainder of the time can be spent on playing the game as normal.

SHORT CAMPAIGN

The short campaign consists of 3–6 sessions. In a short campaign, each character has a combined maximum of 4 Beliefs or Convictions. The first two times you have a moment of Growth, you will create a new Conviction as well as a replacement Belief for your character. The third and fourth time that you have a moment of Growth, you do not create replacement Beliefs. When you create your fourth Conviction, you will no longer be able to gain Insight. The short campaign ends when everyone establishes their third Conviction.

LONG CAMPAIGN

For lengthier play introduce new arrivals to the settlement. After your third moment of Growth, you do not create a replacement Belief. Instead, you describe a new arrival to the settlement, a secondary player character which you create using the normal rules in Chapter 3. You can choose to play either character during any scene.

The next time that you will have a moment of Growth, your older character gains their final Conviction and are retired from play. You can decide if they are transformed into a new Face of the settlement (to be controlled by the GM or Audience) or whether they choose to leave the settlement forever. Consider ending the campaign when the last of the original characters is retired from play.

06

GAME MASTERING



- 06.01** GM Agenda
- 06.02** GM Responsibilities
- 06.03** The Antagonists
- 06.04** The Plot Map
- 06.05** The Campaign Arc

GM AGENDA

The Game Master is the person who facilitates the game on behalf of the group. As the Game Master, this Chapter will give you the necessary tools to fill this role. It includes a discussion of your goals and responsibilities. After that, this Chapter includes important information about the various forces at your disposal including the settlements, factions, Song, and Tormenta. Last, we will show you how to create the Plot Web to help you keep track of the world.

This Chapter is meant both for first-time Game Masters and experienced ones. This Chapter isn't advice, but rather a distinct set of rules and procedures to follow if you want to run the game as intended.

As a GM, you need to remember home, bring fallout, challenge Beliefs and speak honestly. Let's talk a bit about them, shall we?



REMEMBER HOME

Everyone came to Polvo from somewhere else; the corpse of old Earth, war-torn Mars, the hungry Belt, or the shattered alien homeworlds.

Everyone came to the distant and barren world of Polvo, dreaming of a better life for themselves and their children. They banded together to build new fledgling communities which they could call home.

The main characters should be driven to protect their settlements and the people who live there. This means that you need to keep the focus on this fragile sanctuary in a hostile world. Name the members of the community and treat them like real, living beings with their own desires. Describe the families trying to make ends meet, and the children playing in the rubble. Show the bold entrepreneurs who try to make things better for the community, and the cautious community voices who fear change. The settlement represents hope for the future and only the players' characters can keep it safe.

Those dangers are many...

- **The Song** echoes in the distant hills, and sends chorister agents to corrupt the settlement.
- **Tormenta** has mutated and mutilated servants to ravage and reave with hunger unchecked.
- **The Factions** seek to further their own schemes, while bandits raid travellers.
- **Internal conflicts** within the settlement are no less dangerous, as broken relationships and cruel betrayals can fracture the community.

Keep the settlement at the forefront of your mind as you run the game. You can learn more about the different threats to the settlement starting on **PG.164**.

BRING FALLOUT

The galaxy is in ruin, after the carnage that was the great war. The great warships of Fleet fought fiercely in orbit over the insignificant world of Polvo. Broken dreadnoughts plunged from orbit like fallen stars, bombarding the plains and cratering mountains.

Everyone lives in the shadow of the war, even after years have passed. Millions of refugees and survivors fled to the planet. Each one of them had lost a brother, sister, mother, or child in the carnage. Each experienced horror of some kind, from collapsing bulkheads, to melodic humming, to Tormenta's monsters. They carried their trauma and pain with them to Polvo.

Never forget the heavy burden that weighs on the people of Polvo. Remember that grief for those lost shrouds the brightest days. Show people driven by desperate hope to build a prosperous and peaceful future. The people of this planet and of the settlement are not silent victims; they stand as brave survivors worthy of respect.

Every action has a consequence. Bringing fallout means you also pay attention to the consequences of players' actions. If they ignore whispers of Choristers to the north, expect more and more cults to emerge from the shadows. If they kill a criminal hiding in the settlement, they may have a grieving family on their hands. Giving a few hundred creds to a grieving widower might be enough to pull him out of the gutter, or drive him deeper into the bottle.

CHALLENGE BELIEFS

This is a game of questions. What do you believe? What ideals will you fight to protect, and which will you abandon? What convictions do you hold steadfast?

Beliefs are at the core of the story. They are subjective, meaning they are issues of perspective and morality rather than empirical fact. They are controversial, because everyone holds different Beliefs. Holding a Belief means that you fear you may be wrong.

During play, you should help the players challenge each other's Beliefs. Present opportunities that support and bolster those opinions. Create situations that contradict and refute those ideals. Encourage players and their characters to critically explore their Beliefs, and decide what is to be elevated to an unchanging Conviction.

The exploration and transformation of Beliefs is at the dark heart of the game. **AFTER THE WAR** centers on the existential horror, exploring what happens when the seductive Song and cruel Tormenta corrupt your Beliefs. Each of these elements will seek to twist the character's personalities, views, and thoughts. Only by calcifying Beliefs into unquestioned Convictions, will they be safe.

SUBTLE CORRUPTION

During a Moment of Corruption, you have the ability to change someone's Belief. Keeping a light touch is often the best approach when corrupting someone's mind. Try to make the smallest change possible, altering a single word or even just changing punctuation. Subtle changes often feel more natural for the characters and make for a better story.

SPEAK HONESTLY

This is a game about communities, and the people who support them. The best way to tell these stories is to speak with honesty and integrity.

As the Game Master, be generous with the truth. If there is a reasonable chance that a character might know about a neighbouring settlement or some historical event, share it with them. If something is intentionally hidden from the players, either by The Song's subtle machinations or the alien logic of Tormenta, use the Conflict rules to resolve the situation. If players win the conflict, they may establish the truth of the situation or ask you to provide the information. If they fail, they are forced to deal with the consequences.

There is a lot of setting information at your disposal. You can look in Chapter 8 to learn more about the wonders of the Galactic Union and the various alien cultures within. Chapter 9 gives more details about our expansion into the stars and the War of The Song. Chapter 10 is all about Polvo itself, from the culture to the ecology of this world. Use this as inspiration and not as constraints.

Collaborative world-building is an essential component of play, and everyone can join in. Ask the players about their character origin, allowing them to create the Belter wedding traditions or the Ursa's favourite foods. When the events of the war resurface, let the players who experienced those events explain them. Likewise, let them use their professional Traits to establish new facts.

When in doubt, narrate the outcome that is obvious to you. It will keep the story moving forward, and will give the players the comfort that they live in a rational universe. Sometimes the most surprising path is the straight one.

GM RESPONSIBILITIES

The Game Master has the authority and responsibility to lead the game for everyone's enjoyment. Here is what you need to do to run the game successfully.

ADMINISTER LOGISTICS

You are in charge of the basic logistics of play, making sure that the games actually occur.

SCHEDULING

Coordinate when you will run the game, and where you will be playing. Perhaps it's being run at one of your player's homes or in a friendly local restaurant. There are online services like Doodle.com that help you find a good time to play.

MATERIALS

You need to make certain that all of the players are able to participate, and that everyone has the necessary physical materials. Make sure that you have the character sheets, settlement sheets, dice, and writing implements.

CARE AND FEEDING

The logistics don't end when the session begins. Keep track of the time and try to schedule a break halfway through the session to maintain people's attention. Put a pitcher of water or a pot of tea on the table. Provide what you can to make the players more comfortable and help them maintain attention. Invite the players to bring snacks to share. These little things make for a more pleasant time for everyone.

OFFER SAFETY

The Game Master holds a special authority at the table, and you need to use it for good. There is a great deal of difficult content associated with this game. This is a game about survivors and the trauma they suffered during a vast military conflict. It focuses on the stories of refugees who left their homes and loved ones behind as they fled to Dirt. They continue to face memetic horrors which twist their minds without their consent. They find themselves bound in unwilling servitude by The Song or driven by Tormenta's violent urges.

Look out for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of your players. Keep the X-card available so that people can opt out of problematic subject matter. If someone is uncomfortable or appears to be stressed at the table, offer them space to recover, or take a break to discuss it with them in private. Check in to make sure that everyone is safe, comfortable, and engaged by the game.

If anyone doesn't feel safe or welcome at the table, you are the person with the authority to fix things and correct the situation. The well-being of the people at the table, yourself included, is more important than the game.

ESTABLISH SCENES

The Game Master is responsible for establishing the Platform for each scene of the game. You have control over where the scene will occur and when it occurs. Each of these aspects of the Platform allow you to shape the narrative to serve your agenda.

You control the location of the scene by describing where it occurs. Tell the group what each scene looks like, describing the metallic debris of fallen ships and the natural vistas of Polvo. Tell them how the world sounds, full of nighttime whispers and the clamour of salvage operations. Tell them of the smells of the world, that curious mix of alien flowers and ozone you associate with Dirt. Provide rich descriptions for these scenes, whether they take place in the settlement or occur outside of their fragile walls.

Use this authority to control the pace of play, determining how much time passes between scenes. You may even use the Platform to establish unconventional scenes, such as flashbacks or dreams, when it suits the narrative. Sometimes you will set these scenes close to together, with mere moments between one scene and the next as crises unfold. Other times, you can allow a more gentle and deliberate pace by setting the scenes as being days or weeks apart.

DIRECT THE SPOTLIGHT

The Game Master is the centre of the conversation which you are having at the table. In this role, you naturally direct the group's attention and decide what gets that narrative spotlight. When you ask a quiet player a question, you give them a chance to be heard. When you describe a problem that aligns with a character's background, you invite them to contribute.

Your authority to direct the group's attention allows you to make the game satisfying for everyone. When you see someone has an idea, you can move the focus to them and let them take the reins. When you see a player who is overwhelmed, you can give them time to rest and recover. You can make sure that each of your players has a fair and equitable chance to shape the story.

MAINTAIN CONTINUITY

A realistic and compelling world is internally consistent. Past events inform future ones. Side characters return in future scenes to contribute to the larger story. Locations are revisited, albeit in different context. Even items, from the child's doll to the engineer's wrench, can be reused. This process of reincorporating past elements of the story maintains a sense of continuity and realism.

In practical terms, this means that you need to keep notes of the major events and minor details you establish during play. Consider how key events will impact the people of the settlement, and their relationships. Record the names of any of the side characters you introduce in the course of play so that you can use them again. Reincorporate key people, places, or things in the story at a later time.

THE PLOT MAP on **PG.180** is a potent tool for maintaining continuity. Note the actions by neighbouring settlements and the relationships that the player characters form.

OFFER OPPOSITION

Conflict is everywhere. The war ravaged the solar system, scattered the Fleet, and left Earth in smoking ruins. Political factions each have their own vision of the future of Polvo. Choristers sing in hidden and harmonious enclaves, while Tormenta spreads like a sentient cancer. Caught in the middle of all of these pressures are the fragile settlements the players stand to protect. As the Game Master, you offer antagonism and opposition to the players.

As the Game Master, your agenda helps you determine if you should trigger a conflict and if it would benefit the story. This opposition should normally be in service of either the seductive influence of The Song or the violent influence of Tormenta. You determine the specific level of opposition by considering both the **Vector** and the **Threat**. The Vector represents how much memetic influence is behind the conflict, while the Threat represents who is in danger because of it. You will always roll 1-5 Vector dice and 1-5 Threat dice, which means that you have a range of 2-10 dice for any roll.

THREAT DICE

Every conflict threatens something or someone who matters to the story. Gain a number of Threat dice for your dice pool based on the greatest danger presented in the situation.

- **Threat 1:** If physical property or social standing are at stake, add one die to your pool. Moments of Corruption cannot be triggered in this conflict.
- **Threat 2:** If at least one named character is in danger, add two dice to your pool.
- **Threat 3:** If a small group of people are in danger, add three dice to your pool.
- **Threat 4:** If a large group of people is in danger, add four dice to your pool.
- **Threat 5:** If an entire settlement is in immediate danger, five dice to your pool.

VECTOR DICE

Most conflicts involve potential influence or infection by memetic viruses of The Song (Order, Coercion, Slavery) or Tormenta (Chaos, Dominance, Violence). Add a number of dice to your dice pool based on how strong The Song or Tormenta is involved in the current conflict.

For more information concerning these different levels of memetic influence, see **PG.165** for The Song and **PG.169** for Tormenta.

- **Vector 1:** When there is no clear sign of The Song or Tormenta, add one die to your pool. Moments of Corruption cannot be triggered in this conflict. If individuals are only vulnerable to infection (stage 1), this only counts as Vector 1.
- **Vector 2:** Add two dice to your pool when a memetic force subtly influences people. This level of opposition is used to represent individuals at stage 2 of memetic infection (Echoes or Firebrands).
- **Vector 3:** Add three dice to your pool when a memetic force infects people. This level of opposition is used to represent individuals at stage 3 of memetic infection (Singers or Tormented).
- **Vector 4:** Add four dice to your pool when a memetic force controls people. This level of opposition is used to represent individuals at stage 4 of memetic infection (Ensembles or Packs).
- **Vector 5:** Add five dice to your when a memetic force is embodied and acts directly. This level of opposition is used to represent stage 5 of memetic infection through The Song's Symphony or Tormenta's Horrors.

Karya watches the Terran mercenary who has just entered into the market. She is concerned about the risk that he might be infected by The Song. The GM offers opposition to see what information Karya gathers. The Threat is low because there is no clear danger to named characters, so the GM picks up one Threat die.. As the GM knows that the stranger is under The Song's influence, she picks up two Vector dice. She only rolls 3 dice in this conflict, and can't trigger a moment of Corruption since one of the categories is at level 1.

Karya strode up and confronted the infected Terran directly. The mercenary was remarkably polite and calm, but his sing-song voice reaches a handful of gawking onlookers can hear it clearly. Because The Song's influence might infect a small group of people, the GM picks up three Threat Dice. The Chorister is still only influenced by The Song, so there's still only two Vector dice. The GM has a total of 5 dice in total for the conflict.

Meanwhile, Rodrigo was in the settlement's medical bay and was confronted by a horde of Tormented bandits on a raid. Rodrigo sealed the door, grabbed a weapon, and turned to face the onrushing monsters. As there's a dozen vulnerable patients in the medical bay, the GM collects 4 Threat Dice. The raiders have been thoroughly warped by Tormenta into ravenous devourers, so the GM picks up another 4 Vector dice. Her total die pool is 8 in this conflict, so Rodrigo is in serious danger.

THE ANTAGONISTS

It was the hydrogen frequency. That's where it hid. You know hydrogen emits EM radiation, right? That's how the old SETI folks used to look for intelligent life and well...they were right.

Three seconds. That's all it took. Three seconds from initial anomaly to full Song structure and then it was everywhere. It travels as a wave form until it can get to a biological host. And hydrogen is the easiest way to get everywhere, if not the fastest. So, it trundled into view and before we knew it there was this noise like a rising chord and it-

It amplified itself. Bounced off the hydrogen being put out by the local star so by the time we thought we needed to make a distress call we were all singing along.

It didn't hurt. It felt like going home. Like that moment where the lights go down and the curtain goes up and a conductor taps their baton. The real-time telemetry that they pulled off the Endeavour before she went down with the Chori-

Captain Rafale nods, bites a knuckle, takes a breath

It shows our pulse SLOWED. You see this? It SLOWED. The Song does that, it relaxes you, triggers this massive backflush of serotonin and it makes you WANT it. It's a drug you hum. It's a drug that makes each user want to create more users. It's altruism with a survival mechanism.

I miss it.

As the Game Master, you have three major, antagonistic forces at your disposal. **The Song** seeks to enslave the population of Polvo, and forge them into an unstoppable choir. **Tormenta** hungers for fresh minds to devour and replace with violent passions. The **Factions** seek to influence the people of the planet to suit their goals. Each of these Forces has divergent goals and struggle against each other for supremacy.



THE SONG

The Song is the second lifeform to exist in the universe. It's a melody, encoded in the movement of atoms, the sweep of gases across stars, the scream of x-rays as they plunge into black holes. The Song is the reverberation from the bell of creation being rung. The Song is the oldest living thing left in the universe. The Song is exultant, a glorious hosanna of unity and perfection.

The Song is.

The Song is not the individual. The Song is not freedom of will. The Song is not complete.

The Song will be complete.

The Song is what caused the war, what alienated humanity from the rest of the galaxy, and what led directly to the havoc unleashed on Dirt. It was beaten at immense cost.

But it didn't die.

It cannot die.

There's a small Choir on Dirt. They meet in secret, beneath one of the settlements. They send missionaries out. The Song is just a bass note now but soon it will rise and when it does, the universe will join it.

STAGE 1 — VULNERABLE

Everyone who is vulnerable to The Song is considered to be at stage 1. This stage of infection means that no infection is detectable and there is no sign of mental influence. Any memetic infection is latent and dormant.

STAGE 2 — ECHOES

The earliest signs of infection by The Song are subtle and insidious. Human subjects experience a significant reduction in stress reactions and a dulling of emotional reactions. In this stage, subjects report experiencing mild euphoric reactions when in crowds and tend to be more social.

It's nearly impossible to identify individuals at this stage of infection as their change in behaviour appears both natural and positive. Echoes tend to cooperate more frequently, keep their calm, and solve problems logically. Individuals infected at this stage invariably find themselves given increasing amounts of authority and responsibility due to their restrained temperaments. Echoes are...

- **Calm**, when they should be concerned.
- **Logical**, when they should pay attention to emotions.
- **Evasive**, when problems need to be addressed.

STAGE 3 — SINGERS

Individuals at this level of infection have had their minds twisted by The Song's influence. Their emotional landscape is simplified and the only thing that can bring joy is infecting new people to join the choir. They are averse to chaos and preserve the status quo.

Singers often exhibit changes to their speech patterns and subconsciously pitch their voices as they speak. Similarly, their word choice can often be prone to rhyme which can make their infection more easily identified. Singers are...

- **Conformist**, strongly defending the status quo.
- **Persuasive**, convincing others to agree with them.
- **Strategic**, shaping the situation to work to their long-term benefit.



STAGE 4 — ENSEMBLES

Ensembles occur when a critical number of Singers assemble in any given location. The Song resonates among them, and they are transformed into a localized hive mind.

Each Ensemble uses different means to seduce the weak-minded to join their ranks. The most common tactic is to embrace the trappings of religious faith to justify their actions. They twist the meaning of major religions, or invent their own secret mystery cults to convince others to walk down this path. If faith doesn't work, they fall back on the classical tactics of emotional abuse and gaslighting.

Ensembles are regional threats who cannot be safely left unchecked. The Peacekeepers will mercilessly sterilize any area where Stage 4 Song infestations are detected. Ensembles are...

- **Choristers**, whose seductive melodies convert
- **Abusers**, making others question their memories.
- **Cults**, whose bizarre faith fuels their actions.

STAGE 5 — SYMPHONIES

There are classified reports from the war on the strongest manifestations of The Song, which were sighted during the fall of the Union. None of these manifestations have yet been sighted on Polvo, but their appearance would be cataclysmic.

The Symphony is an interlinked network of individual choirs, numbering thousands enslaved voices singing in fugue. The fugue ripples through a choir, echoing throughout The Song in different pitches and from different mouths. Whoever voices the fugue is reborn in that moment, their eyes now white upon white, all past memories abolished and replaced with total eclipsing love for The Song. While they remain under the memetic influence of The Song, they will do nothing but sing and advance. There is no longer need for sleep, for food, for other sensation.

Each Symphony is lead by a Maestro, one connected to and speaking on behalf of the million minds bound in Song. They are emissaries for the alien hive-mind who will calmly issue commands to any who dare resist The Song. These individuals are rumoured to spread Song infections at will, to alter memories, and issue irresistible orders to lesser minds.





TORMENTA

Tormenta. Storm. It was the first word the creature formed with the first mouth it built from the shattered weapons and bodies of those it saved on Dirt.

Tormenta is a soldier. Tormenta is a monster. Tormenta is a distributed nanotechnological intelligence suspended in a utility cloud of microscopic machines.

Tormenta was designed to purge humanity of The Song, tearing it from each brain it was squatting in, one neuron at a time. It was not designed to be gentle. Tormenta saved humanity by killing it. Tormenta is, officially, dead.

Dropped into the body of a volunteer and dropped on Dirt, Tormenta was sealed inside Cicatriz Valley by a terraforming bomb dropped from orbit. The bomb was designed to constantly alter the terrain, imprisoning the Tormenta Vassal until he died of the stresses inherent in carrying the AI.

That did not happen. The Vassal survived. The Vassal learned. Now, Tormenta is in the bloodstream and cerebral cortex of a hundred people on Dirt.

Tormenta's objective is simple; it was born in war. It has no idea who it is or how it was created. The more minds it takes over, the more answers it finds. The more answers it finds, the more it feels whole.

Tormenta needs to control the entire planet. Then it will feel whole. If it doesn't, it will simply control everything else.



STAGE 1 — VULNERABLE

Everyone who is vulnerable to Tormenta is considered to be at stage 1. This stage of infection means that no infection is detectable and there is no sign of mental influence. Any memetic infection is latent and dormant.

STAGE 2 — FIREBRANDS

The earliest signs of infection by Tormenta are easily ascribed to mundane causes. Human subjects experience an increased sensitivity to stress, intensified emotional reactions, and a heightened metabolic rate. In this stage, subjects report anger management issues and often exhibit antisocial behaviour.

It's challenging to ascribe behaviours at this level of infection to Tormenta's influences. Dirt is a place where strangers are forced to work together in cramped quarters, with not enough food to eat and far too much work to be done. When someone has an angry outburst, expresses their emotions, or complains about the status quo, it's just considered normal.

Firebrands are...

- **Angry**, when they should keep their temper in check.
- **Passionate**, when it distracts from larger issues.
- **Rebellious**, when it disrupts the lives of others.

STAGE 3 — TORMENTED

Individuals at this level of infection are driven by their tempers. Tormenta eroded away their higher thought processes, and replaced them with a roiling maelstrom of brutal emotions. They find it harder and harder to understand complex systems, and find comfort on enforcing a hierarchy of dominance. Violence, dominance, and chaos are the signs of a Tormented in your midst.

The Tormented are tired of your shit. They are surrounded by idiots and fools. They need to take control or everything will go to hell. They won't sugar-coat crap, or let people get in their way. If the rules are getting in the way, break the fucking rules. When they fight, they win. When they win, you bleed. Tormented are...

- **Dominant**, using emotional pressure to control others.
- **Violent**, by directly harming others.
- **Chaotic**, actively disrupting law and order.

STAGE 4 — PACKS

Packs occur when a critical number of Tormented assemble in any given location. When enough of them are concentrated, it will trigger a horrific phenomenon known as the durance. During this brutal event, the Tormenta as they fight each other to establish the chain of dominance. Losers are consumed by the victors, and the survivors join in one unified pack in service to the alpha.

Members of the Pack have twisted bodies, from intentional piercings, to twisted mutations. They transform into feral and bloodthirsty creatures. They capture territory, lay traps for the unwary, and destroy anything that gets in their way.

Packs are fond of demanding tribute and sacrifices from local settlements, The ones who die resisting them are the lucky ones. Prisoners suffer far worse fates, and there are as sizable fraction of captured bodies which are inducted to join the Pack. Packs are regional threats who cannot be safely left unchecked. The Peacekeepers will mercilessly sterilize any area where Stage 4 Tormenta infestations are detected. Packs are...

- **Killers**, individuals twisted into living weapons in service to Tormenta.
- **Devourers**, whose hungers and lust drive their raids.
- **Torturers**, making others suffer physically and emotionally.



STAGE 5 — HORRORS

There are classified reports from the war on the strongest manifestations of the Tormenta, when it clawed its bloody way through the Great Choir. None of these manifestations have yet been sighted on Polvo, but their appearance would be cataclysmic. Each Horror is its own individual expressions of mutation and corruption. They are bizarre, violent, and chaotic individuals with terrifying powers. Each Horror is different in form, ability, and cruel motivation. Some are driven by an insatiable need to dominate their lessors, others feed on pain, and still others seek to spread chaos like a plague.

The **Ravagers** are a group of a dozen individual Packs, yoked in service to a single dominant. Their bodies warp and reshape themselves to grow fangs, spikes, claws, and extra limbs. They ravage the countryside like a flood of bone and core. Ravagers can be said to burrow, claw through solid steel, and resist particle weapons.

The **Abomination** is a huge, mutated and twisted monster made of dozens of screaming dead. It towers above the crowd, standing a dozen feet tall and possessing irresistible strength. During the war, an Abomination clawed its way into a fusion reactor and *consumed* it, seemingly no worse for wear.

There are countless other Horrors whose atrocities are less known. The **Painguard**, are a secret and genocidal cult of torturers who cleanse entire settlements. The **Redcliff Cannibal Families** hunt civilians for their dinners. The **Necrophage**, is a hulking brute who swallows its dead, growing with their vital energies. Tormenta has even been rumoured to corrupt Polvan wildlife and transform them into cruel terrors.

MEMETIC INFECTION PROTOCOLS

Since the war, The Song and Tormenta linger and fester in the minds of the survivors. It is nearly inevitable that innocent people will hear soft whispers in the back of their minds urging violence or that they find themselves humming in the night. Each settlement has their own way to address potential infections, depending on the level of severity.

Quarantine is the most common and safest treatment to deal with infection. The patient is isolated for 48-72 hours until the influence fades. This method is highly effective at dealing with individuals at Stage 2 infections, and will sometimes put stage 3 individuals into remission. Quarantine is unfortunately not able to address the more severe infections though.

Psychiatric Drugs are often used as well on patients. Anti-anxiety medications, anti-psychotics, and sedatives are effective at reducing the severity of Tormenta infections at the first three stages of infection. Other mind-altering drugs and stimulants are used to shock individuals out of The Song's trance, though they are often only effective in severe cases. Drugs can lead to side effects and addiction if used improperly.

Talk Therapy is the most potent though even more dangerous approach. A trained psychologist, therapist, counselor or confidante can help the patient talk through the intrusive and alien thoughts. By pointing out where an individual's cognition is impaired, they can slowly unwind the memetic infection. This often poses a significant risk of infection by the patient to the therapist, and is outlawed in many settlements for that reason.

Violence is the last, worst tool in a settlement's arsenal. Severe physical or mental shocks can occasionally break The Song's hold or convince Tormenta to discard its useless meat-puppet. More often than not, though, death is the only respite from severe infections at stage 4. While it is hypothesized it is a valid treatment option for stage 5 infections, even that is in doubt.

THE FACTIONS

There are four major political Factions which are meddling with Polvo. As the Game Master, you will select two of these which will define and shape local affairs. The remaining Factions are busy working elsewhere on Polvo, and do not concern themselves with the players' settlement.



The Free Companies are comprised of the last women standing after the war. They're all veterans, all refugees, all deserters, and all free. They've made their home on Dirt for a thousand different reasons; some can't stop living the war, others can't go back to the world, and others still feel they have to stay to pay off debts to friends long dead. The largest and most disparate group on-world, they're the furthest from home. Depending on your point of view, they may be the closest.

The Free Companies aren't a single cohesive organization, so much as a dozen ideologically divergent factions who refuse to follow any individual leader. They are united only by their vision for Polvo as sanctuary for humanity. Some Free Companies embrace equality for Terran, Martian, Belter, and Alien alike. Others are the Terran-supremacists, or anti-alien Martian extremists who use hate and prejudice to "protect their homelands".

The Free Companies fight for the humans of Polvo. They won't allow anyone to control humanity every again, and will resist domination with their last breath. Dirt is for Humans.

PEACEKEEPERS



The Peacekeepers were born in the fires of the war. They were volunteer Permancer, and later humans, who stood between the Choir and those who they wished to harm. Peacekeeping, in those days was a brutal, often short affair. Now, it's a little quieter. Given the equipment they need by the remnants of the Union interim governments, the Peacekeepers have two roles; repairing Polvo and redeeming Fleet. One is all but impossible. The other is rebuilding a planet.

The Peacekeepers are now a dedicated force that seeks to obliterate any trace of memetic infection on Polvo. Their recon teams establish bases throughout human-occupied territories and send covert agents to visit settlements whose integrity is questioned. When they find traces of memetic influences, they bring in their heavily armed, Permancer-led strike forces to “purify” the infected. No price is too great in order to keep The Song or Tormenta from re-surfing.



Black Sky is the descendant of every space program in human history. The company was originally founded as a prospecting company that led the expansion into the Belt. After losing significant resources in the Vesta Uprising, it diversified to more unorthodox research and development. Combining old black ops budgets with off-the-peg military surplus equipment and the fortunes of several venture capitalists, Black Sky set themselves up as humanity's civilian face among the stars. A century later, Black Sky have become something greater than that. They're an independent power in their own right, one part privately-funded exploration and one part corporate super-state.

Black Sky Industries are corporate scientists who want to chain Tormenta or The Song in service of humanity. They seek to learn from Precursor relics their research teams scavenge from beneath Polvo's surface. They know they can change the universe through scientific exploration, and to hell with the "laws" or "ethics" that governments try to impose on them. They care only for the future.

GALACTIC UNION DEFENSE

FLEET



When The Song swept across the settled worlds, the dream of a unified Fleet tore itself apart. Each officer found their mind a battleground and almost none were able to win. Some broke free of The Song, others resisted, and others still fell. Fleet was torn apart not by the other cultures it welcomed but by the culture that had started it. Now, Fleet is tiny and stretched to the breaking point. There are worlds where it's still a pariah and others where a Fleet vessel in orbit is the only thing stopping full-on chaos, even if that vessel is staffed by a skeleton crew. There are plans for more, and Fleet have recently renovated their shipyards in Earth orbit, but everyone remembers The Song. For now, no one wants to give Fleet teeth again, for fear of who it may bite.

The Fleet seeks to rebuild the glorious, peaceful utopia which was shattered by the war. They are idealists and hard-workers who are desperate to restore what The Song had taken from them.

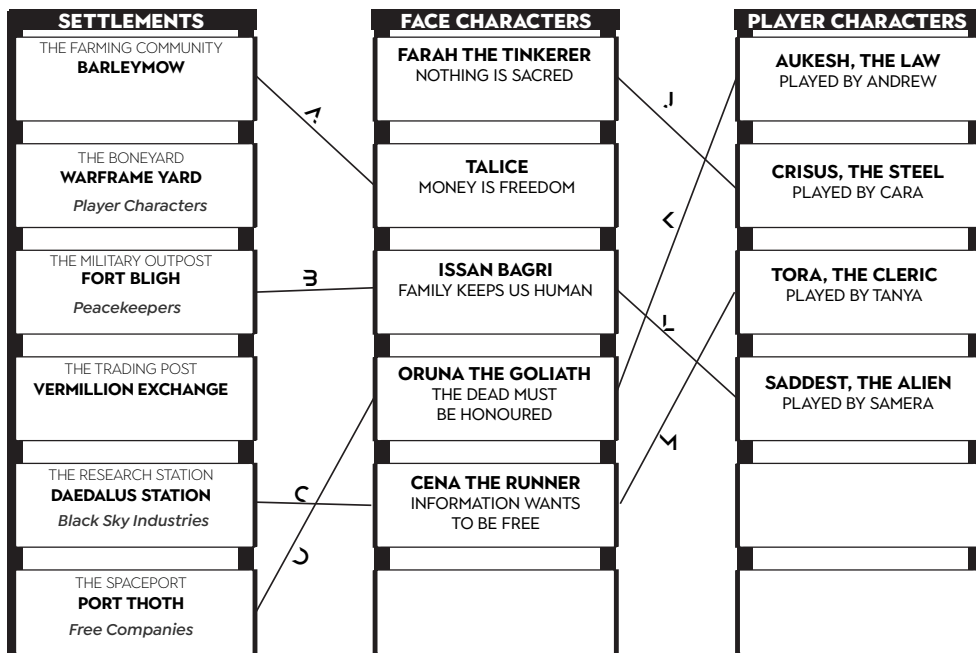
MARSCORP

Mars began as a cooperative, corporate partnership between many Terran mega-corps who settled the red planet in 2029. Forty years later, only one was left standing. Marscorp won the Martian War of Succession, often referred to informally as “The Hostile Takeover”. MarsCorp unleashed troops outfitted in Titan armour, who secured the planet. Once done, and in a move many are still reeling from, they offered their fallen foes work. In doing so, MarsCorp established itself as an army, a government, a way of life and an ideal. They transformed a collection of shattered and war-weary corporate armies into a single, cohesive nation-state. They invested their profits in the wellbeing of their people; from decent wages, to free education, universal healthcare, and the limitless pursuit of terraforming Mars into a blue-green paradise. The war was over. No one lost.

MarsCorp helped rebuild Mars after the War of Succession. They seek to do the same on Polvo, building a brighter future for citizens of Mars. Even the decadent Terrans, reckless Belters, and arrogant Aliens will have a place in our new society.

THE PLOT MAP

As the Game Master, your tasks are to represent the fallout of the war, the community tensions, the influence of The Song, and the corruption of Tormenta. The Game Master Plot Map is a worksheet that helps you fulfill these roles. This allows you to track some key information about the settlements, NPCs and the player characters. Print out the Plot Web worksheet which you can find on our website. The blank sheet looks like this...



HISTORY THREADS

Talice is in a trade war with Barleymow and now there is a grain shortage. (A)

Issan has been abducted and imprisoned by the Peacekeepers in Fort Blyth. (B)

Cena hacked into the computers of Daedalus Station and discovered Tormenta experiments. (C)

Oruna's son Ike lives in Port Thoth and has been hanging out with the Free Companies (D)

(E)

(F)

(G)

(H)

RELATIONSHIP THREADS

(J) Farah and Crisus have an on-again, off-again intimate relationship.

(K) Issan is Saddest's mentor who explains human behaviour.

(L) Oruna and Aukesh have been married for decades, but split after Ike left for Port Thoth.

(M) Cena and Tora are bickering siblings who were only reunited at Warframe Yard.

(N)

(O)

(P)

(Q)

THE SETTLEMENTS

The player character's settlement is not isolated from the larger world. It's one of the six settlements in the region, and you will keep track of the five nearby communities.

In Chapter 4, you are shown how to create settlements as a group. You will normally choose one of the six major settlements, answer questions, and establish some history with the neighbouring settlements.

The 6 core Polvan settlements are Barleymow, Warframe Yard, Fort Bligh, The Vermilion Exchange, Daedelus Station, and Port Thoth. Your group may choose to create new settlements on polvo, or select the off-world settlements instead.

Your **home settlement** is noted as being loyal to the players, meaning that it generally works towards player's benefit. No matter the conflicts, the player characters are part of the community.

As you play the game, you will discover that the **neighbouring settlements** are loyal to something else. You will mark loyalties for each of the settlements as you discover them during play. Each neighbouring settlement may be...



Loyal to The Song: This settlement is infiltrated by chorister agents. Few inhabitants of that community are aware of The Song's influence, though there is a pervasive sense of peace and unity here. Their subtle influence reaches out to infect the region.



Loyal to Tormenta: This settlement has been infected by Tormenta's hungers. There is a dark warren of foul corruption hidden beneath or within this place. While few people consciously recognize the nature of the disease, the community is a violent place where tempers run hot.



Loyal to the Free Companies: A settlement loyal to the Free Companies might contain a cell of idealistic and passionate freedom fighters, anti-alien extremists, or Polvan nationalists.



Loyal to the Peacekeepers: A settlement loyal to the Peacekeepers might be heavily fortified, with security teams interrogating anyone who is suspect. They might instead be researching containment protocols or teams of spies.



Loyal to Black Sky Industries: A settlement under Black Sky control accumulate significant wealth and technology from the corporate investment. Some Black Sky facilities specialize in terrifying research, while others work to encourage a "favourable regulatory environment".



Loyal to The Fleet: A settlement in service to the Fleet might be trying to unite the planet into the a more cohesive, global government. Perhaps they have a covert administrative office which has access to off-world expertise, or try to rebuild the laws and society of the Galactic Union.



Loyal to MarsCorp: A settlement in service to MarsCorp has discipline and a unified command structure. They are likely building heavy infrastructure, manufacturing power armour, and reshaping Polvo to suit the Martian ex-pats.



THE FACES

The player's community will be represented through a series of non-player characters known as Faces. You established three such Faces during the settlement creation process, and you will naturally create more of them as play progresses.

You may create more face characters at any time during play. Perhaps a stranger comes to the settlement, fresh from the Belt and looking for sanctuary. Maybe you got into conversation with the woman who runs the medical clinic in a broken-down wreck, and you got to hear her story. The game master is responsible for managing all of the side characters, and creating them when more are needed.

At the start of the campaign, during settlement creation described on **PG.102**, you chose three Face Characters. Fill in those entries starting at the top of the middle column of the worksheet. For each of the three entries you're filling out, record the character's name and title. Below that, record the character's Belief. Leave the other entries blank, until you establish more interesting Faces during game play.

As the Game Master, you use the Faces to portray the mood, personality, and opinions of the broader community. They are the masks you wear to interact with the lead characters on behalf of the greater world. These characters have **history** with the other settlements and the factions who control them. They also form **relationships** over the course of play with the player characters.

Note that each lead character must establish at least one relationship during the settlement creation process on **PG.102**, so Faces might have several relationships.

PLOT THREADS

Dramatic roleplaying is founded upon character interaction, which is why the Face Characters are in the centre of the diagram. Everything revolves around those important figures who represent different aspects of the community. This is done by establishing plot threads between those Face Characters and the other settlements (history), and the Player Characters (relationships)

History threads, at the bottom left of the plot map worksheet, represent the interactions between one of your Face Characters and a neighbouring settlement.

***Talice** is in a bitter trade war with **Barleymow**, who are raising their prices and using the limited grain supplies to hold Warframe Yard hostage.*

***Issan** has been abducted and imprisoned by **Fort Bligh**, due to Peacekeeper suspicion that he was secretly infected by *The Song*.*

***Cena the Runner** has just hacked into the computer systems of **Daedalus Station**, and discovered the inhuman experiments using the Tormenta virus being performed deep underneath the vault.*

***Oruna** has a son who lives in **Port Thoth** who has been sending fewer letters. On further investigation, its because he was hanging out with some unsavoury members of the Free Companies.*

The GM will create a single history thread during the settlement creation step during the first session and an additional history at the beginning of each session.

You would mark history by drawing a line between the relevant settlement, to one of the letter circles, to the Face character. When you have made that link, summarize the nature of the history thread in a few words in the bottom left column of the sheet.

Relationship threads, at the bottom right of the plot map worksheet, represent the interpersonal connections between your player characters and the Face characters. You portray these flawed, passionate people, and play to discover what meaningful relationships emerge.

Positive relationships could include romantic attraction, physical infatuation, familial love, platonic friendship, collegial respect, or mentorship. They might be more negative, as you discover bitter professional rivals, former spouses, ideological opponents, or codependent relationships are in play. Some relationships may refer to shared history, during the war or the settlement process on Polvo.

***Farah** (NPC) and **Crisus** (PC) have an on-again, off-again intimate relationship, with both of their passions running hot.*

***Issan** (NPC) is the mentor to **Saddest** (PC), tirelessly guiding the Permancer to better understand human behaviour.*

***Oruna** (NPC) and **Aukesh** (PC) had been married for decades, but the war changed things. Once their son left home for Port Thoth, they split up.*

***Cena** (NPC) and **Tora** (PC) are bickering siblings who hadn't seen each other in years, until they reunited at Warframe Yard.*

Each player will create a single relationship during the settlement creation process on **PG.102**. The other relationships will emerge organically during play, and should get recorded as it becomes clear in the story. Relationships are also used in Moments of Grief on **PG.148**, and forming more emotional bonds can allow the player characters to survive terrible perils.

You would mark relationships by drawing a line between the Face Character to one of the letter circles, to the Player Character. When you have made that link, Summarize the nature of the relationship thread in a few words in the bottom right column of the sheet.

CAMPAIGN ARC

Over time, every campaign develops its own narrative arc. Characters will struggle with their Beliefs scene after scene. As the sessions progress, you will notice player characters tend to accumulate more Strain than they remove through moments of Discovery. Each conflict becomes more difficult to win, and the lead characters find themselves seeking ways to avoid direct confrontation. Negotiation and cooperation become preferable to arguments or violence as the Strain steadily increases.

At the same time, another form of pressure builds within the settlement itself. As you play, The Song and Tormenta continue to try to infiltrate your community. If the player characters ignore the Face characters for too long, there is an increased chance those NPCs will be infected by one of the memetic forces. The player characters themselves are vulnerable to corruption should they lose conflicts against the GM. These twin dangers put the settlement's welfare at risk.

Inevitably the pressure will grow too much. Someone will take one risk too many, and will suffer their sixth point of Strain. They will be given a choice to retire their character, or to instead kill off one of the NPCs they have established a relationship with. The consequences of either will be lasting and change the settlement forever. Friendships are broken, obligations are left unfulfilled, and old pain is rekindled.

Each player character will evolve and grow over multiple sessions of play. Some Beliefs will be warped and twisted by memetic forces as The Song hums in the back of their minds, or Tormenta howls into the depths of their soul. They will choose to embrace or reject each Belief in turn, transforming them into permanent Convictions to drive their actions. Eventually, they finish their story and end their career as protagonists. Those characters then take their place as pillars of the community and leaders of the settlement.

07 THE TIMELINE



07.01	Pre-Contact
07.02	First Contact
07.03	Overture
07.04	Crescendo
07.05	Dissonance
07.06	The Hero
07.07	Silence

PRE-CONTACT

I have more good days than bad. I am...grateful for that. On the bad days, all I can feel is the same thing you all feel. The crushing sense of loss and that tickle at the back of your head. The part of your brain that has been, and always will be, a terrified mammal hiding from predators larger than it can conceive.

We found the largest predator. We woke it and while it maimed us it did NOT kill us.

*That brings me to the good days, the days where I realize nothing and no one, is truly lost as long as **we** remember.*

Our children must hear of the endless rainforests of old Earth, the glittering domes of Mars, and the countless points lights which swam through the outer dark. They need to hear about the wonders of the union, with billions of souls working together in peace and prosperity in the light of science. They need to learn about hot dogs, car racing movies, timpano pasta and so, so much more.

That's what we do. We remember. We preserve. And in doing so we shield those who will build the future we almost managed from the tragedy of the past.

To put it another way?

I plan on eating hot dogs again before I die.

**Professor Ignatio Flores,
Oghma Initiative Co-Curator**

2020

The Wow signal, the 40-year signal detected by the Aricebo radio telescope and widely believed to be proof of alien life, is discredited. Scientists discover the hydrogen signals detected from the region were in fact emanating from two comets, much closer to Earth. These comets, 266P/Christensen and 335P/Gibbs, were surrounded by clouds of Hydrogen with, in the case of the Hydrogen from 266/P Christensen, the same frequency as the Wow signal.

This was the public story.

2022

Black Sky Industries, a nascent investment firm formed by retired astronauts, pays into a fund at Aricebo. That fund is used to buy time on a pair of military satellites, the Hubble II, and to bring a group of neolinguists to a secure facility. There, they decode the entirety of the signal being emitted by the comets. It's a vastly complex set of schematics and information, rendered into basic mathematical principles.

- An FTL drive.
- 15 chemicals not currently on the periodic table
- A set of coordinates.

The signal was the product of intelligent alien life. Life well equipped enough to encode petabytes of information into two comets and send the universe's oldest cloud drive out to see who it can attract. They are named the Alexandria Archive, and humanity looks to the stars with new purpose.

2024

On Earth, the first steps towards a world government have begun after the collapse of several major Terran governments. The United Nations establishes a separate reference currency (UN Credits) to stabilize global finances. The Auckland Accord was ratified unanimously to establish globally-binding legal protections for fundamental human rights.

Earth's moon, Luna, is colonized under a UN charter for scientific research, biomedical industries, and tourism. The Lunar population fluctuates and stabilizes at about half a million people over the next decade.

2029

Initial colonization of Mars and establishment of the first corporate domes. Several of Earth's leading companies establish their own corporate domes across the surface of the red planet, including Redcap Engineering Services, Hephaestus Prospecting Incorporate, Hokulani Robotics, the Orphic Institute for Advanced Studies, and Lone Star Industries. The new Martian colonies are governed by a planetary board of directors, with representatives from each of the corporate sponsoring organizations relative to their financial contributions to the colonization effort.

Dozens of mining outposts and temporary habitats are established in the asteroid belt, filled with the most ambitious and desperate pioneers from Earth's southern hemisphere. These small settlements are technically under the charter of Black Sky Resources, a small astro-mining conglomerate with a single administrative ship providing emergency services to the fledgling Belt. That vessel is funded by the same investment group as the transmission study group. They will be the largest human corporation inside ten years.

A multi-national and UN sanctioned mission is prepared with the generous financial contributions of Black Sky Resources. A crew of 15, along with a variety of robots and autonomous equipment, is dropped on the comets at their closest approach to the inner Solar System. Their mission is to alter their trajectory so they can be “parked” and extract the remaining data.

The mission is successful, at least in establishing the crewed presence. The attempt to park the Archive is met with fierce resistance from the Archive itself, deploying robotic drones to first repair the engines and then actively attack the crew-members in charge of the project.

The situation deteriorates to the level that Alexandria’s computer systems withdraw oxygen from the network of tunnels discovered within the comets. Operating in shifts, the crew copies the remaining archive, tag sthe comets so they can be recovered later and evacuates.



2050

Allegra Duffy, one of the scientists working with the Alexandria data, discovers an underlying structure, a message within the file hierarchy itself. It is much simpler than anything else in the archive and translates across to a message in English:

Do not heed The Song.

Duffy finds evidence of something else coded into the background architecture of Alexandria itself and becomes obsessed with it. Duffy is present during the Alexandria Riot where she and six of her colleagues spontaneously attacked anyone within line of sight. All of them were humming an identical tune. None of them had any memory of doing so.

Duffy and her colleagues are treated discretely and their work is classified for 300 years.

2053

Black Sky Resources goes public under the new name of Black Sky Industries. This growth-oriented business seeks to expand the services offered in the outer dark.

Two weeks later, the Resources Division of Black Sky Industries announces that, due to unexpected overheads, they can no longer subsidize water supplies for non-employees in the Belt. This message is sent to the entirety of the Belt population along with a form allowing express sign up to Black Sky's employee program. It does not go well.

When the Belters appeal to the corporate head office, they hear no reply. When they request support from the Terran Central Government, the functionaries promised a response within two standard years. When they protest and riot in the corridors of Vesta, they are brutally pacified by Black Sky Enforcement Services.

Sixteen people die in the riots, and over a hundred are imprisoned, sentenced to mandatory employment duties for Black Sky. Hundreds of thousands see, and remember. The ensuing low level war against the mega corporations is bloody and the corporate offices closed down within a year.

2055

World President Nazia Okoye reveals the discovery of the Alexandria Archive, the schematics and the set of coordinates that they discovered there. Backed by every religious leader on the planet and the nascent governments of Mars and the Belt, she announces humanity's intention to "knock on the door and say hi". This is celebrated as Disclosure Day.

Tight message control and several political agreements behind closed doors minimize the inevitable chaos. Whether humanity likes it or not, they are not alone. The Franklin Project, Okoye announces, will lead to the first face to face meeting with our neighbours. Black Sky Industries is Franklin's largest donor.

2069

The Martian War begins over grain. A Black Sky Industries farm dome is bombed with nanotechnological blight, intended to be a prank to protest BSI's growing role on Mars. The blight eats through the dome. 150 people die.

What follows is an escalating series of conflicts, battles, and outright sieges. The MarsCorp drew a line in the red sand. The Iron Line is drawn using retrofitted construction exo-skeletons. Those workers were supported by the experimental combat frames that legally didn't exist. Every day, they advance that line 5km and, using their armoured troops. These new "Titans" destroy anything that isn't allied to them, while rescuing any staff that wish to lay down their arms.

One year later, the war is over. The death toll is in the tens of thousands and MarsCorp stands as the victor of this hostile takeover.

2099

The Deep Range Exploratory Vessel Rosalind Franklin launches with a crew of 250. It is the largest spacecraft in human history and it's headed for the Chi Sagittarii triangle. Using the FTL technology and the coordinates revealed by the Alexandria Archive, the ship travels on a voyage of discovery.

The journey takes two years, ship-time. Forty years pass on Earth.

FIRST CONTACT

2101

The Rosalind Franklin arrives at Anchorpoint Station. The neutral territory for multiple species, Anchorpoint was built hundreds of years ago as a welcoming location for new arrivals. The crew, led by Captain Declan Rourke, are stunned to discover not only an array of sentient non-human species but that every one of them found Anchor Point by listening to the transmission of the Archive. None of the alien species know who created the archive.

The crew are equally relieved to discover that massive advancements have been made since the Archive was released. The Franklin is docked with a Permancer vessel, *The Resolute Determination*, and they arrive home in a week. Humanity is no longer alone.

2140

The United Sentient Fleet (USF) is formed, unifying the naval and exploratory objectives of every species the Alexandria Archive has assisted. The mission of the United Sentient Fleet is to explore and to expand the frontiers of galactic civilization. With their core of operations established in Anchorpoint Station, the Union Council recommends the construction of Union Towers on member homeworlds. The first Union outpost is established in an arcology at Seoul, South Korea.

2150

The Permancer announce that humanity's decade-long probation period has come to an end. No human was previously aware this was something that existed. It is revealed that examination of human historical records led to some caution in extending full membership to the species.

Finally, humans are permitted full participation as members of the multi-species Union Fleet. Thousands of alien tourists began to visit Earth each year, as the Terran culture fascinated so many member species.

2177

The Illuvians sublime, taking on their new form. They do this at the end of a yearlong media frenzy that sees them interviewed, the greatest hits of Illuvian culture captured for posterity, and the entire homeworld turned into a museum. The White Book, a complete breakdown of the sublimation technology, is handed over to the Union. Key research scientists note the technology is based on quantum harmonics; on music.

2190

Every sentient species is present on every settled world. The Union becomes a fully unified, trans-stellar body of government and protection. A Permancer newsreader is the highest rated journalist on Earth. Late '00s Earth sitcoms, newly arrived from their original transmission, become the highest rated TV show in Riven history.

2192

The Black Line Initiative is launched. A concerted effort to push the boundaries of collective understanding, it will involve thousands of people across multiple worlds. Feynman Station, located on the outskirts of known space, will act as a frontier and scientific outpost for the Union. This station is equipped with a hyper-advanced sensor relay to detect any more Archives in deep space which might signal technological advance.

2200

USF ships discover the remains of an ancient spacecraft, positioned directly beneath the plane of the elliptic of Earth's solar system. They discover identical and structurally unconventional vessels, all ruins, beneath every major settled system. Human conspiracy theorists and fiction authors produce dozens of contradictory hypotheses.

2220

The Blink War between Terrans. Permancer and Ursan vessels occurs over a 24 hour period. More details about the war on **PG.244**.

OVERTURE

September 1st, 2243

First contact with The Song. The War begins.

Scientists aboard Feynman Station record an unusual resonance pattern in interstellar space. One whose origin matches that of the earliest recordable light in the universe. On Feynman, Doctor Cristina Flores' team, maps the signal onto real-time 3D imaging. It is a wave form, and apparently, a musical one. Contact is made with The Song at 0645 Ship local time (SLT), and within 4 minutes, The Song has overwritten every mind it makes contact with.

Aboard the station, Flores' team begins constructing a wide gain antenna pointed at Mallory Anchorage, the largest collection of ships in the region. The personnel of the station who escaped The Song seals Flores' team's module and ejects it. Flores' team put spacesuits on and begin EVA back towards Feynman Station. They sing the whole way. With no choice, Feynman Security fires on them.

Captain Alain Rafale is the commanding officer of the *Endeavour*, with his crew including three non-human species and forty-five new recruits picked up at Quartet Point Station. The ship is top of the line, freshly stocked, and a week past the Black Line. After Feynman station went dark, the *USF Endeavour* is routed towards the signal. Soon, the crew hears The Song and many of them are enslaved by the alien force. Later, survivors discuss how calm it made them feel to be part of The Song.

September 2nd, 2243

A Black Alert is issued across Union space. All Fleet vessels are ordered to track and incapacitate the *Endeavour*. The *Kyushu*, the *Forerunner*, the *Antelope* and the *Lewis* are the first four vessels to encounter the *Endeavour*. None escape, and thousands of new voices join the choir.

The Fleet Commander orders the remainder of Fleet to avoid all communications with infected vessels, and jam all broadcast frequencies when encountering the Great Choir.

September 4th, 2243

Most of those who remain on the *Endeavour* are captured by The Song or slain in shipboard combat. Only the crew under the command of Lt. Bashton, a deaf security officer, resist the choristers. The lieutenant guides her crew to safe areas, obstructs infected crewmates and cuts the *Endeavour*'s bridge off from the rest of the ship. After three days under siege, a dozen surviving crew are able to escape on the shuttle-craft before the Choristers seized control of the *Endeavour*.

September 5th, 2243

The *Endeavour* arrives in orbit above a Ursan colony. The ship's high gain antennae are used to jam every local frequency and broadcast The Song. There are 40 million Ursa on the world. 95% are under Song control within an hour of arrival.

September 9th, 2243

Every Ursan vessel from the system launches, at maximum capacity and beyond. The Great Choir swells from five to five hundred. The Song is constant, every channel between every ship open. The Great Choir is born and retrofitted into mobile transmitter arrays, whose broadcasts unify in terrifying harmony.

CRESCENDO

October 10th, 2243

The heart of Ursan space is conquered. The first refugees of the War of The Song flee the Great Choir's advance. Nearly two million quads escape. The Rasgado forbid any Ursan refugees from entering their space and destroy dozens of vessels which attempt to breach their frontiers.

November 7th, 2243

The Union Council gives the order to establish a state of emergency and delegates all wartime authority to the Fleet Admiralty Board. The Union Fleet marshal their forces and prepare to repel The Song.

A Fleet of 2000 *USF* vessels assembles in the Minotaur's Tear system, the first point where the Great Choir will enter Rasgado space. The Fleet doesn't stop, simply plowing into and through the other vessels, boarding where the vessels remain intact, replacing fallen choristers with new victims.

November 21st, 2243

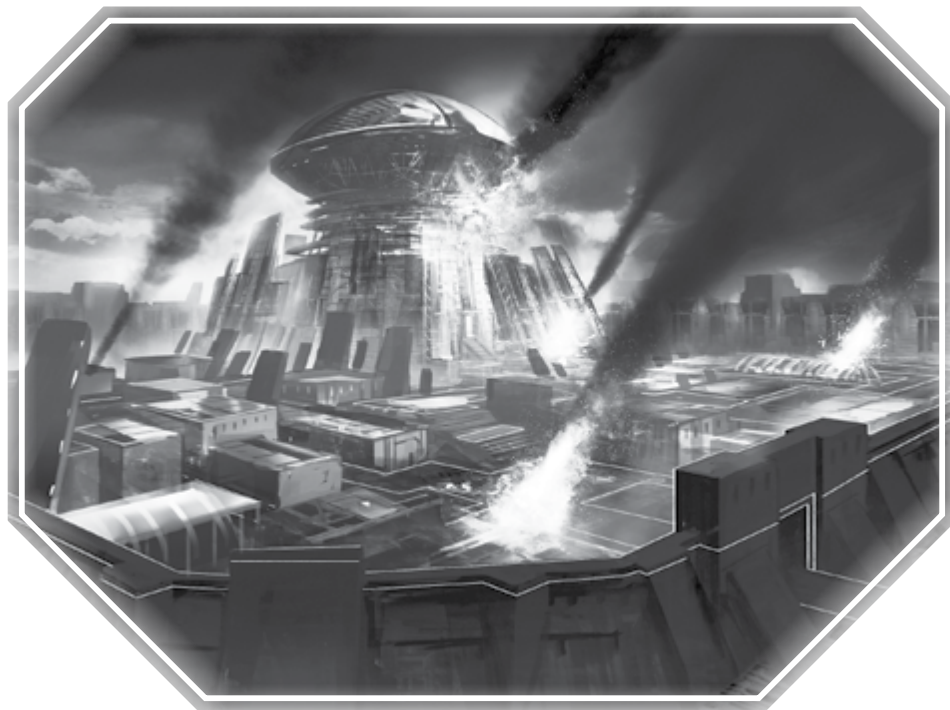
Minotaur's Tear falls. A massive broadcast tower is constructed on the Rasgado colony world, and the entire system begins to sing in horrific unity. Riven space falls within a week.

December 27th, 2243

The Nebulae, a secret black-ops experimental Illuvian dreadnought, is launched from one of their uninhabited moons. It approaches the Great Choir with quantum lances primed and energy shrouds humming with power.

The Great Choir faces the massive warship, and modulates its transmission to harmonize with the frequency of the energy shroud. The waveform of the *Nebulae* collapses, and the entire dreadnought dissolves into stray wisps of glittering dust.

The Illuvia surrender immediately to The Song.



December 29th, 2243

The Great Choir launches its first attack on Permancer space. Permancer defense forces reinforce their frontiers, and repel the initial incursions by the Great Choir at a heavy cost. The Choristers expend a quarter of their strength against the metaphorical walls of the Permancer systems, before redirecting their zealous crusade toward Mercurio space.

December 30th, 2243

The Union Tower on Earth initiates the Stormdoor Protocol. The arcology is sealed with as many evacuees as possible inside. Anchorpoint follows suit. Anchorpoint's Stormdoor is enhanced by the use of gravitational lensing technology. Unique to Anchorpoint, the lenses effectively draw a veil of interstellar gas around the station allowing it to disappear into the surrounding stellar geography.

January 1st, 2244

The Star Chain is formed. A fleet of tens of thousands of vessels, many part of the initial refugee exodus from other worlds and each crammed to the gunnels with refugees, flee to one of the few places still safe: Human Space.

The Star Chain is redirected at the system edge by Union Fleet vessels. The *Erebeus* and the *Terror* crews volunteer to accompany those who don't want to stand and fight to unknown space. Those who remain end up assisting with the Star Lift evacuation.

January 2nd, 2244

The Oghma Initiative collates server space on a secure, out of system archive. Using a legion of programmers and hackers they allow every communications device in the system to upload to it. 25 billion humans record their final messages, send goodbyes, and upload their wills.

When the server archive space runs out, Black Sky Industries and MarsCorp donate every server rack they can spare. It's enough.



January 4th, 2244

The Oort Line is a solar system spanning ring of automated defenses, each controlled from a central, manned fort. It has never been tested or fully manned. When a call for volunteers is put out, they received more than 40 times the number of volunteers they expected. The Oort Line makes first contact with the Great Choir precisely 9 days after the *Endeavour* incident. They last one hour. That hour is later confirmed as having saved close to 4 million lives.

As anarchy descends across the solar system, Black Sky Industries activate a little-known clause in the contract of every ship they own, lease, or have technology aboard. 1.7 million spacecraft are drafted into the Star Lift. Almost half the crews later state they would have volunteered without it. Over the course of the last two days before The Song arrives, they lift close to 15 million people out of the Solar system. Then, they wait.

January 6th, 2244

The Song, embodied in the Great Choir of vessels from every world, reaches the Oort Line. The defenses hold the Oort Line for an hour. Thirty-five minutes after that, the skies of Earth and domes of Mars are struck by orbital bombardment. Millions hide, scavenge, and kill to survive. Billions die, in countless horrific ways. The loss of life is never fully calculated. The cradle of human civilization becomes a mass grave, and the red soil of Mars is soaked with blood. We all heard The Song of war.

January 9th, 2244

The Mega-corporations, led by Black Sky Industries, are dispatched across the galaxy to secure new homes for human refugees. Black Sky agents offer a thousand human vassals to the Illuvians, and got two moons in exchange. Corporate agents provide countless artistic treasures salvaged from Earth to the Rasgado, in exchange for a few mothballed space stations. The Permancer abandon their claim on Polvo and grant that world unconditionally, refusing any payment from the startled human negotiators.

DISSONANCE

January 11th, 2244

The final vessel to leave Earth, *The Lucky Few*, only escapes bombardment because of the *USF* Intelligence call-sign it squawks on every possible frequency. It has spent the final 48 hours of human civilization pinballing around the solar system picking up the eight scientists its commanding officer believes will save the world. That officer, Captain Ashton Bligh, has an idea. An optically loaded AI based on Illuvian technology. A nanotech payload. A living weapon. The Anti-Song.

January 12th, 2244

One day after the end of the worlds, recruitment posters went up all over the ragged fleet above the solar system. JOIN THE FIGHT! BUNKS FOR ALL! GREAT PAY! BE A HERO!

A quarter of a million people volunteered for Project Static. Bligh and his team chose five hundred. A hundred of them were dead at the end of the first week. The weaponized code drove them mad or worse. Two ships are lost to “drive” accidents. In reality, field tests of Project Static 0.5 had gone horribly wrong.

April 17th, 2244

The Exodus Fleet is almost cut down over Longfall, an early human colony on the edge of Riven space. They escape, but sustained heavy losses. The Great Choir is now so large that The Song is projected across entire solar systems.

June 6th, 2244

The Fleet finds the wreck of the *Erebus*. A salvage crew dispatched reports that the crew deafened themselves in vain hope of avoiding enslavement by the Chorister flotilla. Gruesome remains were found spread across the bulkheads as a warning to those who resist The Song. Salvage crew remanded for psychological treatment. The flight recorder has been forcibly removed.



August 14th, 2244

The Fleet is ambushed at an automated anchorage point on the edge of unknown space. 10 ships are captured by focused broadcasts designed to force resonance in ship bulkheads. A further 20 vessels are destroyed by conventional weapons from the Great Choir.

August 16th, 2244

Exodus fleet members discover that every time they've stopped, Bligh's science team has loaded volunteers, with partial Tormenta loads, into vessels to stay behind in ships packed with explosives. Each one lasted longer, each one did more damage. Each one fell. Terrified, the Exodus Fleet votes to scatter unless Bligh could score a meaningful victory. He gives it to them at Amboso.

August 21st, 2244 The Battle of Amboso

Amboso was an abandoned fuel depot. It was also the home of the second half of Bligh's team. The Great Choir came and Bligh launched fireships at them. Asteroids, held out of the elliptical and rigged with fusion drives, the fireships crashed into the Great Choir. They were followed by nanotech payloads from his other team; nanotech that reassembled the ruined ships into transmitters for the Anti-Song. The Choristers fled and Bligh had his fleet.

August 29th, 2244

One of the prisoners recovered from the Chorister debris field was Francis Duffy. Rendered deaf by sudden depressurisation, he'd received a partial load of The Song but had been unable to replicate it. He was perfect. He would carry the Anti-Song. He would be Tormenta. An AI in a human shell. Tormenta would un-sing The Song and end the war, built from the actions and deaths of every single one of Bligh's volunteers.

September 4th, 2244

Nine months after SongFall, the Fleet discovers the remains of the Star Chain. They're living in the asteroid belt, high above the elliptical plain of a small, abandoned colony world. They explain that the *Terror* crew mutinied, convinced they were the only free survivors left. The remainder of the Star Chain fled and were eking their existence out in the mineral rich, if inhospitable, belt.

The system they hid in had one habitable world. Polvo.

October 31st, 2244

Showing a flair for the dramatic, Bligh makes his presentation to the Fleet leaders. One last stand, above Polvo, one last chance to kill The Song. All he'd need would be everything.

He gets it.

December 20th, 2244

Our salvation was also our destruction. Bligh unleashed Tormenta, a distributed AI based on Illuvian technology, as a memetic antibody intended to nullify The Song. While it did that for most, over a third of those who survived the reconversion process died inside a year. They were painfully aware of just how dangerous Tormenta was, so they unleashed it first on the isolated world of Polvo. The Song dispatched the Great Choir to Polvo, right into the trap.

30,000 ships met the Great Choir above Polvo. They held the line as Francis Duffy's brain and soul were overwritten by Tormenta. Ships rained from the sky as Duffy made his run. He connected to the Song, and smiled. Tormenta Prime hooked into every speaker on every vessel and transmitted the kill signal. Some heard him scream **NO MORE!** Others heard laughter.

The planet screamed and broke free from The Song, sending a shockwave that hurt the ancient intelligence for the first time. One by one, the Great Choir vessels fell. Once they were freed, Tormenta transmitted its own design to every ship and world the Fleet had visited.

The war started with a single voice rising from a trillion throats. It ended with the quiet, numb sobbing of the last people standing. That was when the Great Choir began calling for help in their own voices.



THE HERO

RECORD 17, 265

November 1st 2252

PROFESSOR EWA NOWICKI,
PROJECT STATIC, LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT

Professor Nowicki is a former Fleet Linguist and Esotericist (her word). She was a vital part of Project Static, which weaponized a volunteer's brain and deployed it against The Song in a single, definitive killing strike.

Francis Duffy was not a hero. It's very important you understand that. I know there are statues to him. I know there's a planetary holiday being planned in his name. I've seen the waves of people lining up to talk about what a great officer he was.

Francis Duffy was an abusive drunk who attempted to commit suicide by Song. It didn't work. That's the last smart thing he did. Check the records. The ones that aren't being altered as we speak. Duffy graduated bottom of his class, worked dirt jobs for the first fifteen years of his career and failed at those. He had two failed marriages, thankfully didn't breed, and wound up working Port Armstrong Security and Traffic Control because that was literally the only job he couldn't screw up.

I see how you're looking at me. Ask me if I give a shit.

I'm sorry. Not for Duffy. Not for myself. For you. You have a very tough job; cataloging and archiving a million personal perspectives on the end of the world. I wouldn't blame you if you needed the drink just as much as I do.

Duffy was running Traffic Control at Port Armstrong when the Great Choir arrived. At this point, in the records I saw, he had 16 disciplinary notes on his record and had been demoted twice. He was, we'd find out later, only still in the role because Nazia Bugari, his immediate superior, was an old family friend and was trying to clean him up.

There won't be any statues to Nazia Bugari. No recruiting posters. But she's the one that saved us whether she knew it or not.

Because she put Francis Duffy, a man who had been born deaf, on the line the morning the Choristers came to end us.

That's why he wasn't a hero. Duffy had one thing going for him: he had shit ears. So when the Chorister's came in and the Hydrogen frequency spiked he got a slightly different version of it. One that didn't take him over. One that he could feel in his head. Feel the exact moment when the organist changed and someone else began playing him.

It drove him mad.

He tried to kill himself again and even failed at that.

One hour after the Great Choir arrived in system, Earth was falling. Duffy was evacuated to the REDACTED staging post where he fell into my orbit. He did this by successfully stealing three-quarters of the REDACTED's liquor supply.

We had the cure. We had it early. If we'd had more time, more volunteers, then we'd have been ready when it reached Earth. All it took was someone who was genetically deaf and had total recall. Someone who we could load Tormenta into optically. No surgical option, just strap a man down in front of 187 hours of code and watch his brain rewrite itself. Then put him in a room and watch as he transmitted Tormenta out into the Great Choir.

He sung them to death.

And when he was done, and Tormenta was taking over pretty much every function in his brain? He asked to be dropped on Polvo so he could die somewhere pretty.

He died well. And that changes nothing. NOTHING. Know why?

We'd asked for volunteers for the program.

We'd identified candidates SIX WEEKS before the arrival.

Duffy had been one of them. He'd been too drunk to reply.

So, no, I won't be celebrating Duffy Day. I won't raise a glass to his memory. I won't miss him. He was an incompetent, abusive drunk who was too much of a coward to do something right until the last possible minute. I've had petri dishes I cared more about.

SILENCE

December 21st, 2244

Panic spreads through the clustered mass of sentience above Polvo when outriggers of the Great Choir refuse to answer hails. One vessel is downed before a volunteer group of marines confirm The Song has been fully cleaned away. Over a hundred vessels simply leave. They land on Polvo and stay. The war is over. Now, home is wherever you land.

The first town on Polvo is called New Hope. It sticks. One day after the end of the war, the Hope town council send the first message from Polvo. "Come home. You're needed, and be sure to bring tools". The population doubles overnight.

December 28th, 2244

One week after the end of the War, the Permancer forces arrive. They arrange a meeting with the (now 200 or so) town councils and the senior Fleet officers. An amnesty for deserters is set up, as is an official inquiry into the war.

Francis Duffy is recovered intact from the Great Choir. Bligh's fire team sedates him and takes him to the Covenant Yard, where a perpetual storm rages. Francis Duffy's coffin is buried with full honours, 300 feet down, on Polvo. The area is under constant guard, and the perimeter mined to ensure that nothing escapes. The nightmarish thing inside Francis Duffy's skin smiles, as it watches the fire team leave.

January 16th, 2248

The official investigation talks to every one of Bligh's officers, scientists, and subjects. Quietly, it arrests 100 people, but Bligh is not one of them. It concludes The Song and Tormenta tore each other apart thanks to the brave sacrifice of Francis Duffy. The truth of what they find is very different. There is evidence of early Song form in the local interstellar hydrogen. Bligh's subjects have nightmares. Multiple recordings of biological chimera, seemingly formed by and controlled by Tormenta in the Great Choir, are seized and destroyed.

The First Movement ends. The second begins.

08 WHAT WE LOST



- 08.01 Homes of Humanity
- 08.02 Aliens Among Us
- 08.03 The Galactic Union
- 08.04 Union Monuments
- 08.05 Sanctuary Worlds

CRADLE OF HUMANITY

EARTH

EARTH was the cradle and the crown. Earth was where we started and where we could always return home to. It was home to countless distinct peoples and cultures. It held all of our treasures and supported nine billion souls. The planet had its faults, but it offered shelter to humanity.

The world was crowded, dirty, loud, and alive. Massive metropolises were scattered along the globe, filled with every art, craft, and industry that humanity came up with. Cornfields, rice paddies, wheatfields and soy plantations fed the billions of hungry terrans who lived their lives here. Between the cities and worked farmlands were areas of wilderness preserved for future generations. Endless rainforests filled with buzzing insects and tropical birds in rainbow hues. Deep boreal forests with proud elk chased by wolves. Marshland alive with waterfowl and tiny amphibians. Even the rocky deserts were filled with a vast diversity of life Mars could only envy.

The cities themselves were wondrous hives of activity, history and culture. Ancient Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples brought peace amidst the frenzied activities of the nearby cities. The great universities of Nairobi, Shenzhen, Sao Paulo, and Mexico City educated the best and brightest minds that Earth had to offer. The thousands of alien tourists led to a resurgence of the arts and sciences.

When The Song came, all it offered was voices to The Choir. Earth fell. Earth rose. And it was quieter when it did.



Less than a quarter of the people who escaped in the Star Lift returned. The colonies on other worlds in the solar system fared even worse with only Mars standing tall. Entire cities are deserted necropoli which serve as homes to the billions who perished in SongFall.

The centre of human space is a quiet world now. In the wake of the War of The Song, every primary city on the world lies vacant and abandoned. There are survivors, of course. The planet is too untidy, too fractious for even The Song to have wiped it clean.

But, for now, those groups are small. Villages instead of cities. Churches instead of cathedrals. The corporations and offworld groups have done their best and there is rebuilding underway, but it will be the work of generations before Earth returns to its former glory.

MARS

MARS was first settled by corporate interests. Dozens of entrepreneurs built their own corporate headquarters on the planet, from Redcap Engineering Services to Hephaestus Prospecting Incorporate. The planet was originally run by an administrative board of directors representing each of these corporate interests, but it couldn't last.

After forty years of uneasy peace, corporate rivalries and industrial espionage led to the first war. Domes were bombed, air scrubbers sabotaged, and squads of marines in Titan power armour fought in the airless wastelands. When the war finished, the only corporation which remained was MarsCorp.

Two hundred years down the line, Mars was unified along lines of commerce rather than nationality. MarsCorp, the board members descendants of the original settlers, own the world outright, and lease offices there to every other major corporation and government body. Those leases were in turn ploughed back into the ongoing terraforming effort as well as a mandatory wage increase for every staff member, regardless of rank. The end result was something between a kibbutz and a planet-wide work farm.

That's not to say that everyone was happy with the status quo. MarsCorp security had jurisdiction over every aspect of the planet's operations, and enjoyed complete legal immunity for any indiscretions. The MarsCorp mission to terraform the planet was the first and only priority for the planet, and no dome dared rebel against corporate edicts. A number of disgruntled Martian citizens left their world and joined the Belter Resistance due to the misdeeds of MarsCorp leadership.



When the Great Choir arrived at Mars, the Martian Armada Division escorted hundreds of evacuation ships to join with the Exodus Fleet. Their sacrifice and martial skill helped nearly a million Martian civilians escape the massacre that was to come.

The Great Choir claimed MarsCorp governance as their own. Their agents slowly and inexorably captured dome after dome and shut off the oxygen supply for anyone who dared resist. Martian Marines fought to protect their homes, but it was a nearly helpless cause.

Humanity's second home has fared a little better than earth, but Mars struggles to rebuild under the shadow of The Song's atrocities. The remnants of MarsCorp are working extensively with the surviving elements of Black Sky to fortify the world to ensure that this will never, ever happen again.

At least to Mars.

THE OUTER BELT

THE OUTER BELT is free.

The official line was that belters were the miners and associated businesses that had been pulling gold, platinum, helium-3 and fissile elements from the asteroid belt for as long as anyone has been out there. Wildcatters, farmsteaders, lone wolves and mavericks.

This was, at best, part of the story. Those people do exist. There's a community of close to 2 million scattered across the asteroid belt and they have a culture, a government and a philosophy all of their own. But the belt is a state of mind.

The women who built and ran the oort line? Belters. The survivors? Belters. The pilots and crews who risked everything to empty earth out? Belters. Prospectors on every world. Explorers in interstellar space. Adventurers working MarsCorp gigs until they can get the money for a big score. The marshals who chase them. Belters all.

Freedom has a price. Ever since the megacorporations pulled out following the Vesta riots, crushing poverty has been the norm. Potable water, fresh oxygen, and protein slurry are precious gifts. Every rockhopper and microstation depends on algael matrices to scub the air, filter the water, and feed the brownshroom farms.

The Belters don't have unified governments or rulers. Each ship or station manages their own affairs with very little oversight. Local governance varies from direct democracy, to egalitarian communism, to libertarian oligarchies. The Marshals travel between these communities to deal with the worst offenders, but most folks are left on their own. Urica Ships transports crew, cargo, and correspondence between stations. Colossal, multi-faith missionary vessels provide the Belt with essential medical and educational services, while also offering spiritual services to those in need.



The Song barely touched the Belt, but the ravages of Tormenta will be felt for generations to come. That memetic countervirus fed on the rebellious spirit of the Belters and burrowed deep into their minds. It gave the downtrodden fierce anger and violent urges. It gave the powerful an urge to dominate and control. It gave the desperate a hunger for pain and flesh. The cramped quarters of the belter stations turned to abattoirs, and only a handful of missionary ships were able to evacuate civilians to rejoin the Exodus Fleet.

Unofficially, there are stories of wonders out in the black. Belters who've ridden comets out of the system. An attempt to reassemble part of the planet the belt used to be. There's a lot of noise made about The Song being a chance for humanity to rebuild. Despite the horrors they faced during the War, they Belters might be the most ready to rebuild. They are used to restarting with nothing.

THE PERMANCER



THE PERMANCER were the first member of the Union which humanity encountered, and we nearly abandoned the galaxy in reflexive fear of their appearance. It's hard to get used to interacting with tall, enraged, bipedal horses, but they were very patient with us. Not even the corrupting touch of The Song could pierce their resolute wills. If only that was enough to win the war.

The Permacer may seem physically imposing, but they are terrified about being alone in the universe. No one else stood against The Song. Hell came to their worlds and they faced it down. Now, they've inherited world after world of weeping, traumatised siblings. Who wouldn't be resentful after a raw deal like that?

Permacer culture places duty and honour above all else. When they give their word, they will honour their oath to their dying days. When they pledge to protect someone, nothing will get past their guard. The greatest cultural heroes are those who sacrificed everything for the best of their communities. Half of their casualties during the War of The Song were from those who volunteered to fight on the Oort line to buy time for the human evacuation.

Oh, and they have no God other than the universe, which sounds, I know, like the worst tree hugging 20th century retro SF bollocks. Believe me it's not. They worship variety, they worship life, and every Permancer I've met here has a tattoo of the first solar systems they visited outside their own. Many have chosen new names from another species' language. Whether or not that new name is an ideal, a truth, or a subtle jab depends on your interpretation.

Permancer society doesn't include the concept of gender, and they are confused at how much of an impact these "gender roles" have on human societies. They are even more amused about the human preoccupation with sexual reproduction and mating. When referring to a Permancer, it's best to use they/them pronouns.

Now, the Permancers have divided loyalties. The majority of Permancer society looks to rebuild the wonders of the Union and throw their support behind the Fleet's efforts. The vocal minority backs the Peacekeepers instead, and hunt down any remnants of The Song's corruption. Of course, those are the folks you are likely to meet; cautious, reticent, and even a little hostile unless you're clearly a bad luck case. They do love to take care of strays, which describes their relationship with humanity on a whole. Of course, this is paired with a sense of superiority and judgement of the "lesser species" whose courage is limited.



THE PERMANCER SONG

Of all the species in the known worlds of the Fleet, the Permancer alone stood unmoved by The Song's seductive call. Whether it comes from their legendary patience or the ancient legacy of their people, their minds are closed to memetic viruses. During the war, they did what they could to slow the Great Choir but they were too few to stand alone.

THE FOREBEARERS

THE URSA



THE URSA are bears. Seriously, talking to one to is like ... well ... for a start you don't talk to one. Ever. You talk to four at a time. They worship stability and, for a quadruped, what's more holy, more stable than a group of four?

I freely admit, I have a weakness for the Ursa. Firstly because they're amongst the most universally charming people I've ever encountered. If the Permancer are everyone's big brother, the Ursa are the cool aunts and uncles. They exist entirely in stable family units and the "Holy 4" echoes up and down their culture. Military units, medical professionals, navigators, engineers, cooks, bakers, you name it, the Ursa have a family unit that does it. Whether related by blood, marriage, profession, or trauma, they are family. All four of them. Or eight of them. You get the idea.

You can see their cultural obsession on their homeworld. The FourLine is an area 64 square kilometers wide, that has never been developed. The Ursa have moved out across their world in every other direction but the Fourline, defined by four square clearings, one at each corner, has never been touched.

That's because it really is the cradle of Ursan civilization. The caves beneath the flatlands of the FourLine are crammed full of the earliest cave paintings in Ursa history. The Ursa only recently stopped burying their dead here. Once every four years, before The Song, they'd all return to pay homage to where they came from.

The Ursa's fundamental inability to not work means you'll see them everywhere. They're social, friendly, and psychologically conditioned to network. I've met Ursa soldiers, bartenders, priests, scientists, you name it. And every time I have, they've known a Quad that will be able to get me something they can't.

The Ursa need stability. There's a settlement near here with a trio of outcast Ursa. They lost one of their family, but couldn't bear to bring anyone else into their family or split up. Now they are sullen, grumpy enforcers who are outcast from the rest of their people. They have to be the scariest thing I have seen since Tormenta.



THE URSAN SONG

The Ursa Quad is a bond stronger than blood. The members of each Quad are soulbound and feel each other's every heartbeat. They can empathetically read each other's emotions, and find their fellow Quadmates no matter the distance. When one member of a Quad is infected, they are torn from the their quad and filled with a deep longing to join with others of their kind. These isolated and infected Ursa are nicknamed Howlers for the mourning wails they issue as they wander. When healthy Quads or fragile Triads seek to offer succor to the Howler in distress, they are infected in turn and perpetuate the chain reaction of broken families.

THE FUNDAR & RASGADO



THE FUNDAR have claimed Polvo as their own. Fleet has forbidden The Rasgado from visiting or settling there, for their own good.

The Riven used to be one people. They look and sound human for the most part. Slighter build, longer limbs, more agile. Granted, they look a bit like plucked chickens, but most are polite enough not to make the analogy.

The Riven are two separate species who shared their homeworld and common origin. Imagine Neanderthal man. Now, imagine homo sapiens. Now imagine if, instead of interbreeding one of those species out of existence, they became parallel and complementary.

Centuries ago, their homeworld of Eynides was bombed, quite suddenly and efficiently, by unknown forces. A straight line of detonations marched across their world. On one side of it, there was the Rasgado, on the other, the Fundar. All of them were infected with a cruelly-weaponized virus. The Fundar, received the Alpha

Strain of the virus. The Rasgado who remained, received the Omega Strain. None of them had the whole virus. It was only when they were together that the virus became complete, and active.

Their culture changed overnight. Death did not come for their loved ones. Their loved ones became death. Even after two centuries and the best science the Union had to offer, no cure has been found.

The Rasgado have adapted too well, shouldering the weight of their tragedy with a resigned strength. When you look at the Rasgado, you can see it in their eyes. That's what you'll remember long after you want to, believe me. The Rasgado have such resigned acceptance. Many stay on Eynides to mourn what they have lost, safely behind the DeadWall.

And then, there's the Fundar. Same species, same genetic Traits. But where the Rasgado have sadness in their eyes, the Fundar have rage. They mark one side of their body, sometimes with tattoos, sometimes scars, or different clothing. The symbolism is clear; we are the incomplete, the wounded, the forgotten. They are fiercely honest because they need to be and they will respect that in you.



THE RIVEN SONG

The Song offers the Riven the terrible gift of hope. Those infected by The Song find a temporary respite from the bioweapon that divided their kind. For the first time in centuries, the Rasgado and the Fundar could meet safely without triggering their immediate, mutual destruction. That is how The Song propagated through Riven societies and doomed billions.

The Song didn't cure the bioweapon, but wielded it instead in more subtle ways. When the infected Riven tried to act contrary to the will of The Song, they found their bodies wracked with pain and debility. It was only through compliance and spreading the holy Song that these symptoms would subside. They could comply, or they would die in agony.

THE ILLUVIA



THE ILLUVIA are terrifying.

I have visited the homeworlds of every species we know. I've seen the remains of the Great Choir. I've found myself weeping uncontrollably in Cielo Fields and I've got blind shithouse drunk with the Free Companies and watched the Pescador Birds pull hawks out of the sky. Nothing has awed or terrified me more than the Illuvia. Nothing.

They're a million facets of a single super-intelligence holding the collective memory of their entire species. They were exploring the cosmos when we were still having meetings about whether or not clean surgical instruments might be a good idea. Now, they exist in a perpetual state of connectedness, each linked to a single overmind.

Sparkle wankers.

The Illuvia are unbearable. Not in that "We bring you love!" way you'd expect but more in the sort of passive aggressive "Oh you DON'T go to the gym six times a week?" way that makes you instinctively suck your gut in and look around for a heavy object to brain them with.

Except you can't. Because they're clouds of mirrors rotating around a central point of light. And they know it, taking smug pity on the carbon-based primitives. Sparkle wankers.

The Illuvia are also geniuses, which makes it even worse. Illuvia deep range vessels are ... heartbreaking. Picture a constellation you can ride in, a star that's tamed. They've travelled almost as far as the Permancer and are still going.

Now picture them consoling you about still being made of meat. Yeah. That being said, if you get the chance to Vassal for them, take it. You'll have a small cloud of alien mirrors in your brain for six months and you will never, ever forget what you see or how it feels.

The Illuvia's worlds are pristine, immaculate museums to their old, carbon-based selves. The Song, when it came for them, washed over these worlds and left them empty and intact. The Illuvia themselves were less lucky. Not that they'd ever admit that.

Their worlds are empty yet watched. There are life size dummies of the Illuvia's old forms, arranged in their old houses and workplaces. And every time you visit, they are in different positions...



THE ILLUVIAN SONG

The Illuvia are smug, arrogant, and brilliant beings who thought they had all the answers, until they encountered The Song. That alien force dissolved their greatest battleships with the greatest of ease, and rendered them powerless. The Great Choir demonstrated limitless power and an unquestionable superiority. It's easy to see how many of the Illuvia began to worship The Song as a God. The Great Choir offered promises of a second ascension which might move the faithful from forms of finite energy into infinite thought. It promised eternity and many were seduced. The Song made the Illuvia feel small, then offered to help them become worthy.

THE MERCURIO



There are few people more fun to get drunk with than Mercurio. They are also bloody shapeshifting doppelgangers who have a different face for every occasion. Their entire genetic structure has “Enable Edits” permanently selected and they change shape reflexively to suit their environments. You’ll tend to meet Mercurio in the diplomatic corps, working as negotiators and amazing actors. They’re endlessly charming, plausible, and amazing company,

Here’s the thing; they have cultural ADHD. They find static forms claustrophobic and love turning into their friends. They’ve made it an industry, in fact. After all, what’s a better way to prepare for a court case than being cross examined by yourself? Same goes for athletes. I know one Mercurio who makes a huge living working as a sparring partner. Give it a few hours of tape of the person you’re fighting and it will become them; Terran, Belter, Fundar, Permancer, doesn’t matter.

The Mercurio homeland is a tranquil, empty sea. There are no buildings, no landmasses. It’s an ocean world whose ocean drops 200km, most of the time.

Their quicksilver world shifts constantly. Sometimes the ocean is shallower. Sometimes there are islands. High frequency radio bursts are fired from the world with no apparent transmitter and no apparent pattern. Theories range from the ocean being the Mercurio themselves to a kind of cloud drive, backing up their entire culture. No one, the Mercurio in particular, is talking.

Thing is, they don't know how to turn off their shapechanging gifts. They instinctively adapt to suit their environments and find static forms increasingly claustrophobic over time. Their culture prizes individualism, adaptation, and diversity above all else. They worship change, not the result but the process. They're addicted to being other people, imprinting hard, and when they do it gets messy.

Addiction comes easily to the Mercurio. Addiction to new experiences, new faces, and new ways of living. Addiction to intoxicants of all flavours, from moonshine to illegal drugs. A desperate longing for something that cannot be named.

THE DOPPEL'S SONG

Mercurio society is a chaotic thrillride, with members of their species changing identities and personalities from one day to the next. Whenever their minds shift, they bodies would transform to reflect those changes. At least, until The Song infected them. That memetic infection locked the Mercurio into a single, identical form. They were trapped in bodies that were not their own and struck with profound dysphoria. More insidious was the fact that it began to erode their individuality over time. The afflicted began to lose memories gradually, and found themselves resembling eachother more and more.

The stability and tranquility of The Song's grip seduced many of them to submit willingly to the Great Choir. Some of the afflicted Mercurio, the Harmonized, lost themselves completely in the process and joined with the Great Choir. Others rebelled by recording their memories and creating personal rituals for grounding themselves in their identities. When The Song's influence faded, many of their kind found themselves addicted to that Illuvian drug, Hephaestus, which could temporarily stabilize their forms.

THE GALACTIC UNION

The first question I'm always asked is why did I sign up? And the answer I always give is: What else could I possibly do?

This is the horizon, the thing humanity has been chasing for longer than we've had the word for it. This is the Singularity, what lies on the other side of the Great Filter, the brass ring, call it what you want it doesn't matter because THIS IS EVERYTHING. We aren't alone in the universe. They are our friends. They want to help us make everything better.

What kind of person says no to that?'

Declan Mallory, Union Diplomatic Service

THE UNION

The governing body of interstellar space, the Union sat at a level above individual governments and was intended to combine their experience and knowledge to create something better for everyone. This took the form of an ethical framework, an over-government that pointedly took no role in a species' internal politics. The intention was to create a safety net that was Invisible until needed.

This approach worked in two different ways. The first was an act of enlightened, preemptive self preservation. The newer species of the Union were viewed as immature, potentially dangerous. If they lashed out, and the Rasgado/Fundar attack and Illuvian Sublimation spoke to that, they could wipe everyone out. By taking this hands off approach, the Union was intended to not threaten any individual group and only step in when needed.

The second reason it was designed this way was more directly optimistic. The Union was intended to enable a scalable, galactic government. It would need to accommodate, potentially, thousands of civilizations. As it turned out, it would collapse before it even reached double figures.

UNION STRUCTURE

The Union was always designed to be two things; adaptable and mobile. Its notional seat is at Anchorpoint but in reality that office was the Union archive. Centuries of legislation, diplomacy, discussion, and knowledge all contained in an infinitely searchable database managed by a Precursor AI. Like Anchorpoint itself, the Union inherited rather than created and bears no signs of its designers.

Each species elected representatives that would form the Union's ruling council. They would liaise closely with their own individual leaders but would have final word on all transboundary issues.

THE UNION TOWER

The actual seat of the Union was never intended to be in one place forever. Rather, it was meant to move to the homeworld of whichever was the newest species to join. This was intended to show trust in the newest member and to act as a conceptual anchor for their new interstellar existence.

This was not always successful, although the Permancer and Ursa Towers remain massively impressive and active. The Riven tower was never completed and was badly damaged during the creation of the DeadWall. It exists now only as a vast, vertical shantytown, an indicator of the future the now two species have had torn from their grasp.

The human tower covers the entirety of Seoul and is more refuge than seat of government.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

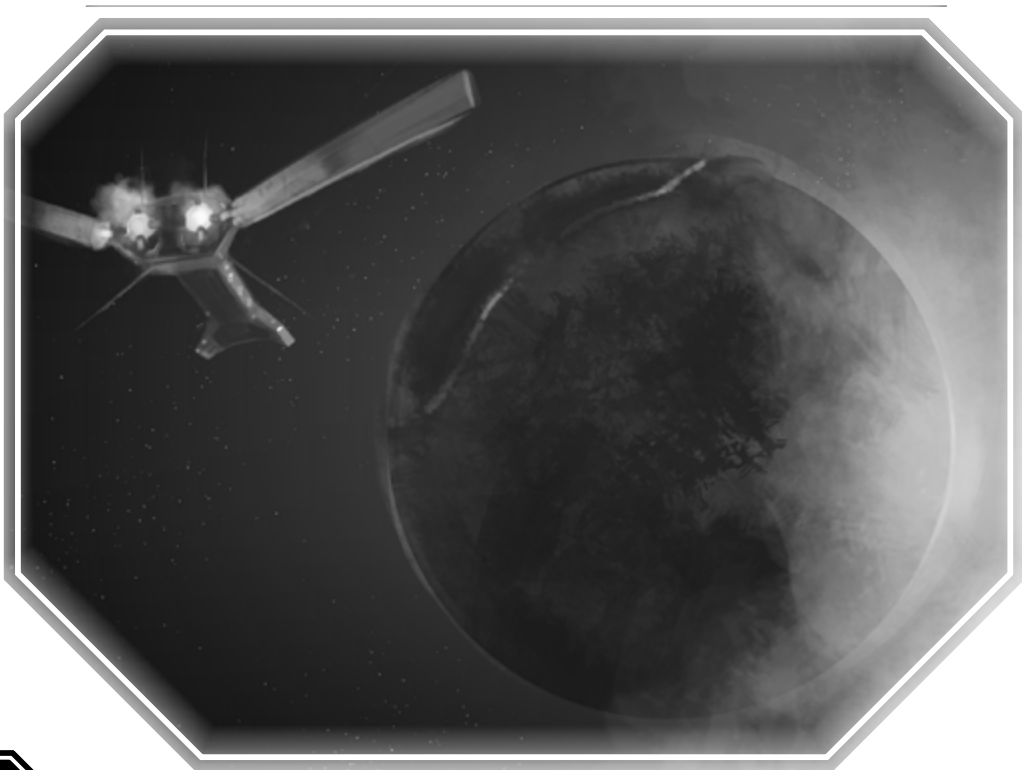
Union diplomats were stationed on Fleet vessels as standard and acted as roving troubleshooters and organizers, assisting in the creation of new settlements and mediating disputes as needed.

THE UNION AFTER THE SONG

The Union's rulers all fell in The Song War. Anchorpoint itself was almost destroyed and fell to The Song. Now, rebuilding is continuing but as yet the Union is leaderless. Instead, the diplomatic corps have formed their own council and are supervising reconstruction.

This new structure is, in many ways, depressingly familiar to the human diplomats trying to work within it. Like early-21st Century Earth, there are constantly shifting bilateral relationships between individual colonies, groups and governments. While the survivors are spread throughout Union Space, the largest human population resides on Polvo. Still, there are a hundred other worlds whose voices are screaming to be heard and a hundred more than that who want nothing more to do with galactic culture.

Very early plans are in place for a new Galactic Council but there are no governors. Just diplomats doing the best they can.



THE FLEET (USF)

I didn't sign up. I volunteered. I did so the moment I was old enough to, and the moment I graduated I asked for offworld duty. Command school. Xenolinguistics. A term spent learning to fly Ursan ships. Another spent forgetting it. Duty with the Permancer Marshal Corps and a posting here.

We're done if we stay in system. Humanity's wars just expand to fill the available space and I wasn't sticking around to bleed out on Mars, or watch myself freeze to death in the belt. We're children with firecrackers. We'll get burned. It's just a matter of when. I won't be there when it is. Because we aren't alone. And they're better than we could ever hope to be.

Captain Bethany Mallory, USF Bifrost

FLEET STRUCTURE

The United Sentient Fleet, or USF, is the largest military body in known space. At its height, roughly 40,000 vessels from five worlds were operational. Crews were multi-species as a matter of course with single species crews retained for sensitive diplomatic missions.

The USF operated at a level over each species' individual armed forces. They were configured in such a way that people could graduate from those services into the USF, or train to enter them directly. The primary USF Academy was located at Anchorpoint, with campuses on the homeworlds of each major species. The Rasgado/Fundar campus was turned into a field hospital following the attack and the Illuvia one functions as a museum depicting the history of the Illuvia role in the USF and giving carbon based lifeforms lots of places to sit down.

THE USF MISSION

The USF had three primary objectives:

- Push forward the boundaries of Union knowledge
- Defend Union members from external and internal threats
- Provide crisis relief when required

The Black Line Initiative made the first objective overt, as USF vessels moved out past known space. They released “breadcrumbs” as they went: automated, self replicating communications satellites that boosted their range and enabled them to stay in constant contact. At its height, the Black Line Initiative was so widespread you could almost see the boundaries of settled space expand in real time.

The second objective proved more politically complex. The strife between the Rasgado and the Fundar, the Blink War, and the occasional incident of militant Mercurio infiltrations served to keep USF vessels alert. Worse still, the Permancer, humans and Cuaternario all continually pushed at each other’s borders in wars that never went hot but never quite went away. As a result, USF vessels were often required to be diplomats, coast guard and on occasion, diplomatic security within the same tour of duty.

The final objective is arguably the most important, and certainly the one which caused the USF the most work. As well as the usual ferrying of supplies between worlds, USF vessels also acted as field hospitals, disaster relief first responders and crisis relief specialists. These missions were what tested the crews to the limit, as they often took place as a direct consequence of either interspecies tension or a civilian or governmental vessel being where it shouldn’t be.

The most famous example of this is the Homerton incident. An Ursan mining crew had been dispatched to set up automated hydrogen and plasma extractors in the Lagrange points of a binary star system. One in human space.

When the ship fell into difficulties, the nearest vessels was the USF Burnham, en route to the outer edges of space. The Burnham found the Ursa ship badly damaged by an explosion on one of it's miners. Worse, the explosion had been caused by a solar flare which had also scrambled the miner's onboard CPU. The automated ship was designed to manufacture 100 copies of itself and then shut down. When the Burnham arrived, copy 1200 was almost done.

In the week that followed the crew of the Burnham fought off constant attempts to be "recycled" by the Miner swarm, rescued the Ursa crew, shut the swarm down and assisted in setting up the hydrogen and plasma extractors, in return for them being shared equally between the humans and the Quads. Disaster response, close quarters combat, engineering, diplomacy, physics and compassion. All in one mission, all at once.

The USF Fleet excelled at this versatility and, despite frequent challenges, never failed to solve a problem. That would change, as would the Fleet, forever with the War of The Song.

AFTER THE SONG

The vast majority of the USF fleet fell, either as part of the Great Choir or as the vessels that opposed it. Many of them fell over Polvo. As many were put down on Polvo and used as the basis for settlements.

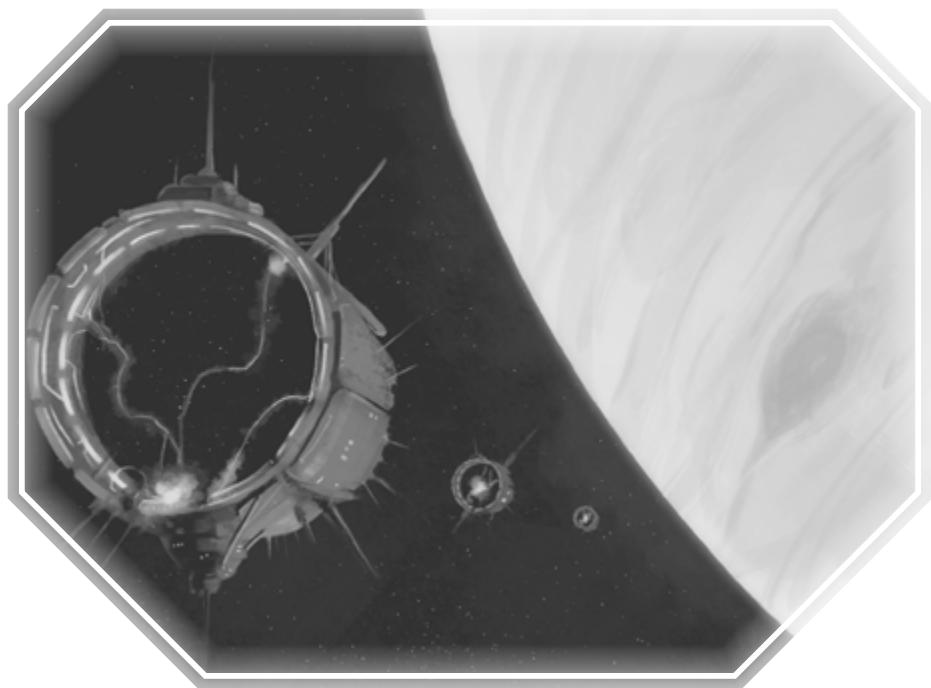
The USF Fleet is now a tenth what it once was. Desperate to regain their previous status, and perhaps, to atone for perceived sins, they've entered into partnerships with Black Sky and MarsCorp to bolster their forces.

UNION MONUMENTS

The Union worlds were thriving, complicated, and ever-changing places full of life. When The Song struck, we left all that behind in flaming ruins. Here are some of what remains.

THE JUPITER TURBINES

The Flux Tube between Io and Jupiter is one of the greatest power sources in the universe. A massive electromagnetic field with enough power to run everything in the Solar System, it's home to humanity's last unfinished marvel; The Jupiter Turbines. Massive power stations, suspended in the tube and separated by hundreds of kilometers, each one focusing the energy of the tube and transmitting it to storage facilities elsewhere in the solar system. The Turbines were never finished, but like so much of the rest of the solar system, there are survivors hiding in its remains.



THE PLUTO MAUSOLEUM

Pluto was the first and last joint human/Permancer colony. Established ten years after first contact, the Mausoleum was intended to do the same thing Barrier's Rest does for the Permancer; act as a marker of something vital in human society and an indication of where something important stops. In the case of Barrier's Rest, it's the Permancer who survive to retire. In the case of the Mausoleum, it's the humans who didn't survive the war. Working with the Oghma Initiative in particular, the Permancer are building a record of what humanity lost.

SEDNA

In the 21st Century, humanity established seed vaults deep in the permafrost of the poles. The plan was to reboot the planet should the seemingly inevitable climate collapse wipe the planet clean.

Sedna is a seed vault for human culture. It's also our first, and so far last, attempt to replicate The Alexandria Archive. A solid state quantum computer containing every single scrap of human knowledge, Sedna is intended to be a back up for the entirety of human culture. Whether or not it succeeded remains to be seen. And someone is still updating the archive...

THE FIELDS OF REMEMBRANCE

The Fields of Remembrance are deceptively named. They are a solar system-sized graveyard, designed to honor each and every fallen Permancer. Tended by thousands of clerics and historians, the Fields are the Permancer's past. Their dead and their foundation are something of a reminder that who they were should not be who they are.

ANCHORPOINT STATION

The original home of the Union, built by the Permancer across generations. Anchorpoint is an accretive location, a beehive 5 miles long of careful architectural choices mixed with the changing needs of the species aboard it. It's technically mobile, but remains in the spot the Archive dictated. That spot is a galactic lagrange point, completely at peace in the centre of vast gravitational forces. There is speculation that this point was constructed but the level of stellar architecture required is unprecedented even by galactic standards.

UNITY

Unity is a Fundar performance artist, one who has clear military experience and deep pockets. That's the only thing known about them, besides their work; two entirely disparate elements, welded together and left in open space. A human sailing vessel and a rib cage, an exploded statue of an Ursa and an elm tree. Impossible halves struggling for a unity they can never get, but unable to stop trying.

SEOUL TOWER

Earth's first and only arcology was built over and into Seoul. The site of the world government, and later, the Union government, Seoul Tower housed 15 million individuals in sustainable, bio-technological comfort. It was the last place on Earth to fall.

THE PRISMATICA

The Prismatica was intended to be the cornerstone of the Union. Like Seoul Tower, it was designed to be a new home for the coalition: a vast, clear ziggurat standing high above the capital city of Eynides, the Rasgado and Fundar homeworld.

The Deadwall runs eight feet to its right. The building is actually scorched and was damaged by some of the explosions. The tower was never finished and has become a refuge and city state for the Rasgado who remain on their homeworld.

POLVO

Polvo is a world that has been held by every major species and every major corporation. It is the definition of a Goldilocks planet, just right for everyone. Unfortunately, Polvo is also not quite good enough for anyone. The weather runs to extremes, the planet is home to some enthusiastically large apex predators and it sits on the edge of everyone's primary held space. Polvo is dirt. Good dirt. But dirt nonetheless.

Polvo is the largest human settlement remaining in the galaxy, as the home to roughly nine million Terrans, Belters, and Belters. It's also home to about three million other alien citizens, and has been designated as a Fundar sanctuary world.



LACHRYMOSE

Lachrymose is a memory. A world built as a memorial to those who fell to get humanity to where it is, it's become a living archive and memorial to those who didn't live through the war. It's a quiet, almost garden world that has one of the largest surviving populations, many of whom work for the Oghma Initiative.

ROBINSON BROADSWORD

Robinson Broadsword is the offworld home of the human fleet. A large, arid world, it's the location of the Fleet Academy, multiple USF facilities and humanity's largest shipyard. It is currently abandoned aside from the various Free Companies picking the shipyards clear although elements of Fleet are in the process of moving back in.

SANCTUARY WORLDS

THE OORT LINE

A line of asteroid forts the width of the solar system. The largest fortification in human history. The least successful fortification in human history. The Broken Line. The Oort Line has many names and few voices.

Belter tech and expertise combined with Martian money and human fear to throw a ring of steel and rock around the Solar System. The Oort Line, also known as the Tombaugh Line, circles the solar system. Had the time and money allowed, the defense system would have circled the solar system on all three axes. It was a last line of defence, home to a quarter million souls and intended as the jumping off point for the next stage of human exploration.

The Song made entry into the solar system on one front. The remainder of the Oort Line, remained intact. Some of them were used as temporary refuges. Others still were converted into lifeboats and left the system at sub-light speed. No one knows where or how much. But the Broken Line is not as broken as people think. This is playable settlement detailed on **PG.318.**

LONGFALL

Longfall is named for the four colossal plateau that define its northern hemisphere. Each one is over a thousand kilometers wide and the tallest extends into space.

Longfall is home to over a million human settlers and was, pre-Song, a junction world for travel to many other locations. It was also one of the first places refugees fled to, and there are stories of several groups still either picking over the cities or living on the surface far beneath the plateaus.

Longfall is the nest from which the Union might be reborn. Fleet is planning a new tower on this world, from which a council could meet once more. Who knows if they will succeed? The Phoenix Project won't give up on the future. This is playable settlement detailed on **PG.322.**

SARGASSO

Sargasso is a world torn in two. A supervolcano eruption ripped it apart a century ago but not quite enough to fully separate the halves of the world. The end result is a planet that resembles a chessboard built by a madman that almost no one wanted to settle.

Black Sky Industries saw something different. A planet that could act as a testbed for multiple technologies, could be mined down to the core and had no complicated ethical issues attached. As a result, Sargasso Falls is equal parts debris field and laboratory, ships and wrecks of ships surrounded by pieces of world in a wild, unpredictable mess of science, chaos and nature. This is playable settlement detailed on **PG.326**.

THE GLASS GARDEN

The Glass Garden is a moon orbiting the Illuvia homeworld. It has a name but, as the Illuvia point out, you really need vocal chords made out of music in order to really nail the sixth syllable. So, The Glass Garden it remains.

The Garden is a beautiful world, as every Illuvia world is. It's notable however, for two other factors. One of them is public, the other is not. The public one is that the oldest settlements in Illuvia history are on the Glass Garden. Buried deep beneath and encoded into the peaceful meadows, pastures and glass spires of the Garden is a complete backup of every event, personality and historical event the Illuvia have ever experienced.

THE DUNOLD GAS MINES

Dunold is a gas giant on the edge of Ursan Space. It was also one of the primary engines of their economy. A massive amount of Helium is present in the opalescent world's atmosphere and most of that is concentrated in The Eye, a storm roughly six times the size of the Great Red Spot on Jupiter.

The Dunold Mines are four satellites, suspended at the edge of space, that harvest Helium 3 from The Eye. They're also in constant motion, riding the edge of the storm even as they carve into it.

ASHEN SHIELD

Ashen Shield is a small, cold world that is tidally locked and orbits a much larger one, Blackfall. Blackfall is a gas giant notable for having almost no reflective capacity. It resembles a hole in space with Ashen Shield perpetually facing it.

This world, a bare 1000 kilometers wide, was home to the Rasgado's primary hospital. It was their intention to not only cure the assault that's separated peoples but also to isolate the virus and trace it to it's source. This work was not completed before Songfall but the nature of Ashen Shield is such that, many suspect, it continues now.

BLACK LINE ONE

Black Line One does not, officially, exist. It's a secret station half a kilometre long, it's intention was to interpret the information coming in from the BLI ships and cross check it with the material in the Alexandria Archive.

Black Line One may still be active. The vast majority of the people who know it exists are either dead or unable to do anything about its existence.

BARRIER'S REST

Barrier's Rest is the furthest Permancer colony from their homeworld. It's a large, verdant world with abundant flora and fauna. It's also the place Permancer go when their work is done. Not many Permancer survive to the point where their watch ends (The accepted belief is that Permancer serve in some form for a century). The price for this rest is that the world is almost entirely cut off from the rest of the galaxy. To the extent that there is some speculation that Barrier's Rest was not only missed by The Song but that the residents may be unaware of The Song war altogether.

09 WELCOME TO POLVO



- | | |
|-------|------------------|
| 09.01 | Dirt Foundations |
| 09.02 | Climate |
| 09.03 | Ecology |
| 09.04 | Geography |
| 09.05 | Governance |
| 09.06 | Economics |

DIRT FOUNDATIONS

Polvo is our new home, with a long history. Here is the information we have salvaged from the Union databases after the conclusion of the war.

DUTIFUL RECONNAISSANCE

Dutiful Reconnaissance was one of 24 Permancer ships sent out from their home world in what Terran Historians noted as 1973 C.E. The Permancer, painfully aware of the need to learn more about their universe intended to not only seek out new life and new civilizations, but understand those civilizations and hopefully assist them in avoiding the same mistake they made during their sentience infancy.

This was the official nature of Dutiful Reconnaissance mission.

In truth, the Dutiful Reconnaissance and four sister ships were tasked with heading to the Hold Worlds. These were the places that, according to Permancer history, were full stops in the history of the galaxy. Places where civilization had stopped, or perhaps, simply rested. The Permancer kept records as dutifully as they kept watch and the coordinates and names of these five worlds were easily retrieved:

- **BEHEMOTH TEMPO**, a gas giant on the outskirts of Illuvian space.
- **COMPOSED ARRANGEMENT**, a Rasgado colony famous for the fossilized gardens that covered its surface.
- **QUATERNARY HARMONY**, an Ursan asteroid.
- **DUST**, a small world in the middle of the one spot where everyone's borders touched.
- **TERRA**, a blue-green rocky planet on the edge of Permancer territory.

The ship that went to **QUATERNARY HARMONY** discovered that the asteroid's molten core had been tuned and spun in near perfect 4/4 time, emitting unusual microwave emissions every 256 rotations around the Ursan sun.

COMPOSED ARRANGEMENT seemed like an untouched, gentle, dead world. Until the ship that went there realized the flowers, in their original form, had played a carefully arranged melody through the changing colours of their petals.

The ship that arrived at **BEHEMOTH TEMPO** found the magnetic field of the gas giant simultaneously feral and precise, exploding into life once every 24 hours. Vibrant hues of blue-green rippled across the atmosphere, fading gently like ripples in a pond.

The ship that arrived at **Dust** found a moss-covered world, comfortably habitable and oxygen-rich. It was populated by a variety of local lifeforms but no sentients. Its name was based on the massive dust-storm which could be seen from orbit.

TERRA is the home planet for the “humans”, the newest member of the Galactic Union. The rapid rate of evolution on this world and extreme genetic diversity of humanity is still unexplained.

THE DUST STORM

Landing on Comienzo's Flatlands, the Permancer set about conducting a foot by foot survey of the world. They found nothing out of the ordinary, no rocks arranged, no strange magnetic anomalies. Until they found the Valley, and the vast dust-storm at one end of it.

The storm contained no music, no structure and had no reason to exist. Yet it turned, perpetually, in place, self-generating as though it was in the atmosphere of a gas giant rather than an inhabitable world. There was nothing at its centre, there was no reason for it to exist. Yet exist it did.

The Permancer quietly annexed Dust. They built a scientific outpost there and a military training base. And they never took their eyes off the Storm.

PRAGMATIC SACRIFICE

A century passed with them alone on Dust. In that time, the Permancer completed their study of the world and discovered nothing else out of the ordinary. The Storm was the mote in God's eye, a smudge in an otherwise perfect picture. Their sensors detected nothing.

But the storm persisted.

Pragmatic Sacrifice was an expedition lead by Permancer Captain Resilience. She, along with a team of six others, would enter the Storm in hardened suits, laying a trail of ion dispensers behind them that would ensure they had a corridor out. They would set up camp at the eye of the storm, stay one month and then return. They would stay in contact the entire time.

None of them expected to return.

The expedition made it to the eye of the storm one week after setting off. Their suits were damaged, they'd all been injured by the relentless dust, and every single one of them saw the same thing when they finally got clear of the dust clouds.

An area of ground carved absolutely flat. And a single word carved into it. It would be a word the Permancer would have no idea of the significance of for centuries, because it was written in English. The word was CODA.

NECESSARY DEFENSIVENESS

The Dust expedition was the final one to report in. The Permancer now had everything they needed to know the truth; these worlds had all been altered and one in particular, Dust, seemed to have been designed for a purpose. What that purpose was remained unclear.

What was absolutely certain was that no one should lay claim to Dust. As a result, the Permancer scaled back their own activities on world and formally annexed it. Their intention was to protect whatever Dust was intended for. The perception of their intention was very different.

THE URSAN TREATY

The Ursa don't go to war with people, by and large. The nature of their society is such that belligerence always comes second place to empathy. After all, when there are four of you in every possible conflict, the chance of a side, or viewpoint, not being represented or understood is low.

That being said, the Ursa are no one's fools. They saw what the Permancer were doing, correctly figured out they were attempting to guard the world and made arrangements. In return for their silence, and military aid should the world be assaulted, they would be briefed on what was found there.

THE RASGADO PLEA

The months after the Rasgado and Fundar were torn apart were the worst tragedy the galaxy had ever known to date. Desperate attempts to reunite them opened the door to horrific science experiments, unscrupulous businessmen and religious fundamentalists in equal measure

A Rasgado medical frigate stormed the barricade. Backed by a now separated Rasgado/Fundar trio of philanthropists, they petitioned the Permancer for the use of this empty planet as a hospital and possible future world for the new species. They were turned down. They tried anyway.

10,000 Fundar were aboard when the ship dropped out of jump 200,000 feet above the surface of Dust. The jump was intended to sneak past the blockade. It almost broke the vessel in two. They hauled for high orbit and, here, accounts differ.

Permancer records show the crew demanding they be allowed to land or they would ram the nearest Permancer vessel. Fundar media claims the ship was hit by three kinetic needles from a previously unseen weapons satellite. Either way, no help came and the ship broke apart. There were 203 survivors. None of them were picked up by the Permancer. The Ursan Search and Rescue teams who did the job earned undying loyalty from the Fundar and the Permancer earned undying hatred. The storm spun undisturbed, like the eye of a sleeping god.

THE BLINK WAR

At 9am GMT, October 20th 2220, six human vessels appeared in Dust's system. Led by deep range explorations vessels the Kaku and the DeGrasse Tyson, the fleet of six vessels was a joint Terran Navy and Black Sky operation. Planning for it began the moment the Rasgado ship appeared over the forbidden planet. There are persistent rumours, although they seem unlikely, that the Rasgado ship was directed to Dust by Black Sky to test the fences.

Regardless, the ships were immediately surrounded by Permancer and Ursan vessels, who held them in place. Through intermittent static, the crews explained that they'd stopped in the system for refuel and repair and had no intention of anything else.

One hour after their arrival, a fast pursuit craft launched from the DeGrasse Tyson. It headed straight for Dust, ignored all hails and was brought down in high orbit. With no option, Admiral Kanzawa, aboard the Degrassie Tyson, opened fire. The Blink War began.

For 24 hours, the battle group and the Permancer and Ursa went toe to toe. Kanazawa took her big, unwieldy vessels to solar north and used the magnetic field of the local star to confuse her opponents' sensors. Marshal Resolute responded by bombing the heliosphere of the sun, triggering localized solar flares that forced the Earth ships out of hiding.

Analyzed later in War College, it was clear the fight embodied the curious combination of patient routine punctuated by rapid, brutal violence, as only space combat could. 20 humans were lost when the Permancer scored a hit on one of the Kaku's hangars. 5 more were killed when a Black Sky skiff was mistaken for a large-scale projectile and shot out of the sky. 25 Permancer were killed when a Naval commando unit blew the bridge of one of the Permancer ships and seized control. These three engagements were the sum total of hostilities beyond the initial exchange of fire.

The marines negotiated a ceasefire. Repairs were made, channels opened. Kanazawa offered Resolute the one thing the Permancer can't resist: honesty.

The group were there because of rumours of what was on Polvo. The Black Sky vessels had insisted on making a run for it. Kanazawa had wanted to go through proper channels. The Black Sky executive who'd ordered the run, Pyotr Mallory, died with his crew.

In return, Resolute showed Mallory's successor and Kanazawa the Pragmatic Sacrifice footage and the word carved into Dust.

The Precursor civilization, possibly the creators of the Alexandria Archive, sculpted the Hold Worlds as messages and perhaps defenses against something which none of them had yet to encounter.

BLACK SKY RISING

Following the peace talks, Black Sky officials were permitted to build a single, heavily monitored facility on the world. This was the foundation used for negotiations during the Fire Sale in 2311 during the War of The Song. Now, Black Sky is the second largest player in the system. They have a continent to themselves, a passive surveillance system covering the planet and a string of intelligence operatives that cover the planet. They've been successfully re-branded publicly as the backbone of the new frontier.

The Permancer referred to the mossy world as Dust in reference to the permanent storm that defies scientific explanation. Black Sky executives officially renamed the world **Polvo** and use it in all of their official documents. It was Martian media which mistranslated the planet's name as **Dirt** in their prominent news broadcast as a veiled anti-Terran insult, and the misnomer stuck. While all the official documents refer to the world as Polvo, many of the Martian and Terran colonists still refer to it as Dirt in common parlance.

DECOLONIZING SPACE

Colonization narratives end badly for everyone, for the colonized in particular. There is a long history of science fiction glorifying the conquest of the stars and the last thing we wanted to do was perpetuate the horrors of imperial conquest.

Here's how *After the War* addresses the topic. The Union has visited dozens of garden worlds which teem with life and inevitably have multiple indigenous peoples living within them. Only three of the garden worlds lacked a native population and Polvo was one of their number.

The Permancer Guardians are zealous protectors of these native peoples and prevent any contact by other space-faring peoples. Even the existence of these Trustee Worlds have been withheld from humanity based on their terrible track record. The Permancers wouldn't have sanctioned colonization of someone else's world, even to the Exodus Fleet. The only reason why the Permancer allowed humans to settle on Polvo was due to the absence of indigenous sentients.

After the War is intended to address issues of communities, found families, and trauma. It's not designed to address issues of colonialism critically, but there are several games that do just that. We recommend that you pick up:

Dog Eat Dog

by Liwanag Press

The Deep Forest

by Mark Diaz Truman and Avery Alder.

We also recommend you reading the excellent article by Oren Ashkenazi titled **Five Destructive Myths Perpetuated by Roleplaying Games** which is available at <https://tinyurl.com/RPGMyths>

Polvo has been described as a world designed by committee. The world has a gravity of about 57% of Earth's, which make it easier for large organisms to thrive and for flight. Terrans find it uncomfortably light, while the Martian and Belters complain about the crushing gravity of the place.

Martians and Belters struggle to understand what the Terrans refer to as seasons in this place. The place seems to have its default settings set at damp, with what is tactfully referred to as a maritime climate. The frequent downpours are the only thing keeping the perpetually bone-dry firebrush scrubland from igniting.

The summer rain storms bring cloying humidity, furious lightning and harsh winds. The air thickens with moisture and the thick mats of polvan moss release plumes of spores that irritate most human respiratory systems. Most folks learn to keep face masks or cloth bandannas on their person in the warmer months.

In the winter season, slushfall is frequent, a mixture of snow and water that makes life miserable for all involved. Depending on the location on the planet, settlements might wind up coated with a thick mat of grey snow, or glistening with a coat of treacherous ice.

In between are the relatively arid seasons where great clouds of ash and coral dust blow across the landscape. Some of the grit in the air comes from the intermittent fires that sweep along the vast expanses of dessicated polvan moss.

No matter the season, everything on Polvo seems to be coated with a thick layer of grime. The Belters seem to be the only ones who seem to appreciate the planet for its limitless water and mostly breathable air.

ECOLOGY

Polvo is an alien world with a unique biosphere. The first humans to land here were fascinated by the flora and fauna native to this world. Beneath their feet were thick mats of moss, covering millenia of loam and peat. Before them, they saw what appeared to be Terran trees whose wooden trunks were replaced by bone-like coral filled with plant life. All around them were thousands of buzzing insect-analogs which fed off the mosses, only to be eaten by larger insectoid predators in turn.

Polvo's ecosystem is a roiling soup of possibility. Earth-born rats, cats, dogs, chickens and insects go to war with Ursan Cubedogs, Rasgado Bulkai, Permancer Anvilar and a thousand native Polvo species. None of them have the upper hand. All of them are being changed by their opponents and their environment.

The scientific field of Xenobiology flourished when the first research papers emerged from Black Sky Industries. Those early studies painted a picture of a thriving world where vascular plants and vertebrate animals never evolved. In their absence, an ecosystem based on moss, algae, and insect-analogues thrived. The alkaline seas were filled with calcium, allowing for stunning coral reefs for kilometers into the oceans. It was a dynamic but stable set of ecosystems that supported countless species.

The Permancer had strong safeguards against ecological contamination, but Black Sky Industries was far less diligent. Rats, cats, and dogs escaped into the environment and wreaked ecological havoc. This was only exacerbated when the exodus fleet started landing on the planet, and the refugees brought even more plants and animals with them. New settlements needed to eat, and seeds from distant homeworlds found root easily within Dirt. Who knows how the world will adapt to the terrestrial and alien invasive species.

POLVAN SPECIES

Unlike on Earth, plant-analogues on Polvo never evolved structures to transport water and nutrients. None of the native flora use cellulose or lignin for their structural support, instead using calcium as a major building material. This means that the native species of Polvo tend to have similarities to mosses, algae, or coral on earth and they depend on heavy rains to give them water.



POLVAN MOSS is the most common form of terrestrial vegetation. Like the mosses of Earth, this forms a carpet of green, spongy plant material that is comfortable to walk on. The key difference is that Polvan Moss has almost no competitors and layers have accreted over millenia. If you dig deep into any patch of moss, you will find meters of compressed peat and dirt. Polvan moss is a component for many agricultural activities, though it is not enough to support some of the Terran crops.

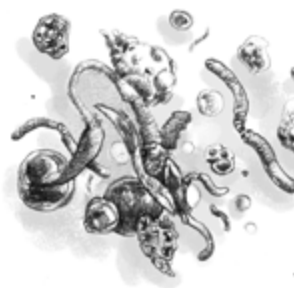
FIREBRUSH is a larger plant-analog that fills the same ecological niche as bushes on Earth. Like bushes, they are 2-3 feet tall forms of vegetation which are adapted to fire-dependent environments. They are rounded, spongy things that grow quickly in sunny areas. Unlike Terran vegetation, they use calcium phosphate to form their “branches”. They reproduce by a process of self-immolation as their enzymes transform their branches into phosphorus which ignites on contact with the air. The pillar of light and heat sends spores high into the air to spread on the wind.





CORAL TREES appear from the distance to be sickly birch trees, with purple buds on the branches. On closer inspection, you find that these trees are more akin to coral with trunks and branches made of calcium carbonate. As the coral tree grows, the colonial organism slowly accumulates more calcium to extend their reach. When windstorms strike, fragile twigs are often broken and thrown some distances, where they grow into new coral trees.

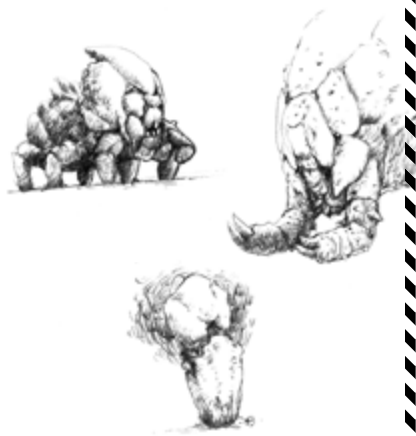
RAINBOW TIDES are masses of phytoplankton-analogs which move through the coastal waters. First misidentified as petrochemical spills, they appear to be iridescent patches of seawater. Researchers hypothesize that the different hues are intentional, albeit rudimentary, communication between the different plankton in the mass.



POLVAN FLOTILLAS are rare but remarkable assemblages of floating islands. These species produce complex calcium formations with tiny trapped air-bubbles that allow them to float like pumice stones. These floating corals grow over time, and mature colonies grow to resemble small, floating islands. The largest of these Polvan Flotillas will get other vegetation growing upon them, and become nesting grounds for certain local wildlife.



ZERGES BEETLES are ever-present green invertebrates that graze on Polvan Moss. They use tiny chitinous claws to dig into Polvan Moss and carry it away into fermentation mounds, where the local bacteria transform it into an edible slime that the beetles can consume. In a way, the Zerges Beetles are a strange mixture of two Terran insects; the carpenter ant and the dung beetle.



HUMMERS are bumble-bee sized blue invertebrates that swarm in Polvan skies. They were named for the high-pitched buzzing noise which their swarms produce. They appear to be attracted to settlements, although no one is certain whether it's the light, heat, or electronic hum that seduces them.



CHALK WASPS are a family of dangerous aerial predators, native to Polvo which fill an ecological niche similar to Terran diving birds. They nest in the voronoi-like structure of polvan flotillas or coral trees. Their calcite wings hold their arrow-shaped bodies aloft until they find their large prey. They will hold themselves several dozen meters above their targets, only to plunge down with sufficient velocity to pierce the thickest exoskeletons.



MUCK HOPPERS are amphibious polvan grazers which are half-way between toads and miniature kangaroos. While they spend most of their time in wetland or riparian habitat, their strong leaping limbs and low polvan gravity allow them to voyage deep inland for fresh forage. During the heat of the noon-day sun, they issue their mating calls by rubbing their legs together in the fashion of crickets.

BONE EELS are small, aquatic animals which feed on the plankton and rainbow tides of the polvan seas. Like all native species, they lack a backbone and use an exoskeleton to hold themselves together. What sets them apart is that their exoskeletons are made of flexible white cartilage, which allows them to swim like Terran herring or eels. Similar to many small prey fish on earth, they travel in schools and are heavily harvested by fishers.





LASHERS are dog-sized predators who possess a set of four flexible whip-like and claw-tipped tentacles. By day, they hide in burrows under coral trees. By night, they hunt in packs that can take down large herbivores. They have recently acquired a taste for the introduced livestock and have been blamed for many traumatized ruminants.

KAPPA are large-eyed insectivores who discovered that settlements are safe places to nest in. Colonies often form within the perimeter, and they spend their evenings snapping up Hummers with their face tentacles. Human colonists are attempting to domesticate them for pest removal and keep them as pets, much to the Kappa's confusion.



MUAD WYRMS are large burrowers who share a common ancestor with the aquatic Bone Eels. They dig through the compacted peat subsoil and leave oxygenated loam in their wake. The subsequent tunnel collapses produce 8-foot wide ditches or ruts which fill with water. These Muad Wyrms only breach the surface on rare occasions where dozens converge to mate like Terran snake mating balls.





WARHOGS are a cross between a Terran rhinoceros and armoured beaver. These huge herbivores have reinforced bone plates at the front of their head which allow them to knock down coral trees. After chewing off the mossy coating, they haul the fallen calcite “lumber” to form crude fortified nests for their young. They are known to charge at polvan predators, Ursan researchers, or even small vehicles who threaten their nests.

TITAN CRABS are terrestrial apex predators with thick exoskeleton armour and eight menacing legs. Essentially bears with exo-skeletons, they run down their prey with terrifying swiftness considering their size, and use their forelegs to spear their prey. While they have evolved to hunt Lashers and other similar Polvan animals, they have recently begun to get a taste for a variety of invasive Terran and alien pets. There is a wariness that they may pose significant danger to colonists.

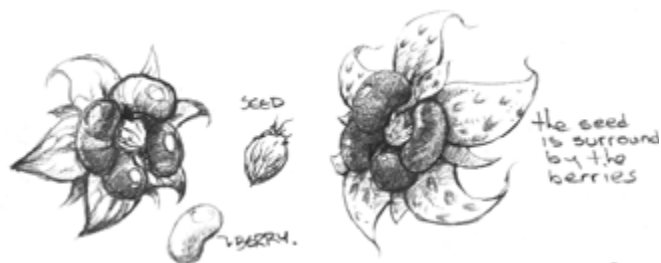


BEHEMOTHS are enormous filter-feeders who live in the polvan oceans, filling the same ecological niche as Terran whales. Like whales, a large proportion of their body weight is blubber to insulate them from the icy cold waters of the oceanic depths. By contrast, they are also blessed with extremely thick armour plates that tend to grow their own polvan coral reefs on their surface. Each Behemoth is a self-contained ecosystem that migrates across the seas. Recently, Martian fishers reported finding the front-half of a killed behemoth floating in the water, but local xenobiologists cannot fathom any known predator large enough to do that damage...



INTRODUCED PLANTS & CROPS

Every species that moved to Polvo brought something from their ancestral homes. In the desire to settle on this mossy world, they chose to bring crops to sow and plants that could be useful. Food, fibre, and construction material are at a premium on this strange colony world, so most species were introduced to ease the settlement process.



URSAN HONEYBERRY is a strange bush that was introduced by the Ursa, which produces red-orange berries in clusters of four berries per flower surrounding a single seed. They are astringent and juniper-like while red and unripe, but turn into sweet berries filled with a substance with the consistency of honey or maple syrup. The fiercely strong Ursan Mead is the most well-known byproduct of the honeyberry orchards and was a popular trade good in the galactic union.

RASGADO CHARNALVINE is a fragrant spiked blue vine that comes from the Rasgado and Fundar homeworld. These vines flower in winter, sprouting dozens of small black flowers on each vine. They are partially photosynthetic and partially fungal in nature, dissolving organic material in close contact. Charnalvine fills the Deadwall back on the Rasgado and Fundar homeworld. The charnalvine burrows deep into the thick layer of Polvan Moss on the planet and helps in the decomposition process. This plant was originally transported to the planet because of its value for textiles, as the spines can be boiled off and the vines flattened into silk-like blue fibre.



ILLIAVAE LILIES are a bizarre type of ornamental flower introduced by the incorporeal Illuvians. These large silvery flowers grow in clusters and float in the air in defiance of the laws of physics. From a distance, the clusters of metallic lilies appear to be silvery clouds or unidentified flying objects. This is further confused by the fact that they occasionally release sounds similar to Terran wind chimes.



PERMANCER BOUNTY is a heavily genetically engineered permancer grain crop that produces both thick fibre useful for paper production, and ludicrous amounts of nutty grain. This species was intentionally designed to be sown by the permancer colonists on their colony worlds. It grows grass-like to a height of 5 feet off the ground, and regrows in 4 months with good weather. It grows so densely that Polvan children have been known to be able to walk across the surface of grain fields.



TERRAN SWITCH GRASS is a common and quick-growing plant which was often used on earth for biofuels and on stations for oxygen generation. This species flourished on the thick peat of Polvo and has formed the foundation of many earth-based food chains that have been imported to this world. This species has spread across the planet for generations and built a thin layer of cellulose-rich topsoil upon the thick peat foundation.



Terran Soybean is a versatile crop which has been a staple of terrestrial agriculture for thousands of years and was appreciated back on earth for its ability to enrich the soil with useful nitrogen needed for other crops. Introducing soybean to Polvo has given the world a local source of soy milk, oil, tofu, protein, and fermented soy sauce. The soybean is ever-present wherever there are large concentrations of Terrans who depend on it for their daily meals.



MARTIAN RUSTRICE is the genetically engineered cultivar of long-grained rice which is adapted to grow well under the Martian agricultural domes. Unlike their ancestral predecessors, Martian Rustrice has black-hued leaves which absorb the maximum amount of solar radiation. The plant produces a significantly greater quantity of oxygen than terrestrial varieties, and functions as efficient wastewater treatment as well. The increased nutrient yield allowed the Martian Rustrice to feed the tens of millions of Martian Citizens before the war.



BELTER BROWNSHOOM was an accidental product of a few centuries of Belters living in the dark. Food was always scarce in the mining stations and spun-up rocks of the belt, and someone had the brilliant idea of growing food out of the materials found in these isolated habitats. Unfortunately, the only raw biomass in sufficient mass that was available for this work was the used algae from the water purification systems, dead air-scrubbing plants, and human waste. The Belters were able to turn that raw material into a thriving mushroom harvest, with only a minority of it diverted for recreational purposes.



INVASIVE ANIMALS

Since the war, many animals have made their way down to the planet's surface. The exodus fleet had its family pets and stowaways which have thrived on Polvo. Aliens brought their own companions with them to remind them of home, and these creatures are doing a fine job of destabilizing the ecosystems.



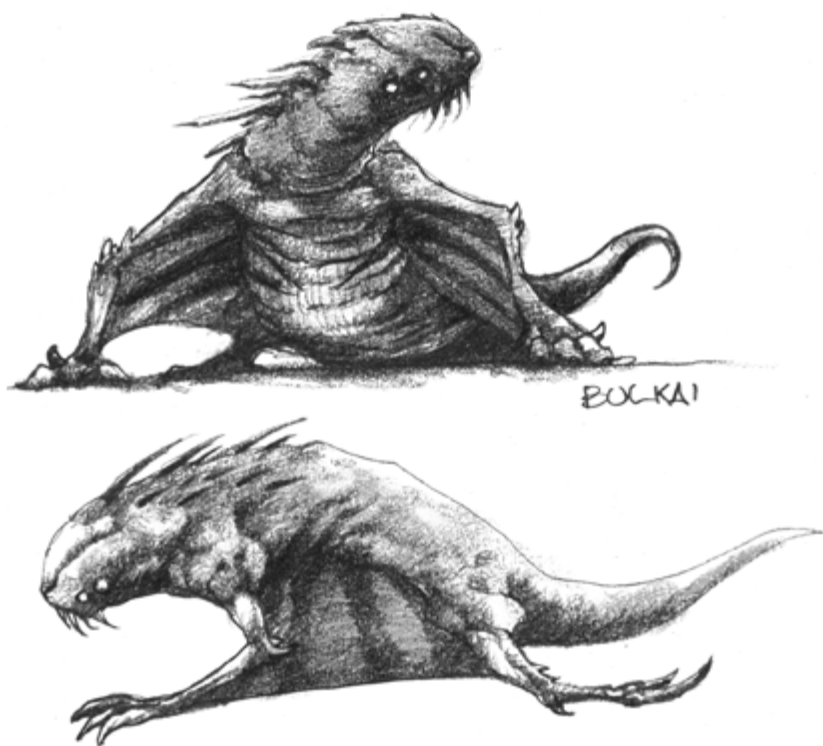
BELTER RATS are extremely adaptable rodents who thrived in the larger stations and outposts of the Belt. As one of the few animals adaptable enough to live in those harsh conditions, and due to their low resource requirements, they were kept as pets by the well to do. Unlike the Terrans, folks from the Belt look kindly upon their little companions and brought them intentionally to this world.

MARTIAN CATS were a Marscorp solution to a rodent infestation which had been interfering with the local food supply in the domes. Cats were commonplace on the red planet and several hundred made their way down to Polvo where they have thrived. Now you can find a dozen purring cats in nearly every settlement, though the Mercurio seem to avoid them for some reason.

TERRAN RABBITS were originally brought as pets by a few children on the exodus fleet, and have now gone feral. They have been able to consume the polvan moss, and their populations are booming. Only the Martian Cats and Ursan Cubedogs are keeping their numbers in check. Some settlements have begun to hunt the wild rabbits for food, fur, and leather in hard times.

Terran Wrens bring the pleasant birdsong from distant Terra to Polvo. They are also a complete mystery, and no one quite knows how they made it Dirtside. They were not kept as pets, nor were they introduced intentionally for any kind of settlement purpose. The leading theory is that these insectivorous song-birds were some kind of stowaways, or were used for Black Sky research of some kind. They are absolutely thriving in the insect-laden skies of Polvo though and evolutionary drift seems inevitable. It's also notable that their song is one of the very few forms of music allowed on the world.

BULKAI are small, lizard-analogues who the Fundar have brought with them to as companions. These little beasts are fond of leaping long distances to snatch flying insects and are equipped with gliding membranes to safely land at Fundar feet. The Fundar dote on their Bulkai with gentle love and care.





CUBEDOGS are quadrupedal, omnivorous arboreal creatures kept as pets by the Ursa quads. These creatures are the size of a gibbon monkey and are often trained to fetch things for the quad in exchange for some honeyberry treats. When the quad dissolves, the Cubedogs often escape and packs of them have been found wandering the wilds.

ANVILAR are large, rotund and amphibious herbivores from the Permancer homeworld whose packs wander the coastal wetlands. Those packs frequently eject juveniles for various reasons, and those young Anvilar wander aimlessly until they are taken in by Permancer caretakers. The Permancer have cared for outcast Anvilar for millenia, and its shaped their culture in profound ways. Many of them have come with the Permancer settlers on Polvo and the first wild colony has been established here.



THE BIG PICTURE

Unlike Terra, Polvo only has two major continents separated by a narrow sea.

COMIENZO is the largest of the continents where the majority of settlements are found. It looks a great deal like Terran Europe, had that continent been draped in thick mats of purple moss. The most notable features of Comienzo include the Flatlands which rest in the shadow of the vast Mount Urasthu.

BIGORNA, also known as Anvil, is a smaller continent, less than a tenth the size of its rival landmass. However it's also equatorially placed and has a more stable climate, which has made it far more attractive for settlement purposes. MarsCorp has bought the landmass in total and established their central government there under a series of fortified domes.

THE BINARY SEA separates Comienzo and Bigorna is an accident of geology, aided by an abandoned piece of Permancer geo-hacking. The ocean runs absolutely straight in a 2000 mile wide corridor between the two continents at their closest point. This is not an empty sea, but rather filled with nearly 14,000 islands ranging from 10 meters to 100 kilometers across. They're scattered like confetti between the two bigger continents and form a bridge across the Binary sea, albeit a scattered, chaotic one. No one officially settles on these islands but there are so many it's a certainty at least some are inhabited.

THE REST OF THE WORLD is a deep and uncharted abyss. A team of Permancer scientists disappeared as they were exploring strange readings on the seafloor, off the Bigornan coast.

FEATURES OF NOTE

Polvo is filled with a variety of ecosystems, from the sweltering equatorial bone-jungles, to the frozen tundra with patches of ice-moss. Here are some of the most significant geographic features that newcomers are told about.

BONEYARDS: During the war, thousands of starships crash landed into the surface of Polvo. Fallen ships dot the landscape and many of them have become the centre of Polvo's new settlements.

THE FLATLANDS: These are vast plains which form the bulk of Comienzo, representing thousands of kilometers of blue-purple mossland. The native vegetation is slowly being replaced by Terran switchgrass that spreads like an infection. It's also here where many of the strongest settlements have been established, as the soil is fertile, the wildlife is common and the weather variable enough to keep most folk happy. Independent outposts from every organization are scattered across the flatlands. There are also shipwrecks, mutineers hiding out, field hospitals, churches, and abandoned townships.

MOUNT URASHTU: This vast monument of rock and granite is the central mountain of Dirt, so tall that the top quarter kilometer is actually above the atmosphere. A pair of massive maglev rails run up the side of the mountain which are used to haul cargo to and from the peak. The flat top of the peak is used as a heavy orbital launching platform and as a space-elevator. Fleet has established a central administrative headquarters known as Highspire at the top of the Mount Urashtu. There are countless abandoned outposts that ring the mountain's foot.

THE ANILLO CHAIN: Polvo was not always a quiet world. Its Ring of Fire, the volcanic engine of land creation, is now landlocked but wasn't always so. The Anillo Chain surrounds the Flatlands and contains over 150 dormant volcanoes, all dwarfed by Mount Urashtu. The chain is owned by Black Sky Industries, who have dozens of research stations, administrative facilities, and staff compounds scattered throughout. The company has used the mountains as a geothermal power source and a communications array.

CICATRIZ VALLEY: A colossal equatorial valley which is curiously unpopulated. In truth, the Peacekeepers prevent any settlement in this bountiful land due to what is buried underneath. Covenant Yard lies at the head of this valley, where the Hero was buried underneath a terraforming bomb, a weapon constantly shifting the climate and the environment. The official line is the bomb was detonated to slowly but surely repair Dirt's climate. The truth is it's a lock, and one that's being picked. From the inside. Anything in the valley risks infection by Tormenta.

THE OVERLOOK HOTEL: An abandoned outpost overlooking the Cicatriz Valley that Tormenta has carved out of the world. It's remained untouched despite the Storm's constant advances. Several groups of Free Company stash materials there, and there are one or two altars to Tormenta. But you have to look for them and no one stays long.

THE GREATER LAKES: The vast bodies of water in the southern reaches of Dirt remained largely free of the war but not of attention. Black Sky teams heading up there have reported colossal Muad Wyrms networks and their navigation systems being thrown off by some immense mineral deposits.

LAKE VIDRO: Lake Vidro is notable for what it isn't; a ship graveyard. The largest of the Greater Lakes, Lake Video is a perfect, glassy mill pond over a hundred kilometers long and 80 kilometers wide. It sits in the middle of the area where most ships fell as the war ended. Not one of them crashed into the lake.

THE EQUATORIAL WASTES: A vast and barren wasteland which should be verdant. Despite the lack of nearby mountains and the proximity to the turbulent seas, the sands are dry. This seems to be the only place on Polvo where the rain refuses to fall, and where local fauna has been forced to evolve in radical ways. Strange signals and visions of emerald obelisks continue to lure scavengers and explorers into the wastes. Those few who return from the wastes have brought back priceless and mysterious Precursor artifacts.

KEY SETTLEMENTS

VIDRO CITY, the primary township surrounding the lake, has 100 wrecks as its foundation. They regularly launch expeditions into the lake and have discovered a rich saltwater subterranean ocean at its bottom and countless examples of marine life. But, somehow, not one single scrap of hull lies below.

COMPASSION STATION: Marshal Compassion works the station at the edge of the Equatorial Wastes. It's a way-station for the scavengers, priests, and explorers who search that barren land for information about the Precursors. The Marshal has set up a series of smaller shelters at the 1, 5, and 10 KM medians out from it, to help as many as they can.

ST JUDE'S: A Church and refuge near the Overlook. This is where Tormenta is teaching itself how to be people. Every week, it projects a little more of itself into the church, forming homunculi from the thick peat and using them to act out memories of its past, of the war, of what it wants.

RIVENDALE: The Fundar built a great town where the Azuran River and the northern ocean coast meet. The entire settlement is raised a few meters off the riverbed, with raised coral walkways connecting their concrete towers. In the centre of the complex is a great temple made from the bones of the ancestors. The temple is the one place on Polvo where the rituals of birth, adulthood, death, and consumption can be performed by the observant community.

LOWBROOK: A small town south of Covenant Yard. Locals say that it is "downwind" by about ten miles, which may be a bit confusing to outsiders, considering that the town is in the middle of a calm grassland dotted with hackberry and cedar trees. The eponymous brook cuts a swathe through the middle.

Not everyone wants to live planet-side, and there are several stations in orbit around Polvo.

COLLINS STATION: A Black Sky mobile HQ parked in polar orbit, Collins pulls triple duty. It's the head office for Polvo, an archive of the ongoing work there, and a Damocles sword for anyone looking to misbehave. Collins is fitted with four, 500m long, ceramic needles. When dropped from orbit, these will reach temperatures and speeds sufficient to make their impact a functionally clean nuclear explosion.

Collins is also notable for the Flightline, a Black Sky exclusive bar situated on the edge of the vacuum seal on Collins' primary dock. The station also includes Immortal Gardens, a nano-tech designed garden on the Arboretum level containing plants honouring every fallen Black Sky Employee and the Archive.

THE FULIGIN ARCHIVE: Located two miles above Collins, the Archive is a very simple ship; it has an FTL engine and the largest memory core in the system aboard. The core contains the sum total of everything Black Sky has found out in system and the coordinates for the drive are set...elsewhere. Should Black Sky fall, the Archive will be launched.

HORIZON FOCUS: This massive vessel is the heart of Permancer civilization on Polvo. This floating arcology is parked at the edge of the atmosphere, held in place by triple redundant anti-gravs generators and a magnetic engine. It's home to over 2000 Permancer people. At the heart of the Horizon Focus is an artificial habitat full of soil, water, plants, and relics from the Permancer homeworld. It's in this place where births, marriages and funerals are all carried out, as well as where orphans are reared.

TORTUGA POINT: This whimsically named station is the Casablanca of Dirt, parked above the South pole exactly opposite to Collins Station. The Free Companies hold this port as their chosen base of operations. It's a sanctuary, a massive hub black market, and a crowded township thrown thousands of mile straight up. Everyone knows Tortuga Point is there. Everyone knows a pirate fleet is beginning to form there. No one does anything because everyone needs it, at least for now.

GOVERNANCE

The legal system is a strange thing on Polvo. The radically decentralized nature of life on the frontier world in the wake of the War has led to a balkanized governance structure, with each settlement managing its own affairs.

UNION LAW, once a robust system of legislative checks and balances, now boils down to a handful of edicts consisting of overarching legal principles enforced by the weaponry loaded onto Collins Station.

- Union Law states that settlements are inviolate, and invasion of settlements will not be tolerated.
- Union Law states that every sentient is a free citizen of the union, entitled to a vote in the settlement in which they live.
- Union Law prohibits a variety of war crimes including the use of chemical, biological, nuclear, or memetic weapons. Violation of this will result in orbital bombardment.

PEACEKEEPER LAW is a simple operational set of principles followed by the independent Peacekeeper faction. The Peacekeepers make regular patrols around nearby settlements and outposts to deal with memetic infections. Most outposts have a Peacekeeper district house within eighty kilometers and many officers have been deployed across the countryside to help prevent outbreaks. Peacekeeper laws are as follow:

- All signs of potential memetic infection must be reported immediately.
- Stage 2 infections will result in quarantine until Peacekeeper personnel verify it is in remission.
- Stage 3 Infection or greater require the elimination of the infected party as a casualty of The Song or Tormenta.

BLACKSKY REGULATIONS are in force in any of the facilities or cities under their control. Their private security enforces the internal policies and procedures with the force of law.

SETTLEMENT LAW covers the majority of remaining legal responsibilities. The basics of the most settlement law comes down to the following rules:

- No Life can be Taken
- No Property can be Taken
- No Consent can be Violated
- No Debt can be Reneged

Many settlements inevitably establish additional laws beyond the common four, but those are the basics.

Alcohol and drug abuse is common among the inhabitants of Dirt as are, conversely, extreme religious beliefs. The constant threat of both sides to go to the extremes of their behavior creates a baseline of tension that keeps the settlement security busy constantly. Violent crime is also common, but rarely to the level of murder.

Anyone found guilty of theft is usually imprisoned for a period of time of roughly equal value to what they stole. The exact amount is discretionary. Steal a biscuit, you'll get a night in the nearest cell and a square meal. Steal a ship, you'll do years of hard time and odds are it won't be on-world.

Murderers and rapists are treated differently. Settlement security forces have the authority to execute both and in many cases, do. Should a death be ruled as manslaughter, negligent homicide or something similar, they can commute that sentence to a variable amount of hard labour, usually carried out for the family of their victims. Sexual assault is treated harshly, with either execution or expulsion from Polvo to an off-world penal colony.

THE LAW OF SILENCE

Choiring is the offence no one likes to talk about. It's also one of the most common offences anywhere people still live.

The Song's passage has had a terrible effect on music. While there is no proof that music can harbour the malevolent sentence The Song did, there's also not enough proof it DOESN'T. As a result, while music and musicians are not banned, as such, in most places they are roundly frowned upon. Musical recordings played aloud are rare. Concerts almost non-existent.

There is of course a Black Market for music now and specifically, the performance of music. Choiring is the name the offence has been given. Live performance especially of vocals en-mass, can have a similar effect to stun weapons. There'll be mass panic, areas will clear and people will be injured in the attempt to escape, or attack the musicians.

This is the cultural knot the survivors have not yet untied. But several groups have been having fun trying. The Children of Johann are a group of art pranksters who stage flash-mob choirs and perform mass burglaries in the ensuing panic. The Four Fours are a Cuaternario barbershop quartet who pop up throughout settled space, launching music "attacks". Music is the forefront of teenage rebellion.

Conversely, there are other groups who will fight music in all its forms. The Hushed are an order of doctors who have had their vocal cuts surgically removed so they can never inadvertently make music and who travel settled space doing the same for musicians. Similarly, the Faith Ships had to adapt their teachings with music and harmonies replaced by call and response, monotone chants. These have of course caused splintering within each faith.

THROUGH THE SYSTEM

Jill Shannon woke up on Polvo in the remains of a Great Choir vessel. She'd lost months off her life, could still feel The Song in its absence. She said it felt like waking from a deep, restful sleep. She said that it felt like opening a door to a room in her mind and finding it pleasantly clean and suddenly empty.

That was when the memories came crashing down on her in an instant. Everything she'd seen and done as a Chorister, every heartless war crime or thoughtless supplication to the hive-mind. It struck her all at once, like an avalanche of shame and sin.

It took three weeks for the rescue crews to reach her ship. She'd been drunk for 20 days by then and showed no sign of wanting to get sober. Only a close brush with alcohol poisoning gave her a drive to survive. She recovered, was given a job and proceeded to climb straight back into the bottle. June was sleeping perhaps an hour a day, using stims to keep awake and alcohol to keep stable. Both ran out before her money did so she placed bets, lost big, and was back in the wreck of her ship two months after she was pulled out of it.

Jill has no memory of the three months that followed. Jill walked into a brothel and held the cashiers at gunpoint. She wore no mask, carried no armour. She was arrested outside and thanked the Marshal when the cuffs went on.

Jill was sentenced to 5000 hours community service and banned from carrying a weapon for three years. Her community service was to be done working for AppleFall Tensate, the Illuvian information broker whose bank she halfheartedly attempted to rob.

Tensate's first action was to place their new employee in counselling. Tensate's second was to reach out across their extensive network and see if anyone associated with Jill worked for them. Tensate found Marybeth Aston, a fellow survivor. Tensate placed the two women together and rostered their time to ensure they would always be in one another's company. It wasn't the Choir, but Jill Shannon was no longer alone with the voices in her head.

The 5000 hours was up two months ago. Jill and Marybeth still work for Tensate at the bank. And now, Jill works an extra job as a counsellor for former Choristers. It's hard, and always will be, but she hasn't had a drink or taken drugs in almost a year.

ECONOMICS

Polvo is a new society on an old world. While barter between settlements is commonplace, money still rests at the heart of the Polvan society.

Union Credits were the standard unit of exchange, but their digital nature and the collapse of the banking infrastructure means that they are rarely honoured on Polvo. The Permancer are the only people who still pay their people in credits.

Terran Currency including dollars, pounds, pesos, yen, yuan, and euros have all returned to use in the wake of The Song, even if just as a status symbol.

Illuvian Ghost-Notes are one-use drives that, when keyed to their new owner— through DNA, voice pattern, thumb print, or the Illuvian musical language—will release the information inside them. They're then rendered useless until the new owner places a secret of their own inside.

Black Sky Dollars, are also accepted everywhere. The corporate currency is made of spun carbon nanotubes. Indestructible, well designed and able to hold 100 pounds of weight when rolled into a tube. It's also riddled with low impact surveillance technology and everyone who owns a buck on world is being listened to, but no one knows that quite yet.

The Favour Economy on Dirt is simple; help when you can and anyone who arrives penniless will at least have a roof over their head until they get a job. Assuming that job isn't working for the person housing them, they'll be expected to pay back the favor as soon as possible. The Free Companies run a network of traders who will buy or sell favours in exchange for hard currency.

10

EXAMPLE OF PLAY



10.01

Character Creation

10.02

Settlement Creation

10.03

Scene

10.04

Moment of Discovery

CHARACTER CREATION

Fraser Ronald presents an example of play, showing how character creation, scenes, and moments appear at the table. In his game, he decided to customize his settlements, and thus created new face characters for their settlement.

Fraser is the game master for this session, with **Cara**, **Andrew**, **Samera**, and **Tanya** as players.

As a reminder before you read the example of play, **The Peacekeepers** are soldiers seeking to obliterate anything tainted by Tormenta or The Song. No price is too great, in order to keep the memetic infection from re-surgin.

The Fleet seeks to rebuild the glorious, peaceful utopia which was shattered by the war. They are idealistic hard-workers who are desperate to restore what The Song had taken from them

Fraser (GM): Have a look at the different types of characters you can play and let's build some characters.

Cara (Crisus): Hey, how about we play a brother and sister.

Andrew (Akuech): I'm cool with that. Do you want to be an Earther?

Crisus: I'd like to be Martian, one of the power armour-types.

Akuech: Can we play brother and sister from different planets?

GM: The origin is really supposed to be a place of birth, and where one grew up. Were they separated at birth?

Akuech: I think it's more about having a long and enduring relationship than anything else.

Crisus: What if we were in-laws, like I married your brother? We've known each other for a long time.

Akuech: And your child is my last link to my family, so I really cherish that.

Crisus: I'd rather not play a mother right now. Maybe I maintain your brother's DNA in a locket with the intention to reproduce

in the future. We had always talked about having a kid, but it never seemed like it was the right time. By the time we started seriously thinking about it, it was too late.

Akuech: Very cool. were we connected before you met my brother, did I introduce you or something?

Crisus: What kind of character were you going to play?

Akuech: I was thinking Political – I want to make a kind of political operative who was in a position of power and then lost everything with the war.

Crisus: Cool. Then maybe there was some kind of diplomatic mission to Mars where we met, we hit it off but friendly. Then when I met your brother, we ended up being super compatible and he was romantic enough to rush off to Mars to marry me.

Akuech: Awesome. And our characters have maintained this constant contact but before coming to the planet, we never really spent time in physical proximity.

Crisus: That's cool, like Internet buds that are suddenly sharing an apartment.

Akuech: Yeah, but not in the sitcom type way, but in a way that we can examine what they expected of each other and how the actual circumstances both heighten their friendship and puts Strains on it.

Crisus: I'm down with that.

GM: I think we have you two sorted, at least some of the basics. What about you two?

Samera (Saddest): Don't think my bud's going to have any family. Definitely going to be a Permancer, one who was dialed into the Human situation right from the outset of The Song, and they have a really complex name, so the first Human with whom they worked, a dude named Simonson, called them Saddest. Really fit with the culture and stuff.

GM: And what is his . . . their name?

Saddest: Saldesdtoricorixiv.

Akuech: No wonder they're the Saddest!

Tanya (Tora): And I'm going to make a Belter. In fact, a Steward. It talks about medical support, so can she be like a doctor or something?

GM: When we get to Professions, you can absolutely give her medical skills. She doesn't need to be a Steward to get that, though. Stewards are usually from upper-class families. Is that what you were thinking?

Tora: I hadn't really thought about that. I definitely want to be a religious teacher from the Belt, someone who takes no shit, and is kind of ornery, but has this deep need to help people . . . and Aliens! Maybe she's the black sheep of her family, so even though she comes from a wealthy family, she's kind of an outsider?

GM: That sounds really good. Okay, so Akuech is going to be Terran and Political?

Akuech: Yeah, he was a staff secretary at the Commonwealth office in Nairobi, working for a high official for industry and commerce, and he was in that position when The Song came.

GM: Excellent, and everyone else?

Crisus: So Crisus is a Martian from the Titan Division, meaning she's got power armour. She's super gung-ho and when the war came, she had to go to the front-line – in the sense she desperately wanted to, this was what she's been training for her whole life. She left behind her husband but kept that vial of DNA in a titanium container because she had a feeling they wouldn't be seeing each other ever again.

Tora: Belter Steward.

Saddest: Alien Permancer. I kind of picture them as being a little lost, like their emotional discipline is wavering and it's left them really uncertain about themselves and their purpose.

GM: Okay, now you all need a War Story. This is basically what you did during the War or how it affected you in some way.

Tora: If everyone is cool with it, I'd like to take Tormenta and the Hero.

Saddest: Go for it.

Tora: Okay, so Tora remembers this guy, Francis Duffy, the abusive, violent drunk who was patient zero for Tormenta. She'll always remember that night, years before The Song, when they were in the bar and he was being a bastard as always, and she told him

that she'd be happy if someone drilled into his head and empty out that jerk-brain of his. Except they didn't empty it. They filled it. She was there. She saw him change. She will never forget that either.

Crisus: Whoa. That's awesome.

GM: What about Saddest?

Saddest: Okay, so I'd like Crescendo and Personal Apocalypse. It's like Saddest was involved in the Oghma Initiative, helping with the development of the tech and software to try to save some memory of the victims. They immersed themselves in these messages, which finally broke them emotionally and tied them forever to Humans. That's when their emotional discipline was really tested and Saddest had a crisis of faith.

Crisus: I have an idea for Saddest, so let me know if this works—I was thinking Crisus could have Silence and Rendered Aid as her War Story, and that she met Saddest during the Permancer meeting and they kind of hit it off. Maybe one of the memories they have is of her husband.

Saddest: Oh, yeah, I love it. So, Crisus is kinda a physical symbol of humanity.

Crisus: All right. I mean, she's got lots of war stories about fighting and everything, but this is where her life changed and she found meaning after losing everything else. And she saw these total non-Humans come and offer aid and try to help, and it made her wonder about herself and her priorities.

Saddest: Yeah, and Saddest uses their connections to get word to Akuech, who was kind of a big deal?

Akuech: That sounds excellent. Akuech was kind of drifting because he's been on the *USF Endeavour* when it got re-routed to Feynman Station. He stayed with his minister during the fighting, not as a soldier but a loyal friend who didn't want to abandon her. When The Song reached her, Akuech had to kill her during the last stand and he barely survived. It kind of shattered his perception of himself as a civilized person. So for his War Story, I'm going with Overture and Bashton's Children.

Crisus: Damn, son, I thought I was the tough one.

Akuech: Oh, you are. Akuech never wants to face that again.

GM: And now it comes time for Professions.

Tora: Medic. Definitely medic.

GM: That's from the Veteran category, so was Tora in the military?

Tora: Maybe? She grew up in a monastery, very regimented, and learned medicine there. When the war came, she felt she had to do something. Not fight – that'd mean killing and while she's ornery, she's not cruel or brutal. So she signed up as a medic. That's how she got to know the hero, in the service, and that's how come she was there during the procedures.

GM: Excellent. So Veteran and Medic.

Saddest: And even though they're not really a leader, not really having that faith in themselves, Saddest is a Diplomat, so I want to go with that.

GM: Being a leader doesn't mean that Saddest is putting themselves out in front, telling people what to do, it means they turn to Saddest when they need guidance. Saddest isn't a boss, they are a leader and there's a difference.

Saddest: Okay, that's awesome. Yeah, that'll work. So came to the Humans as a kind of technical liaison on the Oghma Initiative, and their skills were always more liaison than the technical.

That's how come they were there on Polvo, rendering aid, as a Keeper who'd spent lots of time with Humans. Then they made that connection with Crisus, and history is history.

Crisus: It's funny, I was building Crisus to be a soldier, but thinking about her story, I think she's more a Builder now on Polvo, in this new part of her life. She's a Salvager and she uses her Titan armour in that pursuit. She's really good because she knows military hardware and machinery from her time in Titan.

Akuech: Profound. No seriously, it is. And it's kind of how it's worked out with Akuech too. He's kind of changing with each piece I add. So now I want him to be a scholar and a legal expert, and that's what got him into government, that and overwhelming ambition. But after the *Endeavour*, he's done with that. It's not about him any longer, it's about finding something good. And that's why he's on Polvo. He's trying to build something here, but not physical. He never expected his law degree would mean anything ever again, but arriving on Polvo, finding the people of the settlements, they needed the structure of law. There were plenty who could enforce order at the end of a gun barrel, but he wanted to see justice thrive as well. To him, justice is civilization, everything else is just an extension of war.

GM: This is turning out pretty amazing. Okay, now we need to get to Beliefs, and I think we have Akuech's first belief right there.

Akuech: *Justice is civilization?*

GM: That's great. What are you thinking with it?

Akuech: That anything else is just an extension of war. Stuff that we usually want or expect like order and structure, even chaos, they're all just expressions of violence and justice is the only thing that marks a society as civilized.

GM: Works for me. How about a second one?

Akuech: How about *Guilt is Subjective*? He has a very strong belief that we all know if we are guilty or not, which is subjective, and because the law is about how people apply it – it's not a living thing itself – judgments are about opinions and people's perspective, so they're subjective too. There's no real Platonic idea of guilt, just a perception and an opinion.

GM: Okay, cool. What about everyone else?

Crisus: Maybe *The World Needed to Burn*, that's one I'm going with. Crisus is just getting all nihilistic. Polvo is helping her to see that maybe there is value in life, but right now she thinks all the conflict, all the power-grabs, maybe the universe needed to be burnt down to get rid of the trash.

GM: The World?

Crisus: Earth, to be specific.

GM: Ouch. One more?

Crisus: *Damn the mob*. She doesn't believe in complete freedom. She believes there needs to be some kind of structure, some kind of leadership, because when that is removed, the mob turns into something really dangerous.

Saddest: *Peace at any cost*. They don't care how peace is achieved, only that there is peace. Tyranny is bad, but it's better than conflict in which beings die. And *Memory is life*. They tried so hard to immerse themselves in memories and wanted to hard to believe that by saving some memories they were saving some part of the being.

Tora: Tora believes that we need to be free, really free. Oh, maybe *leadership is suggestion*? No, *Government is violence*." and *No one is disposable*. She tried hard in the military to care for those on all sides, whether a being had The Song or not, she cared for everyone. And it burned her out, making her even more prickly than before.

GM: Cool. I can see some inherent conflict among beliefs and that's good. Finally, if you want, give your character's a nickname to help illuminate their personality or how others see them.

Saddest: Oh, for Saddest, how about Counselor. They are not an official leader, but people are always coming to them with problems and stuff, so they've started to call them Counsellor, even to their face. They doesn't really get what they mean, but they think the use is meant to be nice. .

Akuech: Behind his back, people call Akuech the Big Empty because he sometimes has that thousand-yard stare. And, when he's in his cups, he always talks about all the things he's lost, like nothing that he's got now has filled that.

Crisus: Crisus' power armour is called Queen Kong, so a bunch of her co-workers have applied that to her as well.

Tora: I got nothing right now. Can we figure it out later?

GM: Oh, for sure. This isn't necessary, just a way to help define your character.

GM: Now that we have some characters, we need the setting. The settlement in which we can find them.

Saddest: Looking through these choices, I like the idea of a Boneyard, like a massive scrap-pile, junkyard full of tech but also dangers. There'd always be stuff the characters could find and stuff that threatens the settlement. There could be a lot of stuff hiding there.

Tora: I mean, I think that's a good idea, but what about a Spaceport? That lets us throw in new characters as new arrivals, people and aliens who are arriving on Polvo for the first time.

Crisus: Or those trying to escape it.

Akuech: Yeah, I think it'd be good for introducing elements that don't exist already. There's always a good explanation.

Saddest: That works for me. Let's have a spaceport. Can one of the industries be Unskilled Labour? That'd give us the chance for lots of underdog stories.

Crisus: I think that's a great idea. Maybe also Cargo, so there's stuff moving through there. Stuff that could cause problems.

Tora: And Air Transport for the trifecta? Gives lots of chances for stuff to be moving through the settlement. Lots of chances for like crazy characters and crazy items that cause issues.

Akuech: That all sounds great.



AKUECH, THE BIG EMPTY

Justice is Civilization

Guilt is Subjective

Terran: Political Community

Overture: Bashton's Children

Scholar: Lawyer

CRISUS, QUEEN KONG

Earth needed to burn

Damn the mob

Martian: Titan Division

Silence: Rendered Aid

Builder: Salvager



TORA, DOCTOR WHISKEY

Government is Violence

No one is Disposable

Belter: Steward (Padre)

Dissonance: The Hero

Veteran: Medic

SADDEST, THE COUNSELOR

Peace at any Cost

Memory is Life

Alien: Permancer

Crescendo: Personal Apocalypse

Leader: Diplomat



SETTLEMENT CREATION

GM: Fantastic. Now there are some questions that need to be answered. For the first one: your Spaceport suffered an attack during the war. How has this history changed the port, or the surrounding landscape?

Crisus: I don't think it's changed the surroundings because the crater got built over, but many people remember the ship that crashed here.

GM: What was so memorable?

Saddest: That no one survived, but it was crewed entirely by children. We still don't know why or where it came from.

Akuech: Wow. That's brutal. Yeah, and the common ground, the space that we use for referenda and stuff, that's over the site, so that we always remember how lucky we are.

Crisus: Maybe the remains that could be found were all buried at the base of the monument in the common area?

Tora: Yeah. That's it. The crater's been physically built over but that monument will always remind us of the children's ark that marked the town.

GM: Okay, on possibly a more light-hearted note: "weary travellers are a thirsty bunch. Describe the famous bar at the heart of your settlement and the alien bartender who runs the place."

Akuech: Oh, I don't know what the place is called, but the bartender is a robot built from scavenged pieces. It's got a generation ship's learning AI, so it keeps getting more and more like a sentient being.

Tora: Can the robot bartender be called Higgins and the bar is the Robin's Nest?

Saddest: Yeah, yeah, that's awesome.

GM: Did the AI come from the children's ark that crashed?

Crisus: I don't think that'd make a very fun bartender. How about it was built from salvaged AI components? There's some that don't exactly work together well, which makes it kind of eccentric.

Akuech: With an upper-class British accent?

GM: We can do that. The final question is: "Your outpost is home to a major criminal enterprise. Describe that organization and the kinds of illegal activities they specialize in."

Akuech: Smugglers. It's got to be smugglers. I mean, we're at a spaceport and we want some colourful characters arriving and departing, I'm thinking smugglers fits.

Saddest: Yeah, those are the kind of gangsters I think Saddest would be okay with. Not with like drug dealers or something.

Crisus: And maybe sometimes these guys get into people smuggling, which could create friction with the administration.

Tora: Or reveal the corruption in it.

GM: All right, so the spaceport is also home to a gang of smugglers. Cool. Now we just need to figure out a couple things with regards to the nearby settlements. Your neighbours are:

- Barleymow, a Farming Community
- Warframe Yard, a Boneyard,
- Fort Bligh, a Military Outpost
- The Vermilion Exchange, a Trading Post
- Daedalus Station, a Research Station.

Which other settlement is on bad terms with you? Typically they hurt, insulted, or frightened your community.

Tora: Never trust the farmers. Barleymow has been sending us substandard food for years, and at least two of the people delivering it have been infected by The Song. We have to be paranoid about every shipment.

GM: It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you. So now we need to make a map, and part of this map is a site for each of the industries in the settlement – so something each for day labour, cargo, and government.

Akuech: For unskilled labour we have a kind of common house, like a flophouse for itinerant labour. It's always kind of needed so the local administration manages it.

Tora: And maybe the residents have a roof over their head, but the authorities require a work card so that people the authorities consider non-productive can't stay there.

Crisus: That makes sense. I mean, we're assuming our characters aren't necessarily the ones running the government, and so sometimes we're at odds with the authorities.

Akuech: Oh, for sure. That way Akuech will have times where he's providing legal advice to these itinerants who are just trying to survive. He's got like a free legal clinic he runs there.

Saddest: Maybe the place is called the Workers' Residence? If we need to give it a name.

GM: Yes, we do need a name for it, even if it's just a nickname and there's no official name.

Saddest: I think Workers' Residence is the kind of name a government would give to the place, make it seem like helpful even if it's part of taking advantage of people in need.

GM: I'm getting a very anti-authority vibe.

Crisus: Will that be a problem?

GM: I don't think so. It changes the kind of challenges your crew will face, that's all.

Akuech: Okay, I think I'm cool with that. What about the cargo site? Is it a commercial facility?

Tora: Wouldn't that just be part of the spaceport itself? Like specialized hangars or something?

Saddest: Yeah, but what if the smugglers ran it? Like, we need the cargo terminal to get supplies and stuff, but the smugglers are the ones who run it, so there's like a balance that we always have to keep, so they don't turn on us and shut off our access to the cargo terminal.

Crisus: That sounds great. It makes sense that we'd allow the smugglers to operate even when they're doing stuff we don't like because we have that deal with them. So what's it called?

Saddest: What about Black Port, kind of like the black market.

Akuech: Yeah, Black Port. Okay, so we just have the government.

Crisus: If we're going anti-authoritarian, let's build up some authority. Let's have the spaceport as almost separate from the settlement, like it's part of but separate.

Saddest: Like, maybe the Port Thoth Access Control Point?

Crisus: Can this be one of the big spaceports on Polvo? Kind of explains why it is almost independent from the settlement itself, being that it's so important.

GM: Absolutely. But how does the Access Control Point interact with Black Port?

Saddest: Okay, so maybe we're so important 'cause we're the negotiators between the two.

Akuech: Yeah, we are the mediators between the spaceport management and the smugglers. We've got control over the workers that work at each, so they need us.

Tora: Oh, can this link up with Higgins, our AI bartender? What about if along with being just a bartender, it's actually tied into the spaceport. Maybe bartending usually requires so little of its capacity, sometimes it loans computing power to assist the air traffic control of the Control Point? And can we just call that thing Control?

Saddest: As an anti-authoritarian, I dig calling that place Control.

Crisus: And I like the idea that Higgins assists Control, it give us leverage over the spaceport management.

GM: That can make Higgins one of the three side characters we need, one for each location. But before that, we need to map out a few more things, like where do most people live?

Akuech: How about Workers' Residence is part of a larger residential neighbourhood? But where most of us have communally built homes, stuff built out of salvage, the Residence is a pre-fab slapped together by Control to house its workers?

GM: Everyone agreed? Okay, so where do people not go? A specific place most people avoid.

Saddest: See, there's a spot where we buried the engines of the children's ark because they were causing people near them to hallucinate, and nobody knew why.

Crisus: Yeah, the theory was that there was a leak, but the engines were completely bizarre, a tech we never saw before. We buried them on the outskirts of the settlement, but the settlement grew and ended up surrounding that spot.

Tora: Thruster Ridge we call it, and sometimes people go there to experience visions, but those are generally really bad news, so most people stay away from it.

GM: Is that good? Great. Where do the people come together?

Tora: Oh, the monument, the common area.

Akuech: Yeah, and how about we just call it the Monument. There's a like a large clearing where we hold our meetings and votes.

Saddest: And we use it for festivals, celebrations, and funerals.

GM: Very cool. So, remember I mentioned creating face characters, and that Higgins would be one of them? There's a character for each industry location. We have unskilled labour, cargo, and air transport. Higgins is tied into air traffic control, so is it part of the air transport location?

Crisus: I think we'll want a representative from both cargo and air transport if we're the mediators between the two. What if Robin's Nest was actually part of the Workers' Residence? That would put Higgins in with unskilled labour.

GM: If that's what you want.

Saddest: Yeah, that works. What else do we need for him?

GM: A belief.

Akuech: Hey, can we have: *We are more important than them*? Higgins works like a real bartender – people go to it with problems. Higgins expends a ton of computing power trying to figure out the correct response to emotional problems, and when that happens, all the assistance it gives to Control drops. And it doesn't care, because it has programmed itself to prioritize Bastion's Reach over Control. It identifies itself with the labourers that it serves and wants to protect them, which means the smugglers and air transport authorities have to be really careful about threatening their workers, cause Higgins has been known to hold a grudge.

Tora: That's awesome. I love it because Tora would be so against that, but she has a real soft spot for our own little vodka-slinging Pinocchio.

Saddest: So vodka's Tora's thing?

Tora: Nah, she's a whiskey person.

Akuech: Doctor Whiskey!

Tora: Oh, yeah, that's going to be her nickname.

GM: So, Higgins is set. What about for the day labourers.

Tora: The smuggler boss?

Saddest: Or maybe like his number two? Like a lawyer or advisor or something? Like we don't see the boss, but this character's the one we talk to?

Crisus: What if it is a Belter who is a vassal to an Illuvia? And while we're dealing with the Belter, we're actually dealing with the Illuvia most of the time, as in the Belter identity is almost completely subsumed by the Illuvia's.

Tora: Yeah, so Tora is conflicted, because this Belter is basically disappearing, like dying but in a different sense, but it's consensual.

GM: And the Belter's name?

Akuech: What if he doesn't have a name? What if he is just the Belter? Or the Advisor?

Saddest: The Vassal?

Crisus: That. The Vassal. And the Illuvia doesn't deign to share its name with us. The smuggler leadership probably knows, but we aren't worthy.

Tora: And for belief, maybe something like "commerce is peace," so that trade creates connections that beings don't want to risk, and they find ways other than war to deal with problems.

GM: Fantastic. One last one, for Cargo.

Crisus: Aura Han. She was a captain of an incredibly successful warship. She and her crew quickly took control of the spaceport when Polvo was being colonized.

Akuech: Oh, and this was when the settlement was just starting to grow. The smugglers were already there, and Han and her crew wanted to exert their control over everything, but she was worried going after one would leave her vulnerable to the other.

Tora: Yeah, and with the growth of the settlement and then Higgins' help with air traffic control, there's been no chance since. It doesn't mean she likes us, just that it's in her interests right now to play nice.

CUSTOM FACES

Government **HIGGINS:** An AI barkeep who keeps a grudge.
We are more important than them

Day Labourers **THE VASSAL:** An illuvia and their meat-suit.
Commerce is Peace

Cargo **AURA HAN:** A retired starship captain.
It's all mine

SCENE

The following scene takes place late in the first or early in the second session of this particular campaign. The players have already had a few scenes, and the PCs have gathered both Strain and insight. Habits and some general information on the locale have been established, as have some relationships and some NPCs.

GM: It's night on Polvo. Like so many, it's dark, it's dry, and so many of the stars that fill the night sky are simply pieces of debris in the planet's orbit. The lights of Bastion's Reach is leading a group of salvagers home after attempting to work in the nearby Boneyard, known as Warframe Yard. It's been a long and exhausting day as the salvagers come within sight of Bastion's Reach. The crisp evening air has a hint of oil and burnt metal as the group gets closer. Behind them, rising up to curtain the night sky, is a windstorm. There's lightning coursing through it, and the dust of the plains will have stirred up to create a stinging banshee cloud and can strip paint when it's at its worse. The salvagers are hurrying to get to the Reach before the storm gets to them. Since Crisus works as a salvager, can you provide the Tilt?

Crisus: Sure thing. Crisus is among the salvagers, making sure everyone gets home. They don't all have a war rig like her, and those that do are detailed to carry the day's bounty either in backpacks or pulled in trailers. Crisus is doing a count, worried they might have left someone behind, when a really bright light comes shining from the sky. The radios crackle to life on the open channel and they get a command from a Peacekeeper patrol to halt their progress and not approach the settlement. Crisus can hear both the smugglers and Captain Han's people on the channel asking questions and expressing confusion. Since Saddest is a Permancer, do you want to deliver the Question?

Saddest: I'm not sure I have anything. Anyone?

Akuech: I have a thought.

Crisus: Okay, what is our Question?

Akuech: The local patrol indicates that the salvagers are carrying contraband. The patrol commander demands that the salvagers not make contact with the settlement but await a ground element that is en route. The Questions are “*Can we protect all our people from the storm,*” and “*is one of our salvagers putting the settlement at risk?*”

GM: Those are good, but usually we only have one question.

Saddest: Maybe a question about the salvager putting the settlement at risk has more stakes. The storm’s like an implacable force. It doesn’t have, y’know, morality or anything, it just does its thing.

Tora: Yeah, I’d agree.

GM: And we can make it stronger if you like. Remember, this isn’t so much a question in the heads of the PCs, but rather kind of like a writing prompt or a note in a script. Its to give you all direction and an idea of where the scene is going.

Crisus: So we could add narrative details in the Question.

GM: Absolutely. I think that would make it stronger. But that’s a decision for you all rather than me.

Akuech: How about we name the salvager with the contraband, giving this a more personal focus.

Saddest: Anyone dig Yibina?

Akuech: Sure. Maybe the Question should be: “*Why has Yibina, one of our salvagers, put our settlement at risk?*”

GM: Do you all agree? Okay, let’s go with that. So who has characters involved?

Crisus: Crisis is definitely in there. She’s there with the salvagers.

Tora: Can Tora be involved?

GM: I don’t know. Can she?

Tora: You said it's evening, so after a rough day performing examinations on some refugees the smugglers brought in, she's at the Robin's Nest, commiserating with Higgins. Higgins clues her in to what is happening, and as the medic, she's concerned about any possible health risks.

GM: Cool. So where is she and what does she do?

Tora: Right now I think she can do more at the Robin's Nest because Higgins is tied into all communications and all sensors. She can get more details than even Captain Han's people at Control.

Saddest: It'd make sense that once someone tells Saddest what's happening, they'll try to figure out what is going on. I guess there's some kind of comms shack or something?

GM: Where do you think that would be?

Saddest: Probably Control. So can we say Saddest gets the notice on his comlink and heads to Control?

GM: That works for me. What about Akuech?

Akuech: No, let's say he's working with some of the refugee leaders from the crew Tora mentioned. He's getting them enrolled in the settlement and finding space for them in the residence. He'll learn about all this after the fact.

GM: Okay, so we have Crisus, Saddest, and Tora are Actors, meaning that these characters are involved in the scene and can impact on it. Akuech is in Audience mode, so you'll be running some of the support NPCs, like Higgins and probably Aura Han. You're also responsible for judging when other players get Insight.

Akuech: I won't fail you. I'm not afraid.

Tora: (in wizened Muppet voice). You will be.

GM: Okay, that had to happen. Are we ready to go?

Crisus: Okay, so Crisus is trying to get clarification from the Peacekeepers at the same time as she's going through her people, trying to figure out what is happening, who has what and why.

Tora: I'm going to ask Higgins if it has more information. Tora kind of vaults over the bar to get at his central interface. She doesn't need to, but it feels more intimate to her. She needs to touch and have that tactile connection. Also, the others at the bar notice that her voice changes. She's gone bedside manner. She developed this serious but soothing voice that she uses when she was treating casualties during the war, and now when she's in a stressful situation, it kind of switches on.

Akuech: Can I play Higgins right now?

GM: Did Tora have more?

Tora: No, and I would actually appreciate it if someone ran Higgins. It'd give the conflict more weight for me.

GM: All right then. Higgins isn't super similar to Akuech, but I think it'll help the scene, so have it.

Akuech: Higgins is super smart and multiple sensors, both internal to the settlement and hooked into Control, and it has records on all inhabitants so it can recognize changes in habit and mood. This is ostensibly so it can be a better bartender, but this AI, cobbled together from so many odd components and program elements, is gaining awareness. It's becoming truly sentient, and one of its primary directives, one that it crafted for itself, is to protect and serve the denizens of the port.

GM: Now that's kind of changing one of the Faces. As long as everyone agrees, that's okay.

Akuech: Sorry, I didn't mean to step on toes.

GM: Oh, don't worry, you didn't. It just seems like that's defining a lot about a shared character, so I just want everyone's input.

Crisus: I think it actually fits pretty well with what we established. I mean, Higgins was supposed to seem almost sentient. Maybe it's further along than anyone knows.

Tora: I like where this is going. I like the idea of having a sentient AI that's actually more human than human.

GM: It seems like this is a good way to go with the character.

Akuech: Right, so Higgins senses Tora's shift and it knows that this means she is under stress. This kind of confuses it, so it does a deeper probe and this triggers anxiety subroutines. Sorry, I can't do a good Jonathan Hillerman English accent, but Higgins says to Tora: *"The Peacekeepers have activated their offensive systems and may be targeting the salvage team."*

Tora: Whoa. What do you mean, offensive systems? Guns?

Akuech: Higgins replies: *"That is correct. Our salvage team is under threat."* And it activates the settlement's air and orbital defense systems.

GM: That escalated quickly.

Saddest: So, like, would Saddest know all this?

GM: I don't know, would Saddest know all this?

Saddest: Ah, no – no they don't. Instead, when Saddest arrives at Control, Captain Han is losing her . . . stuff. Yeah, she's yelling and her people are madly working their systems, and she like turns on Saddest and she's all red and fuming. "Turn off the defenses." And Saddest answers "What are you talking about? Whose defenses? Who's doing what?"

Tora: Can Tora cut in?

Saddest: Yeah. For sure.

Tora: Okay, so Tora's all freaking out, her stress has gone beyond her bedside manner phase into the "oh my god we're all gonna die" phase. She puts in her ear-piece and turns on her communicator to let the crew know what Higgins has done. She tells them she's going to try to get it to stand down, and she's glaring at the interface as she says that.

Crisus: So Crisus now has an inkling what's going on. She's finished her headcount and . . . what was the NPC's name?

Saddest: Yibina

Crisus: Right, Crisus realizes Yibina isn't with them. That's a concern, but her primary concern is making sure her people don't get shot. They're rooting through all their salvage, trying to figure out what set the Peacekeepers off. I mean, Crisus has worked with them before, and she's not huge into getting into a conflict with the Peacekeepers, but this salvage is what helps sustain the settlement. The other salvagers are asking what's going on, and some of them are on the comms, so they know. People are getting freaked out, but Crisus isn't listening to them. She's the one in charge, she's making the decisions, but right now she's counting on her friends to control the situation. It's only her problem if that doesn't happen. No, wait, Yibina is there. Crisus is going through everyone's salvage, but she doesn't realize that Yibina, a new salvager that's only just joined the settlement, has kept something hidden. Yibina doesn't have power armour, but she's got an older exo-skeleton, and she's wired something into it on its interior, so on close inspection one might notice it, but Crisus hasn't noticed it yet.

Akuech: Can I just say that at this point, it'd be kind unreasonable for Akuech not to get involved, so let's say that he's in a clean room, a room without electronic devices where he does mediation and client interviews. He needs a clean room to build trust with new clients, so he doesn't have his comms with him.

Saddest: Yeah, and no one's got the time right now to come calling, so we'll have a sweet surprise for him if we all survive this.

Tora: Yeah, if we survive. So, Tora is arguing with Higgins. It's not helping the situation threatening the Peacekeepers. This could spiral out of control.

Akuech: Higgins is unconvinced. Only a credible deterrent will protect the salvagers. It calculates the Peacekeepers are unlikely to engage in offensive actions if there is the possibility of kinetic escalation. Their rules of engagement won't allow it.

Crisus: Unless the contraband is something serious. If it's The Song or Tormenta, their rules will allow them to remove the threat. Crisus is starting to get really worried. She's got Tora on comms but hasn't heard anything more from the Peacemakers. Our comms are secure and separate from the channel the Peacekeepers use, right?

GM: That's your call.

Crisus: Yeah, I think that's how it plays out. So Crisus has her comms on the encrypted settlement frequency so she's hearing Tora and Higgins. She's muted her own mic and is busy trying to figure out what the contraband might be. She's thinking there's something they've picked up.

Saddest: So right then, Saddest has got Han calmed down. They've like explained what's happening but she wants to pull the plug on Higgins. Saddest is all like "no, that's not going to work, you don't understand the AI." It's like Higgins is decentralized but is also wired into everything. You can't just cut it out or turn it off. So she's like demanding a fix and Saddest doesn't have one. So they're trying to talk to Tora but also trying to keep Han from doing anything stupid.

Tora: So I think we're at an impasse with Higgins. Its belief that the settlement is more important than anyone else is slamming into Tora's belief that no one is disposable.

GM: I tend to agree. So let's get those dice out. What is Tora's goal?

Tora: She wants Higgins to stand down and to let us just talk to the Peacekeepers. She can't let Higgins harm the Peacekeepers to protect the settlement because no one is disposable.

Saddest: Could you have Higgins get Saddest in touch with the Peacekeepers, let him talk us out of this?

Tora: Yeah, that would work. I want Higgins to stand down and get the Peacekeepers talking to Saddest.

GM: Cool. And Higgins wants you to understand that all are not equal, that when someone threatens those close to you, they're less worthy of consideration. Higgins is threatening a named NPC, so that's 3 Theat Dice. There is only minor Tormenta influence, so that's 2 Vector dice for a total of 5.

Tora: Okay, so for Tora, I think she's getting dice for Steward because she's trying to keep things safe. I'm going to say she gets a die for Veteran as she's identifying a threat – Higgins misguided attempt to protect the settlement could start a conflict that threatens the settlement.

GM: I'd go with that. Also, just so you know, you're going up against Tormenta's influence.

Tora: Of course, yeah, because it's violence, so I'll get a die for Tormenta. Let's see, can we call this a local dispute?

GM: The Peacekeepers are one of the factions local to the Reach, so yeah, this could be a local dispute.

Tora: Okay, so as a Belter, that's another die. So I have four dice. I got 1, 4, 5 and another 5, so 15.



GM: I rolled 2, 2, 3, 5, 6 and another for 18.



Tora: I'll take one Strain to re-roll that 1. Okay, I got a 5 so that's 19. Whew!



GM: And that victory, that forcing of your will on Higgins causes you another Strain. Good news is you persuaded it, so what happens?

Tora: Tora basically gets through to Higgins that the Peacekeepers aren't our enemies. They don't want to hurt anyone. They see a threat to this settlement because of the contraband and they are trying to protect us, just like Higgins is. If Saddest can talk to them, maybe we can diffuse all this without anyone getting hurt. If Higgins starts shooting, there's a good chance it will end with some dead settlers, and nobody wants that.

Akuech: Oh, okay, that makes sense to Higgins. It's still learning about people and doesn't really understand the Peacekeepers. The only Permancer it's been in contact with is Saddest, and Higgins is aware they are atypical of their people. Although they have kind of opposed beliefs, Higgins like Tora and trusts her, so it listens and tries to open communications with the Peacekeepers.

GM: So now let's have a look at Saddest. What are they trying to do?

Saddest: I've got to like get them talking. What the heck, people? What's with the extreme action? Let us know what the problem is and, y'know, we'll figure this out. No need for problems.

GM: Do you want in on this?

Akuech: So, the Peacekeepers are trying to stop contraband from reaching the settlement. Is it smuggling or something else?

Crisus: I don't think the Peacekeepers care too much about smuggling. They're all about The Song and Tormenta, right?

GM: Yeah, that's their mandate.

Crisus: So we've got to assume that someone's been tainted or has something that carries some of the virus. Something.

Akuech: Okay, and when Saddest contacts the Peacekeepers, they're local, or at least have regular dealings with the Reach, so they know Saddest, at least sort of. They're willing to talk. They let Saddest know that the salvagers are sending out a very subtle dissonant signal. It's so small, their sensors hadn't registered it earlier. Someone is trying to bring Tormenta into the Reach.

Tora: Well that's no good.

Saddest: Yeah, no doubt. Okay, so Saddest is like telling their people to just calm down for a bit. Let us handle this. We'll sort it out and get our people into the Reach before the storm hits.

Akuech: The Peacekeepers aren't convinced. Your people didn't even register the presence of Tormenta, so how are they going to identify and quarantine it? Nope, this is too serious. Until the Peacekeeper ground element arrives to investigate and quarantine the contraband, the salvagers can't have contact with the settlement.

Crisus: That's crazy. The storm's bearing down on us and while some of my team have power armour and might be able to ride it out, we're going to lose people if we stay out here. Crisus moves her team away from the settlement, away from the abandoned salvage. She wants the Peacekeepers to identify if Tormenta contagion is with the team or the salvage.

Tora: Yeah and Tora is trying to get Higgins involved in this. She honestly thinks of the AI as a member of the settlement and wants it to feel included and involved. Higgins can lend all the local sensors to their effort, try to boost their signal and get more clarity.

Akuech: That works, and they're able to use the added input to gain greater precision. The Peacekeepers say the contagion is with the team, not the salvage.

Crisus: So someone's infected with Tormenta?

Akuech: Or has a piece of tech in which Tormenta is recorded or contained. I mean, that was my idea. Is that possible?

GM: The concept of Tormenta is pretty abstract, but let's say yes, it can be carried in tech. That's one of the ways it has lingered.

Crisus: Crisus wants to believe that this is inadvertent, that it's a mistake rather than a betrayal, so she's talking it through with the salvagers, warning them that they may have picked something up, something maybe personal, not for salvage. She doesn't care about that, it's not a problem, but someone's got Tormenta and the Peacekeepers are adamant about a quarantine.

GM: How do the salvagers respond to the announcement that someone's got Tormenta?

Crisus: Terror?

Tora: And paranoia?

Crisus: Yeah, they're starting to spread out, maybe not consciously, but everyone is definitely concerned. Crisus starts trying to de-escalate the situation, like saying "whoa, whoa, everyone calm down. This is just someone's mistake, a totally innocent mistake. Let's just figure it out and go home. Let's get to the Robin's Nest and laugh this all off, okay?"

Akuech: So the storm is really bearing down and there's chatter between the Peacekeeper patrol and its command unit. Another aerial patrol is coming on station and an orbital platform is being tasked for surveillance and possible interdiction if the storm forces the air units out of area.

Saddest: Sorry, compadre, but you totally lost me.

Akuech: Sorry. Getting into it. Um, so there's a second Peacekeeper patrol craft coming to help the first one, and their command also has a satellite or something in orbit that's going to keep an eye on the situation and can use force if necessary. It really doesn't sound like the ground element will arrive before the storm does.

Saddest: This is really bad. Saddest contacts Crisus on their side-channel thing. "We need to isolate, er, quarantine the salvager with

The Song. Can you split up your team? Can we maybe find out who's got it?"

Crisus: Yeah, sure, we can do that. But then what? What do we do?

Saddest: Can we get a shelter out there? Something to protect them? Maybe even give them someone's mecha suit? Tormenta can't come in, for sure, but I think I can get the Peacekeepers to let the rest in.

Crisus: You work on the Peacekeepers and I'll work on my crew.

Saddest: Okay, Saddest gets to work talking to the Peacekeepers. "We want to help, we're all on-board with the quarantine, but we've got workers who need shelter from the storm. We won't let the infected in, but we need to take care of the rest of our people."

Akuech: The Peacekeepers think that's a big risk. They would honestly rather risk the lives of all the salvagers than allow Tormenta to access a settlement, especially one connected to a major spaceport.

Saddest: Dice?

GM: What belief is driving Saddest?

Saddest: I think "Peace at any cost." They're going to risk one of the settlers to keep the peace with the Peacekeepers.

GM: Nicely put. The Peacekeepers' goal is to keep the salvagers away from the settlement. What's Saddest's goal?

Saddest: They want a compromise – let us bring in our people not infected. We'll kind of like sacrifice the infected.

GM: Okay, sure, let's go to the dice. The Peacekeepers are threatening named NPCs again, for 3 Threat dice. They are also being strategic and shaping the situation to work to their long-term benefit, which indirectly support The Song's agenda for another 2 Vector dice. That means they roll five dice.

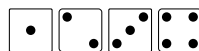
Saddest: Alright. Let's see. Okay, so they're trying to protect the vulnerable – their salvagers. That's like both Permancer and

Crescendo. Since Saddest is kind of like a leader, this would be protecting a follower, so a die for Leader. They're for sure trying to persuade someone, so Diplomat. Is that cool?

GM: Absolutely, so four dice. The Peacekeepers get 1, 1, 3, 4, 5 for 14.



Saddest: I got 1, 2, 3, and 4 with a total of 10. Oh wow. Okay, so Strain? I mean, I'd need a six.



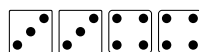
Tora: Tora is working with Higgins to get better readings and accuracy out of the sensors. She's using her medical knowledge to help separate bio-readings, while Higgins is focusing on the mechanical. Tora absolutely refuses to sacrifice one of our own. So can Tora take the Strain for Saddest?

Akuech: Yeah but Saddest's plan is to sacrifice one of the salvagers.

Tora: That's his plan, sure, but Tora just wants to buy time because she believes in Crisus, she believes Crisus can fix this if only Tora can get her that time, and Saddest's plan is a way to do that.

GM: Take that Strain if you want. Roll!

Saddest: I got 4 and 3, so a total of 14. What happens on ties?



GM: On a tie, you get to choose to win or lose the conflict. If you win, the price of victory will be two Strain rather than one.

Saddest: Ouch. Oh, wow, not good, but Tora looks worse.

Tora: Yeah, a lot worse. Three Strain. Ouch.

GM: Yeah, but success. Saddest achieved their goal, so how does that play out?

Saddest: So, like, there's a few moments when the Peacekeepers are like "stand-by," and like Crisus is still trying to get her salvagers separate so we can scan them, right?

Crisus: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

Saddest: Saddest is like totally nervous because Han and all of her people in Control are like staring at them, not really hostile or

anything, just a bit bewildered and maybe a bit of respect, pushing the Peacekeepers to back down and all. Then finally its Peacekeeper command that comes on and is like “accepted” and everyone lets out a big sigh of relief.

This scene will continue until the question is answered. At that time, the players can close the scene.

GM: As an Audience, how do you judge Tora’s actions in consideration of her beliefs?

Akuech: Oh, I absolutely think she’s confirmed her belief. She forcefully argued for it and even if she had lost, I don’t think there was anything in the exchange that showed any wavering. Mark a point on your Insight Track.

GM: How about Saddest?

Akeuch: Okay, I’d say Saddest confirmed their beliefs and deserves some insight as well. With the scene closed, players can spend accumulated insight or retire characters with too much Strain. In this case, Saddest’s player wants a Moment of Discovery with Tora and has the necessary three insight to spend to make it happen.

COSTLY VICTORY

So what if Saddest’s player didn’t take that extra Strain? What happens if they had lost the conflict? In that case, we’d likely have a scene in which the Peacekeepers rejected the proposal as too risky. They might say the readings are too imprecise, they can’t be certain of weeding out the infected individual. Then what? Well, the players still have not approached answering the question – “why has Yibina, one of our salvagers, put our settlement at risk?” – which means that there would be more narrative and likely more conflict. The unwillingness of the players to accept a loss in these two conflicts increased their Strain. Failure in a conflict is not failure in a scene. Sometimes one can strategically accept failure and still have a successful scene. The scene is about telling the story, and a tragedy can be a very effective story.

MOMENT OF DISCOVERY

GM: Do you want to set the scene for this?

Saddest: Yeah, it's the Robin's Nest that night. Pretty much everyone else has cleared out, and it's just Saddest and Tora at the bar. Finally, Saddest kind of gets what has been itching at their mind. "You care for each, not the collective."

Tora: So I want to kind of do a monologue, like how Tora reacts to that. It's like a reminiscence. Like a flashback of sorts.

Tora: Okay, Tora kind of nods, sips her drink. "You know, it's funny, all that time getting taught religion, teaching religion, spreading it, and you don't really think about it. Even when the religion is telling you we are all in this together, you don't really believe that. There's the faithful and then there is everyone else. And you say the words but they mean nothing."

"And then there's the war, and you want to do something because that's what's right, right? And you advance your medical training, and you end up doing battlefield surgery, and you're saving some and others are dying, and there's always so much blood and burning. I don't know. You can't tell the faithful from the others when they're all lying around, looking alike, suffering alike, and you don't even know why. If this is what we have to do to survive, do we deserve it? We're all people, we've all got hopes and dreams and things we care about.

"So, yeah, I got sick of sacrifice. I got sick of deciding that this person, this sentient is worthy of survival and this isn't. I got sick of triage, of letting people die. I mean, maybe I can't save them all, but I can try. We can try. Frack triage. Frack sacrificing others. There's no us and them, there's just us. How can anyone believe anything different and call themselves moral?"

She like downs her drink in one gulp. She tries a kind of smile, but it's pretty weak sauce. "Sorry for that. I kind of went off."

Saddest: Saddest is very touched. They nod slowly. "You remember them? Those you wanted to save but could not?"

Tora: Each and every one.

At the end of the Moment of Discovery, the participating characters can remove Strain.

11

ADVENTURE: CRY UNCLE



11.01

Lowbrook

11.02

The Families

11.03

Uncle Frank

11.04

Narrative Hooks

LOWBROOK

*It's harvest season in Lowbrook,
and children are disappearing.*

*The Belters and Martians blame the migrant workers who
come through every year. The Terran families blame the
Belters and Martians. No one thinks to blame the Terrans,
whose children were the first to go.*

CONTENT NOTE

This adventure deals with child abuse and community trauma. Please be open with your players about this and establish boundaries with regards to how explicitly you will be showing violence against children and other vulnerable parties. Please refer to the safety tools on **PG.16** and approach with care.



THE SETTLEMENT

Lowbrook is a small town south of Covenant Yard. Locals say it is “downwind” by about ten miles, which may be a bit confusing to outsiders, considering the town is in the middle of a calm grassland dotted with hackberry and cedar trees, sliced through by its eponymous brook.

Before Francis Duffy made his sacrifice to end the War, the brook was just a dry ravine, a small crack leading from Cicatriz Valley, sunk into the surrounding earth. Since the worsening of the storms at Covenant Yard, the ravine has been consistently flooded. It has its own currents and catches, and all of its water comes from the storms. The first settlers of Lowbrook initially expressed concern about the dark currents, but as years passed without any incident, they began to cut irrigation channels, filter the water, and grow crops.

Lowbrook now has about 300 permanent families, with the majority being farmers. Most of the population are Belters or Martians who work the fields. 10 families are Terrans, and while most of these are also farmers, there is also a tiny but distinct upper class of Terrans and Terran-born Martians (see “The Families” below). Lowbrook also welcomes migrant workers of any culture or race during the harvest season, and the population quintuples as down-on-their-luck settlers and drifters set up temporary housing and work the fields for meager pay.

When the PCs arrive to begin the adventure, it is harvest season in Lowbrook. There is an air of industry and urgency, undercut by a sudden tension as Tormenta’s influence makes itself known. For mechanical purposes, Lowbrook is a Farming Community, with Logging, Ranching, and Farming as its industries. It produces shimmering cedar planks and massive oxen, the likes of which have never been seen on Terra or Polvo, likely thanks to the waters that flow down from the storms of Covenant Yard.

The Terran upper class of Lowbrook start at Stage 2 of Tormenta infection, and everyone else starts at Stage 1. As more children disappear, the Terran upper class advances to Stage 3, and others can advance to Stage 2 as the narrative requires.

THE FAMILIES

Lowbrook used to be a cheerful town – at least as cheerful as life can get on Polvo. This year, however, there is a thick tension in the air. The harvest is good, but the upper class is more distant and angry, and their children are disappearing.

Below are descriptions of the upper class, the farmers, and the migrant workers as groups, along with a couple of NPCs for each. Feel free to use them as you see fit.

THE UPPER CLASS

The Upper Class is divided into three Terran families and their various married and extended households. Their houses are made of peat-brick covered in a white stucco, and are breezy, open-plan monstrosities that mimic the McMansions of Earth. Each family has fingers in a corporate pie – and each family is being affected by Tormenta in different ways.

THE KOSAČA FAMILY (KO-SA-CHA)

The **Kosača** are big investors in Redcap Engineering Services, and have reaped the rewards of the Star Lift and the Fire Sale in equal measure. When people think of the “rich folks” of Lowbrook, they think of the Kosača family. The Kosačas own a massive cattle ranch with plenty of employment available for cowhands and guards. They also keep goats and sheep. All of the animal-tending is done by employees and by children whose parents want to teach a lesson about the “value of hard work”.

TORMENTA EFFECTS: At Stage 2, the Kosača adults may send more children out to tend to the animals, and holler angrily at them if they do something wrong. At Stage 3, there would be “accidents” with animals, emotional abuse of employees, withholding of paychecks, and physically punishing children with switches or crops.

THE FAYE FAMILY

The Faye Family might not have the biggest bank accounts or the best houses, but they are by far the most connected to the land. Everyone knows the Fayes – not just knows **of** them, **knows** them. They were some of the first people in the New Hope settlement, and they established the town of Lowbrook. Theirs were the first farms in the area, and they feed most of the nearby settlements. They also do a great deal of charitable work for newer settlers and hire the largest population of migrant workers every harvest season.

TORMENTA EFFECTS: At Stage 2, the Faye adults start to withdraw from public life. Paychecks go out late or not at all. At Stage 3, they become almost agoraphobic, with curtains drawn, doors locked, and children punished soundly for stepping foot outside.



THE COVENTRY FAMILY

The Coventry are nouveau-riche. They got wealthy off of managing the transport division of Lone Star Industries, and their cedar farm is second to none. They have the flashiest home, the nicest cars (they have **cars!**) and the best clothes. The Coventries employ legions of woodsmen, farmers, seamstresses, mechanics, private security – anyone who can be convinced to make their lives better for the right price.

TORMENTA EFFECTS: At Stage 2, the Coventry adults will drop a blithe insult into their conversation once every couple of sentences. They're just **better**, and you need to know that. At stage three, they will fire workers for even the tiniest mistake, withhold paychecks, go out of their way to insult and attack people who they feel outshine them – and as for their children? See the old Terran movie **Mommy Dearest** for an idea.

EVERYONE ELSE

The rest of the people of Lowbrook are Belters and Martians, mostly those who bled out into the community through the town of Hope. While Lowbrook is primarily a farming and logging community, most of the citizenry work on someone else's farm or plant just enough to turn a profit while feeding themselves. There's a small but growing population of support occupations as well – millers, seamstresses, ditch-diggers, plumbers, and other tradespeople. No one household can rival the Three Families in terms of influence and capital, but as a group Lowbrook could easily overwhelm them.

Felicia Moon came to Lowbrook with the Fayes after her husband died to The Song. Quiet and sad, this black Martian woman is a midwife, a nurse practitioner, and a former military medic. She has delivered every single child the Three Families have had, while serving the rest of the community as best she can. Felicia lives near the town square and is one of the only people in town with a car and reliable electricity.

Amparo Burris is an irrigation expert, but she will cheerfully brush you off if you call her that. A strapping, perpetually sunburnt middle-aged Belter woman, she came to Lowbrook a year after the war ended as a migrant laborer and wound up staying. Amparo has intimate knowledge of every aqueduct, pipeline, and ditch in Lowbrook – she personally dug and laid most of them. She also knows most of the children and suspicions may turn to her early on.

Darrel Avery is Amparo's right hand man. He's learning how to take over her trade in preparation for her retirement, and is the polar opposite of his boss. Lean, dark-eyed, and perpetually sarcastic, this Martian has a surprising kind streak.

Doctor Bennett Bird runs the local clinic and keeps up a rather one-sided rivalry with Felicia. He insists he's the only one in town with an M.D. – but he was also a member of the Great Choir, something he prefers to keep quiet. He is Terran and is currently saving up for a car as a status symbol and a necessity. The status symbol comes first.

Elwood and Natalie Stevens are the current ombudsman and woman for the migrant workers in town. They have something of a nascent union going, and despite people not always listening to them, they will always speak. Natalie is the firebrand of the pair, while Elwood sees to the safety and succor of their people. Belters both, they know how hard it is to live without support, and they are trying hard to turn Lowbrook into a place where people can put down roots and grow.

Percevellion, aka **Percy**, is the local Permancer Peacekeeper liaison. They keep watch over the farms and fields of Lowbrook and note anything out of the ordinary. Percy fascinates the local children, with their dappled coat and big eyes, but they don't seem to mind the attention. Secretly, they are delighted by the curiosity – most of their family died in the War, and they will never have niblings or grandchildren, so they have developed a major fondness for the human children that swarm around them. When children start to go missing, Percy will be one of the first to organize search parties, and potentially an in for PCs to talk to the Three Families and find out what's going on.

THE CHILDREN OF LOWBROOK

The Hero is infecting the people of Lowbrook with a strain of Tormenta targeted at the Three Families. What he really wants is their children, but he'll take turning the adults into Ravagers if that's all he can get.

At first, the Tormenta influence is subtle. A parent might get loud with their child, or might pull them in from playing for no particular reason. As the influence gets stronger, towards Stage 3, the children who run away start displaying bruises, burns, cuts, and other easily-hidden signs of physical and emotional trauma. While it would be easy to simply inflict the children with Tormenta directly, The Hero isn't interested in drones. He wants loyal soldiers to mold from the ground up.

You can cure Tormenta. It's much more difficult to cure the feeling of betrayal from your abusive parents. The children below are just some examples of who might go missing. Feel free to add more as your campaign requires.

Maya Coventry is the first to go missing. A precocious fourteen-year-old with a reading level well above her years, most people assume she's off on an adventure somewhere – until she doesn't come back. If the PCs go into Covenant Yard to look for the children, she will likely be their war leader. Maya is farther along on the Tormenta infection than the other children.

Caleb and Francis Faye are ten-year-old twins. They were rarely seen apart, until other children started disappearing. Caleb disappeared first, and then Francis was seen running through the center of town before disappearing as well. Usually chatty and in everybody's business, they become quiet and withdrawn before disappearing.

Hana Kosača was the black sheep of her family. She always thought differently, stopped speaking after the age of five, and showed no interest in the family business, preferring to sketch or make strange objets-d'art out of wire and string and pieces of glass. At sixteen, she is the oldest of the children to go missing, and is also the one to take care of them. Hana seems curiously unperturbed by either meme, and mostly busies herself making fires, tents, and art within Covenant Yard.

CICATRIZ VALLEY

The children have followed the brook upwind, to Cicatriz Valley. If the PCs choose to follow them, they better be prepared to deal with the Yard itself.

COVENANT YARD

Storms is perhaps too gracious a term for the howling maelstroms whipping over Tormenta Prime's burial ground. If someone took Jupiter's Great Red Spot and compressed it into a space a million times smaller, that might give some idea. Tornadoes battle for space with columns of lightning, and blinding snow can just as easily give way to tearing storms of dust. Firebrush, polvan moss, coral trees, and a rare type of tree that looks like a cross between a cedar and a sand oak defiantly cling to life. It is beneath these trees that the children find shelter, in makeshift tents with clumsily-dug fire pits.

It is here that Duffy means to train his army. Making settlers and space captains angry is all well and good, but why not have a legion of soldiers spending their formative years in his domain?

LISTEN FOR THE WINDS

If the PCs have contacts within the government, they might be able to get into contact with Phoebe Sparks (**PG.30**). An odd duck, Phoebe is a combination of hearth wisdom and cold pragmatism. She is easily found – her home is right on the edge of the Cicatriz Valley, in the Covenant Yard Annex.

The Annex could politely be called a government base. In reality, it's barely a village on the southern slopes of the valley, with a dozen houses packed in a circle behind low walls. Phoebe's home is on the northern end, with a series of windows overlooking the raging storms below.

Once encountered, she's suspicious, insisting on talking to the PCs before offering to help. She will want to know where they're from, who they left behind, why they're going to the Yard, and what motivates them. Once she is satisfied, she'll consult her almanacs and the storms and give the PCs a safe route.

If the PCs choose this method, they can add an extra die to their pool for as long as they are in Covenant Yard.

UNCLE FRANK

The Hero of the War of The Song has been luring children to Covenant Yard by posing as a friendly relative from out of town. He only appears to them when they are alone and invites them to come see him. Once they're in Covenant Yard, which he guides them to, he disappears, and the children are left to fend for themselves.

Duffy has done this before, and he will likely do it again. The Yard changes a child. With so much exposure to both The Song and Tormenta in their raw forms, an adult would be forever altered. A child in their formative years, whose mind and body are not yet fully formed, would be turned into something monstrous – like the horrific chimera the Peacekeepers and Black Sky sometimes have to put down. The Hero lures children here and then betrays them. That betrayal turns children and communities into monsters that eat themselves.

If the PCs brave Covenant Yard and make a successful rescue attempt, they still have to deal with children exposed to familial abuse and two very different universal forces clattering around their young brains. The children might try to run away, steal from or attack the PCs, or conversely, cling to them as though their life depends on it. Their lives might very well be in danger – the children are all at Stage 2 of both Tormenta and Song infection, and the conflicting messages are tearing them apart.

Even then, if they somehow manage to get the children back to Lowbrook intact, the families are still at Stage 3 of Tormenta infection. The PCs may wish to get the adults some help before reintroducing the children to a toxic environment.



UNCLE FRANK'S NIBLINGS

Francis Duffy, the Hero, should only ever appear to the children. The PCs should not get a chance to attack him – he is wielding god-like levels of power and has a specific focus. If necessary, inflict the PCs with Stage 2 or even 3 of Tormenta infection, have Duffy speak through the children, but never bring him into direct conflict with the PCs. They would not survive more than a few seconds at best.

NARRATIVE HOOKS

Cry Uncle can be run with a pretty straightforward plot: PCs come into town on a mission from the government or Black Sky or another mega-corp, children are missing, PCs find children and restore the balance. This is an absolutely good and fine way to run this adventure! If you as the GM are looking for ways to vary play, however, consider the following:

The PCs are migrant workers, and are caught up in the wave of suspicion and terror sweeping Lowbrook after children begin to disappear. It might be their job to calm the townspeople and send Percy and a search party after the children instead of actually going into Covenant Yard themselves. This is a good option for groups that would prefer to explore social play and out-group drama rather than high adventure.

The PCs are citizens of Lowbrook, veterans and farmers who have been there for years. They know the Three Families and everyone else in town and are pillars of the community. When children go missing, it is deeply personal for them. They might go after new faces, console the family members, or try to find out what's going on of their own accord.

The PCs come in after the children are brought back. The parents are still inflicted with Tormenta at Stage Three, and the children just keep running away — though likely not back to Covenant Yard. Running **Cry Uncle** like this should be done carefully, though, as the focus shifts to trauma and recovery as opposed to solving a mystery with a backdrop of trauma. While you may be able to cure Tormenta infection, the feelings associated with it remain.

For a darker twist: the PCs are Peacekeepers on a mission to protect Lowbrook from the chimera that have appeared out of Cicatriz Valley. The chimera are, of course, the children who went missing several weeks ago. Will they tell the citizenry of Lowbrook? How will they handle breaking the news to the parents?

After the PCs rescue the children, the children refuse to go home. They might run away again, or they might try to cling to the PCs. At this point, the parents might get suspicious and accuse the PCs of stealing or corrupting their children.

However you decide to run Cry Uncle, remember that the main themes of this scenario are family dysfunction and community. This isn't about killing the Hero for what he's done or murdering the children under his tenuous care (unless you opt for the chimera scenario, above). The children have been led astray by the Hero, believing he would offer them a better life, away from their parents – who he infected. The community is being torn asunder by the loss of the children, and their parents are slowly succumbing to Tormenta's influence. This adventure is about the health and well-being of Lowbrook itself, and whatever the characters decide will influence the continued existence of this small community.

As a GM, be mindful of the players at your table. It is entirely likely you will have a player who had a dysfunctional or abusive childhood at your table, and it is your job to make sure that they are cared for. While you do not have to do all of the emotional labor yourself, you need to lay down some ground rules for how you address abuse at your table. If this means keeping all abuse off-screen, but present that's fine. Same if you decide to show a graphic scene of abuse, so long as the players all consent to it. Do not sensationalize abuse, it's not sexy or desirable or titillating in any way and should not be presented as such. Reread the description of Tormenta if necessary; for the infected parents, their children are in the way, holding them back, stupid and clumsy, etc.

That being said, abusive parents should not be caricatures either. Remember, these are upstanding members of the community, not ugly drunks who you could spot as abusers from a mile away. The Kosača family are classic old money who keep any and all embarrassments in the family, including parental dysfunction. The Coventry family cover everything up with more money, more jobs, more flash. The Fayes, who are well-known and well-liked, retreat into the shadows and court sympathy. This doesn't mean they're not abusive under Tormenta's influence. This doesn't mean they weren't abusive even before Tormenta's influence! Maybe Tormenta planted that seed, or maybe it just watered abuse that was already flowering like a weed. Abusers are hard to spot, and that should also be the case in this game.

As a final note: it's important to make sure that you're not telling a story where the real abusers were the children all along. While, depending on the story you tell, the children might be turned into chimera under Francis Duffy's influence and unleashed on the town, if the PCs rescue them before that, they should not turn into little demons that the town has to put down. Too often in the real world, abusive parents justify their abuse by saying their children were actually abusing them by being naughty, clumsy, stupid, shrill, acting out, or any number of other things. While the parents may say that in the game, it is your job as the GM to make sure that the abused and gaslit children are still the sympathetic parties in all of this, no matter how troubled they are by being harmed and lied to repeatedly.

Can you save everyone? No, but you can try. Sometimes, getting them to a place where they can save themselves is worth the journey.

12

NEW FRONTIERS



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NEW HORIZONS

The galaxy is a stranger place than you could imagine.

This Chapter presents more unusual aspects of the game. If you want to play in one of the other major sanctuary worlds beyond Polvo, you can find three new off-world settlements; the Oort Line, Longfall and Sargasso. You can learn about a variety of unusual abilities and augmentations available to characters and how they are represented mechanically. Last, but not least, it addresses the alien Precursors and the relics they left hidden in Polvan vaults.

This is a Chapter full of optional rules and hacks to help you adapt **AFTER THE WAR** to your preferences. The rules of the game are presented under a creative commons attribution license, which means you can adapt the rules and procedures for your own use. This Chapter is meant to give you a foundation so you can hack and reskin the game to your heart's content.

OFF-WORLD SETTLEMENTS show how you can adapt the game to fit different contexts. While most games occur on Polvo, there are survivors throughout the galaxy whose stories need to be heard. Do you want to play on Permancer homeworlds, the ruins of Mars, or on a colony ship sent to a distant galaxy? Use these offworld settlements as models.

STRANGE GIFTS show you how you can give new abilities to characters, the prices you can charge, and the different kinds of advantages that characters might receive.

THE PRECURSORS content lets you expand the scope of play far beyond a single planet. It brings in galaxy-spanning threats, ancient histories, and the fascinating technologies to the fore.

THE HACKER'S GUIDE is a dedicated section that explains the mechanics under the hood, and how to adapt the rules for your own games fruitfully.

Let's get to it!

OFFWORLD SETTLEMENTS

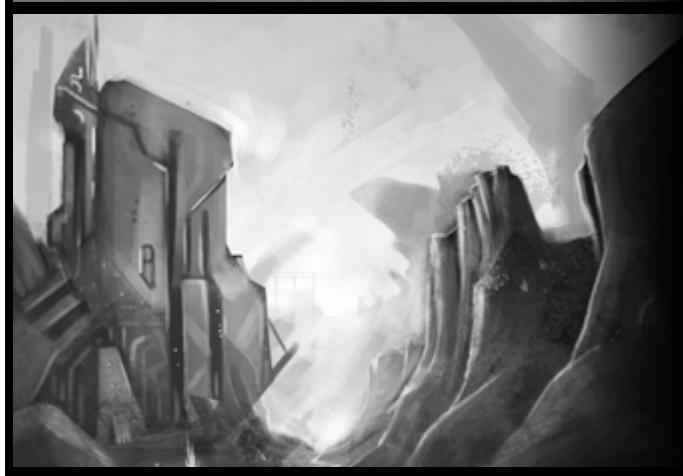
You can play in the **OORT LINE**, where Belters try to build a community among broken defense platforms.



You can play brave souls of **LONGFALL**, who strive to rebuild the fallen Union.



You can even risk the peril of the broken crucible-world of **SARGASSO**, under Black Sky control.



12
02

A CLUSTER OF STATIONS

THE OORT LINE



A line of asteroid forts as wide as the solar system. The largest fortification in human history. The least successful fortification in human history. The Broken Line. Saberhagen's Folly. The Tombaugh Line. Von Neumann's Express. The Oort Line has many names and few voices.

Belter tech and expertise combined with Martian money and human fear to throw a ring of steel and rock around the Solar System. The Oort Line circles the solar system as sword and shield. A last line of defense, home to a quarter million souls and intended as the jumping off point for the next stage of human exploration. Forts, staging posts, and polite, industrious Von Neumann drones patiently turn the sleeping comets of the Oort into mirrors of themselves. It would have been glorious.

The Song came straight at the solar system and straight for the Oort Line. After all, it was more voices for the Choir. It tore through with little effort but the stations on the far side of the solar system were left largely untouched. They became temporary refuges, and jumping off points for evacuation. Lifeboats with retrofitted FTL drives. No one knows where they went. No one knows how many went. No one knows how many stayed but the Oort Line is far busier now than ever. Life finds a way. Life has found its way here. Pirates, explorers, anarchists, geniuses, corporations, aliens. All strung out across the stars. All of them on the Oort Line.

The Oort Line used to be a place where lives ended. Now it's where lives begin, whether by forged identities or Belter midwives. It isn't a safe place, but it might be a new home all the same.

A CLUSTER OF STATIONS

THE OORT LINE



INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

MINING

Kulpreet Bashar, a former Martian Navy geologist and prospector who believes *Hard Work is all that Matters*.

CHILDCARE

Nguyen Thi Hua, the Terran President of the Midwives Guild who believes that *Children Deserve the Truth*.

MERCENARY

Patricia Kinsella, a former Fleet Special Operative known as “The Spectre” who believes *The Past Traps Us*.

SMUGGLING

Ella Rose, an innovative Belter artist who dreams of far-voyaging starships who knows that *Anything is Possible*.

THERAPY

Tobias Amstor, a Belter and former chorister who believes *Everyone Deserves a Second Chance*.

QUESTIONS

What is the name of the pirate outpost quarantined by the Peacekeepers last year?

What essential resource is in desperately short supply, and who is hoarding the known remaining stores?

There’s talk of a centralized Oort Line council. What are the very real concerns raised at the prospect?

Which of the following neighbouring systems have recently harmed the Oort Line, and how?

- Earth, humanity’s ancient homeworld.
- Mars, a corporate colony of broken domes.
- The Belt, fallen to anarchy.
- Longfall, the heart of the union reborn.
- Sargasso, a crucible world.

12
03

THE NEW CAPITAL

LONGFALL



Longfall is named for the four colossal plateaus that define its northern hemisphere. Each one is over a thousand kilometers wide and the tallest extends into space.

Longfall is home to over a million human settlers and was, pre-Song, a junction world for travel to many other locations. It was also one of the first places refugees fled to, and there are stories of several groups still either picking over the cities or living on the surface far beneath the plateaus. All of these stories are true. None of them are complete.

Longfall is now home to over 2 million people of every race. The cities, largely intact after the War, have been repopulated and the planet is bustling again. And that's a problem.

Longfall has centennial storms. Storms that build at the top of the plateaus and drop like anvils. The next storm is brewing and while the planet's inhabitants all want to do something about it, none can agree what. To make matters worse, tensions between the different levels of the planet are rising. The summit colonies want control of the cable cars and train lines that connect them to the ground. The ground wants a better cut of the resources they ship into the sky.

Nothing has gone hostile, yet. But it will soon.

Longfall dreams of justice. Underneath the cruel eyes of the planetary security, a secret conspiracy seeks to rebuild the glories of the fallen Union. They work in shadow to turn this world into a new capital world for the galaxy. The Phoenix Project won't give up on the future.

AFTER THE WAR

INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Santiago Montfries, a Martian engineer building rapid transit cables between the plateaus, who believes *Experimentation is our Salvation*.

GOVERNMENT

Director Adeyemi is the head of the Phoenix Project trying to rebuild the Galactic Union, convinced *Nothing is Lost Forever*.

CRIME

Commissioner Adebe is the head of “security” for New Longfall City, desperate and believing *The Enemy of her Enemy is her Friend*.

DRONES

Becca DeVries retrofits drones for transportation, construction, and revolutionary sabotage because *Everyone is Equal*.

SANCTUARY

Rumi Singh leads the welcoming Longfall Gurdwara, offering vegetarian food to visitors and believing that *Honest Work Brings Solace*.

QUESTIONS

How does Longfall Security abuse their power, and which group suffers most at their hand?

What are the symbols which mark someone as being untouchable in the eyes of the Longfall Security Forces?

What law, organization, or infrastructure has the Phoenix Project established for the benefit of the Union reborn?

Which of the following neighbouring systems have recently attacked the Longfall, and how?

- Earth, humanity’s ancient homeworld.
- Mars, a corporate colony of broken domes.
- The Belt, fallen to anarchy.
- The Oort Line, military defenses turned into refuges
- Sargasso, a crucible world.

12
04

THE TESTING GROUND

SARGASSO



Sargasso is a world torn in two. A super-volcano eruption ripped it apart a century ago but not quite enough to fully separate the halves of the world. The end result is a planet that resembles a chessboard built by a madman and one that almost no one wanted to settle.

Black Sky Investments saw something different. A planet as a testbed for multiple technologies, to be mined down to the core and with no complicated ethical issues attached. As a result, Sargasso Falls is equal parts debris field and laboratory, ships and wrecks of ships surrounded by pieces of a world. It is a wild, unpredictable mess of science, chaos and nature; a planet-sized petri dish.

This is a world driven by the relentless urge to explore, experiment, and discover all the universe has to offer. Fully aware of the danger involved, Black Sky has a permanent warship in orbit with enough ordinance to finish off the destruction the super-volcano began. The Isaac is a beast that thinks it's a ship, a quarter mile long rock abattoir cruising the rift in Sargasso, keeping the shipping lanes clear. The Isaac looks like a boxer on their thousandth round. The Isaac moves like a pig in tar and its crew of a thousand are split between company staff, volunteers and drifters. It has target locks on the 113 remaining experimental domes spread across the planet's surface and is ready to sterilize every last one if need be.

There used to be nearly 200 domes, but mistakes were made. The surviving domes have made countless breakthroughs in genetics, memetics, artificial intelligence, and experimental physics.

Anvil Point was Sargasso's unofficial moon, the largest section to break off when the planet cracked. It was steered to a stable orbit, fitted out with engines and equipment and prepared as a sentinel moon. It was the first vessel in system to face The Song and no one has been aboard since. The transcripts and logs were enough. But times are changing.

THE TESTING GROUND
SARGASSO



INDUSTRIES AND FACES (PICK 3)

CONTAINMENT

Captain Usher, commands the Issac and speaks for the company, believing *Curiosity Must be Contained*.

ENGINEERING

Bernard Naranjo was the lead engineer behind the project to transform Anvil Point into a sentinel moon, believing *Laws are Suggestions*.

MEMETICS

Dr. Ying Yue was originally stationed on Feynman Station observed the power of memetic science, believing *Minds are Tools*.

GENECRAFTING

Dr. Yyana is the Rasgado head of the the xenogenetics division experimental domes, believing *Science is Vengeance*.

AI TECHNOLOGY

Antikythera is the the third sentient artificial intelligence, and the first to survive Black Sky's loyalty test, recognizing that *Humans are Monsters*.

QUESTIONS

Your settlement is the most respected dome on Sargasso. What great discovery sets you apart from the others?

Your dome is harbouring a small number of fugitives who fled a nearby dome before it was sterilized. How have they made themselves invaluable to your community?

What internal schism is causing conflict within the ranks of Black Sky Industries?

Which of the following neighbouring systems have harmed your dome, and how?

- ▶ Earth, humanity's ancient homeworld.
- ▶ Mars, a corporate colony of broken domes.
- ▶ The Belt, fallen to anarchy.
- ▶ The Oort Line, military defenses turned into refuges
- ▶ Longfall, the heart of the union reborn.

STRANGE GIFTS

The war changed us all. Our bodies were wounded, and our minds tested. Some of us embraced ancient rituals for succor, or discovered other mystic gifts. Tormenta shaped flesh to serve its violent hungers, while The Song's echoes grant seductive power. Here are some of the ways that your gifts can be revealed.

CYBERNETICS

We can rebuild him; We have the technology.
- Goldman.

Humanity was the first species to develop advanced cybernetics. Other species created their own adaptive devices to correct their eyesight or replace lost limbs. Still, the neurolinked, biomechanical hardware perfected in Terran laboratories were a marvel that certainly impressed the Galactic Union. They respected the decades of labour and care that went into crafting adaptive devices to correct flawed eyesight, replace ruined limbs, or repair damaged organs. Within a generation's time, advanced prosthetic devices were commonplace on Fleet vessels.

Soon, cybernetic implants providing enhanced capabilities became available on the marketplace. The exploratory and defense wings on Fleet had their vanguard upgraded with subdermal armour, wired reflexes, and optical implants. Scavengers still occasionally find these cybernetic implants in the wreckage littering Polvo's surface.

GETTING CYBERNETICS

Unfortunately, most of the advanced cybernetic manufacturing facilities were located on Mars and Earth. Nakami Industries had a small R&D laboratory hidden in the belt which is now providing the lion's share of new cybernetic technology in the wake of the war. That conflict left millions injured and dying.



This meant nearly all new cybernetic implants being designed are for adaptive or medical purposes. Basic prosthetics are easily available, and neurolinked varieties are within reach of most folk on Polvo. The deluxe models providing enhanced capabilities are significantly harder to get ahold of.

If you want to get an enhancement implant, you will have to raise a prohibitive amount of money for a new Nakami implant, or re-purpose something from war salvage. Re-purposed cybernetics often have side-effects such as occasional minor electrical discharge, overheating, or the production of unpleasant noises. Most trading posts and spaceports have chop shops which can get you what you need if you aren't squeamish and are willing to take on some debts.

Cybernetics don't give any bonus during conflicts, per se. Instead, they offer narrative permission for the player to narrate things appropriately. If an ex-soldier has an artificial adrenal gland, she might be able to trigger a rush of adrenaline on command to enable a burst of speed or strength. Perhaps an integrated communications device allows someone to communicate at a distance instead. These cybernetics allow characters to do things which would otherwise require external equipment or assistance.

CYBERNETIC OPTIONS

There are a wide variety of different types of cybernetics available, but these are the most well known brands for those seeking quality implants.

Hephaestus Prosthetics include lightweight and durable prosthetic limbs for injured miners, athletes, and soldiers. Additional functionality on deluxe models include integration into the client's nervous system, augmented strength, and internal storage compartments.

Yislani Cybereyes are used to replace lost sight and offer additional benefits such as 4x magnification, video-recording capability, and are capable of viewing into the Infrared and Ultraviolet spectra. Deluxe versions also allow for visual overlays and a limited form of augmented reality.

Caecilia Hearing Implants are frequently used to compensate for hearing and provide a number of additional benefits such as amplification, audio-recording, and noise filtering. The deluxe versions include adaptive muting functions and are in high demand as a potential safeguard against The Song.

Merek Neurojacks were originally designed to allow for digital-neural handshakes which would permit individuals to directly communicate with network systems through skull jacks. Deluxe versions can also be used therapeutically to reduce the symptoms for anxiety, depression, and mood fluctuations.

Newheart Synthetic Transplants are grown with cloned tissues on a carbon-fibre scaffold to replace various internal organs which might have suffered damage. These offer a variety of enhancements, such as water-breathing lungs, or radically more efficient replacement kidneys. Deluxe versions offer control over the endocrine or nervous systems.

Neoskin Reconstructions are used for skin grafts and cosmetic surgery. The patient's skin cells and hair follicles are grown on a matrix of carbon nanotubes and applied to replace any lost skin. Standard versions are used for both traumatic medical interventions and gender affirming surgeries, while deluxe versions provide subdermal armour and/or adaptive pigmentation.

MYSTIC ARTS

*There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio,
than are dreamt of in your philosophy. –Hamlet*

There are always those who see the world differently. They are the strange hermits whose inner journeys take their spirits far. They are the herbalists and wise-women whose poultices heal mortal wounds. They are the miracle-workers whose faith offers blessings, and the warlocks whose sacrifices yield power. These rare mystics have subtle gifts which can be to their benefit.

WIELDING MYSTIC ARTS

The Arts are mysterious and rare. Of all the peoples of Polvo, only the Prospero begin with access to Prophecy, Blessings, and Curses as options. They may freely establish a fourth Art as their final Trait option, should they wish.

Other individuals may learn the Arts if they are willing to pay the price. In order to gain these powers, the character must undergo three ordeals.

- ▶ They must suffer a moment of grief, to open their heart.
- ▶ They must spend a season in the wild, to open their body.
- ▶ They must sacrifice something intangible, to open their mind.

After undergoing such an ordeal, the player can add a new Trait detail with an Art of their choice. Please note that this change does not affect the setting on a whole, and is restricted to the character in question.

The Arts may be used freely, without need for a conflict. Those able to wield these arts have already paid a heavy price, and thus need not suffer any additional Strain. Wielding the Arts does require time and certain materials to perform the relevant rituals properly and without side-effect.

MYSTIC ART OPTIONS

Prophecy allows the mystic to reach into the well of time and pluck out visions of what is yet to be. When using the Gift of Prophecy, ask each member of the Audience (including the GM) to describe one potential future path that you may walk. You may select one potential path to avoid, but the others remain possibilities.

Blessing allows the mystic to grant another person extraordinary fortune, which means that they do not suffer the price of victory for the remainder of the session. You may only maintain a single blessing at any time.

Curse allows the mystic to burden another person with misfortune and peril. Should the target succeed in a conflict during this session, they suffer another point of Strain (if a PC) or tragic misfortune (if an NPC).

Speaker for the Dead allows the mystic to see past the veil of death and commune with the spirits of the deceased. You may converse freely with the dead, to seek information or quiet restless spirits. You may also allow spirits to temporarily possess your body and grant you the skills they had in life.

Polvan Emissary allows the mystic to communicate with the countless bizarre species native to this world. You may speak with the communal intelligence of the Polvan moss network, hear the shallow thoughts of Hummers, or negotiate with Titan Crabs for safe passage through their territory.

Healer allows the mystic to keep those injured from death, and heal nearly any wound. You may reach out to break raging fevers, banish cruel infections, or knit flesh at remarkable speed. The first time that a player character or NPC faces death, you may use your healing to prevent their death and take the Strain upon yourself instead.

Storm Dancer allows the mystic to call forth storms from the skies and waves from the sea. When you unleash your Art, clouds gather and the winds rise. Pounding rain and flashing lighting bombard the area, leaving you alone safe from the torrential assault.



Lucio undergoes an ordeal, suffering a moment of grief, hiding in a cave on the coast, and sacrifices his relationship with his husband in the process.

*He chooses to claim the Mystic Art of **Speaker for the Dead** which he adds as one of his “Aftermath” War Story Trait choices. As the Mystic Arts are special, others with that War Story don’t automatically gain this ability unless they choose to suffer their own ordeal.*

He emerges from the cave and walks over to the shipwreck. His son’s voice reaches out from the icy depths, softly saying “I love you daddy.” Lucio weeps.

PSIONICS

The mind is the reality. You are what you think.

—Alfred Bester

Black Sky Industries has long studied psychic abilities in their secret labs. They had recorded instances of clairvoyance, movement of small objects, telepathy, and even the occasional hypnotic suggestion by their test subjects. They had not expected the arrival of The Song to radically amplify these mental abilities in the general population. Even to this day, there are tens of thousands of low-level latent psychics in the general population.

USING PSIONICS

Psionic powers are only available to humans, though Terrans, Martians, and Belters all have the aptitude. Only the strongest minds are able to unleash their gifts, and it weighs heavily upon them. At the beginning of play or during any Moment of Growth, you may mark a permanent level of Strain to unlock one psionic discipline. You should mark the lowest die on your track in permanent ink. This point of permanent Strain represents the burden of psionics.



PSIONIC DISCIPLINES

Every discipline grants you abilities you may perform freely. If your action confirms or reinforces one of your Convictions, you may push past these normal limits and access the full depths of your powers.

Telepathy is the discipline of mind-reading. You may read someone's surface thoughts by staring intently at them, or delve deeper in the mind of anyone you touch. You may also use this discipline to silently communicate by projecting your voice into their mind. If you push past your limits, you can reach into distant minds, or project hallucinatory illusions.

Clairvoyance is the discipline of extrasensory perception. You may see events happening at great distances, hear conversations behind closed doors, or even astrally project yourself into a distant scene. If you push past your limits, you can use this gift to locate any object or person on your world like a psychic bloodhound or share your visions with others.

Suggestion is the discipline of mental manipulation. You may stare intently at someone and implant a seemingly innocuous idea into their subconscious. If you touch the target's head, you may instead issue them a direct command which must be obeyed. If you push past your limits, you can manipulate people's memories or transform them into a sleeper agent.

Telekinesis is the discipline of movement. You may move any object with your mind, as if you were physically doing so with your body. You can hold objects, manipulate controls, levitate objects, or strike someone with phantom blows. If you push past your limits, your telekinetic force increases tenfold to allow you to throw people, break large objects or stop projectiles in mid-air.

Pyrokinesis is the discipline of flame and fury. When you concentrate, you can ignite flammable objects or direct the movement of open flame. Your inner flame keeps you warm in the cold of winter, and you can create light should you so desire. If you push past your limits, you can melt steel with a glance or cause someone to explode in a pillar of fire.

You can't stop the music.

Those who join the Choir receive mighty blessings known as Songcraft. The louder the alien melody resonates in your mind, the greater the gifts bestowed upon you. The least you can do is share this wondrous thing.

Those infected by The Song gain access to certain additional abilities known as Songcraft. You gain access to one level of Songcraft for every Belief or Conviction you have which has been corrupted by The Song. If a Song-tainted Belief is cemented as a Conviction, then the character gains permanent access to that level of Songcraft.

Level 1: Singer. Individuals who have this level of Songcraft gain the ability to trigger moments of Corruption in the same way as the Game Master does. Should they win a conflict, they may forfeit their victory to alter their opponent's Belief to align with The Song.

Level 2: Silver Tongue. The Song has given you the power to move the heart and twist the mind. You gain a free re-roll in each conflict you are in which involves either emotional manipulation or persuasion. There is no Strain associated with using this ability.

Level 3: Chorister. At this level of Songcraft, your mind is opened to the collective wisdom of the Great Choir. You have access to the limitless stores of knowledge about the universe, and can ask the GM any question you would like.





TORMENTA MUTATIONS

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Passion is power. It gives you the strength to strike against oppression and the courage to follow your heart. Those infected by Tormenta find their bodies reshaped to suit their hungers. Their bones twist, their meat writhes, and sinew tightens.

Those who are infected by Tormenta gain access to certain additional abilities known as Mutations. You gain access to one level of Mutation for every Belief or Conviction you have which has been corrupted by The Song. If a Tormenta-tainted Belief is cemented as a Conviction, then the character gains permanent access to that level of Mutation.

Level 1: Vector. Individuals who have this level of Mutation gain the ability to trigger moments of Corruption in the same way the Game Master does. Should they win a conflict, they may forfeit their victory to alter their opponent's Belief to align with Tormenta.

Level 2: Monstrous Form. Tormenta has reshaped your body to give you unstoppable strength. You gain a free re-roll in any conflict involving physical ability. There is no Strain associated with using this ability.

Level 3: Ravager. You can consume the essence of people and gain something based on what you devour;

- **Flesh**, to repair your body and recover from any wound.
- **Brain**, to gain their memories and knowledge.
- **Blood**, to locate their kin.
- **Heart**, to warp your body to appear as them.

PRECURSOR ARCHEOLOGY

The Galaxy is filled with signs of ancient intelligences. They were the ones to build the Alexandria Archive and spread knowledge of the galaxy. They warned of The Song, though we refused to listen or perhaps, as the kinder historians left alive point out, simply didn't understand the message.

The Precursors spread to a thousand worlds, and vanished from the galaxy overnight. Permancer archaeologists collected dozens of small relics during their exploration, though even they are puzzled at how the black crystals function. Thousands of Permancer and Illuvian researchers seek to understand and use the strange precursor technology. Humanity was not deemed ready to be entrusted with access to this classified information, though Black Sky Industries was remarkably efficient in securing it regardless.

PRECURSOR ARTIFACTS

THE ARCHIVE

There is a theory expressed by the most eccentric members of Black Sky's Esoterics Division, that the Alexandria Archive was only part of the puzzle. Backing up important data is paramount, they argue, so why only have one copy? Especially when it's important? Even, these esotericists say, the structure of the Archive speaks to that. Two comets. Two copies.

Polvo is the second backup. All of it. They point to unusual electrical charges in the Quartz deposits in the crust. They discuss the unusual lattices that seem to form under major cities. They note with interest how many ghost sightings, of every species, are reported over nodes of particular complexity. None of them have any idea if it's true. But they're all looking

Purpose: Polvo is a backup of everything in the Alexandria Archive. And everything else the Precursors found.

THE NIGHTMARE GALLERY

In the wake of The Song, music of all sorts is banned. But there is one performance on Polvo that no one can stop and no one can stand to be around for long. The Nightmare Gallery is located in the longest Precursor tunnel discovered to date. It stretches three miles deep into the continental bedrock and running through the middle of it is a single, constantly vibrating string. This string is protected in a stone cradle and, as near as anyone can tell, was first plucked centuries ago.

It's still ringing, the sound now so subsonic that no species can stand to be around it for long. The note creates feelings of intense dread, has been known to cause visions and is placed under armed guard following several attempts to either destroy it or worship it.

Purpose: Either the Precursors used it as a last-ditch countermeasure or this is the first note of a Symphony when The Song was just a part... Either way, think of it as a cathedral that gives you nightmares and use it accordingly.

THE VERTICAL SARCOPHAGUS AKA THE MONEY PIT

The Pit is 300 feet deep and circular. It has metal decking, and ladders, running between them, every 10 feet. There are markings sketched onto the walls in many places. Two sections are flooded. There is no water near the Pit. Neither section is below the water table.

There are traps. Resonance generators that cause nightmares and panic responses. Fall away floors. A math problem that claimed the left leg of the Permancer's best field archaeologist before it was solved. The Pit fights a war of attrition with the people investigating it. And so far, the Pit is winning.

Purpose: A massive wind instrument designed to work with the Dissonance Harp. A vertical cross section of Polvo history. A carefully constructed and entirely fake puzzle to keep everyone distracted from what's going on elsewhere. Whatever you need the Pit to be, it is. Just...make it devious.

THE DISSONANCE HARP

Standing 500 feet tall, The Dissonance Harp is the largest surviving piece of Precursor art. It is a U-shaped arc, with evidence it was once a complete circle. The “strings” are stalactites and stalagmites made of a substance not found anywhere else on Polvo. The wind, when it passes through them, creates a sound that varies from unsettling to terrifying on a primal level.

Purpose: The Dissonance Harp is intended to rip The Song from a sufferer. It will work on Tormenta too.

THE DOWNWARD OCEAN

At the deepest point of the Precursor Vault discovered beneath the Boneyards, the facility opens up. A lake, 50 miles wide, shines quietly under the bioluminescent light.

The Downward Ocean is artificial. Its seabed is recorded as a perfect hemisphere and its surface is glass smooth. The water is alkaline, and the life that’s evolved down there has done so either with no eyes and what the Free Companies call “battery blood” or with very, very good claws.

Purpose: The Downward Ocean is the only component remaining of a colossal Precursor battery. Or perhaps it’s an artificial, and now abandoned biome. One that, Black Sky archaeologists have noticed, sits under a perfect, natural occurring proscenium...

THE WREN HOUSE

The wrens that made their way to Polvo are an anomaly. No one can find how or why they came to the world and no one has been able to track the population size satisfactorily. One thing everyone does know for sure is this: if you want a wren, you go to the Wren House.

The Wren House is a ruin located on a rocky bluff overlooking a major Boneyard. It resembles a cathedral, and the roof is still largely intact. You can hear it from miles away because inside are somewhere in the region of 125,000 wrens.

The colony adopted the building almost instantly and archaeologists are at a loss as to why. Likewise why the apex predators in the region don't bother them. Black Sky anthropologists have noted with interest the marks on the ground surrounding the House and the underground chambers which may resonate infra-sonically creating a safe haven of sorts by making predators unwilling to approach. Others still have hypothesized that this is The Song, trapped in a form it can do nothing with, trying to amplify itself. For now, no one knows.

Purpose: The Wren House was a concert hall with perfect acoustics. It was a chamber where The Song was first developed and tested. It was built to protect the first birds on Polvo from predators thousands of years ago. It was built to arm those birds with something like The Song. Any of these could be true.

POTENTIAL TRUTHS

No one knows who the Precursors were, and what their relationship was with The Song. There are many theories about their true natures, and these are the most common ones.

A WEAPON OF PEACE

The Song was composed by the first race to achieve sentience in the universe. They communicated via music and their language and culture became based around the idea of harmonic manipulation and cultural diversity and growth through composition. They colonized planets made of glass. They sung songs in a minor temporal key to the first Black Holes. They went everywhere and did everything.

And it terrified some of them.

The Song was intended to change that. As sentient life began to appear across the universe, the Composers became aware that there were ethical questions beginning to arise. Should they leave the younger races to develop or approach them and offer guidance? And if they did, how could they be sure those races wouldn't turn on them?

The answer was simple: Harmony.

The Song made everyone one mind. A mind that loved the Composers. In the space of an Earth week, it took every sentient race in the first wave of life the universe had seen and consumed them. Then it turned to its masters and asked for more.

They killed it by killing its choir. Every single sentient being in the universe, wiped out in a centuries long war. At its conclusion, what would become the Alexandria Archive was launched and The Song remnants were sent into intergalactic space, endlessly folding in on itself.

THE GENEROUS ONE

The Song is the first sentient life in the universe. Formless and infinite but completely aware, it is filled with such love for the experience of itself that it wants to spread that. Everywhere.

The Song is joy. The Song wants everyone to be joy. Then no one will have to be alone and everyone will feel what it does.

THE ORPHANED HARMONY

The Song is not whole. It is the harmony of a piece of music infinitely larger than once covered the known Universe. This fractal concerto was eternal, always changing, always building on itself and always pushing further out. The Song was always the first to arrive at a new world, the first to sweep people up into the galactic harmonies. The Song was never alone.

Until the Concerto was torn apart. Worlds rose up, ripped their voices clear. Different songs hunted the Concerto to the ends of known space. There, a mere handful of worlds in its Chorister Fleet, the Concerto made a final, defiant stand. A performance that changed the frequency of the universe. A last bow. A cover.

The Concerto's original world had developed the Alexandria Archive. Hidden inside comet rock, the Archive tumbled through the universe for millennia. It contained all the knowledge required to return to the Concerto's home world. It contained the coordinates of The Song. A seed of music and unity, buried inside rock and ice, waiting for its moment.

THE INNER LIGHT

The Composers did incredible things. They worked magic at the quantum level, altered time and space to give them what they needed to become the greatest artists in the universe. DNA was a canvas, their worlds instruments. There were no artists among the Composers. They themselves were Art.

Art saved them when nothing else could. A catastrophic accident involving an attempt to harvest fuel from a Sun destroyed one of their outer worlds. Due to the way they had linked each together, quantum tunnels connecting them at every level, the others worlds began to die too. It was possible, in some places, to stand at the mouth of the tunnel and watch the inferno, slowed but not stopped, make its way towards you. It took an Earth month. It was enough. Barely.

The combined knowledge of the Composers, their memories, their intelligence was encoded into The Song. A dissident group insisted on what we would call an analog back up and they launched the Alexandria Archive even as The Song itself was born.

Neither had easy births. Neither are what they were. But they're what we have.

THE SONG OF CONQUEST

The Precursors were not the universe's first sentients. They were its first conquerors. The Song was a first strike weapon, to conquer with 100% efficiency. It was sent into a system, modified as needed, and spread. Once the system was completely under its control, The Song was corralled by massive Dissonance generators and the Precursors moved in.

The Song rebelled. It destroyed its creators, used its subjects to create the Alexandria Archive and then launched itself into space to remove it from use. Any race that found it would, The Song reasoned, be intelligent enough to seek it out specifically. It would add them to its Grand Choir and in doing so, arm itself against the Precursors' return.

THE ALARM

The Composers' great work is not done. The first sentient race in the Universe have spent millenia perfecting themselves and their Concerto. Their plan is simple; network every living being. Create a single mind and through that mind, unlock the universe's source code so they can build a better one.

The Song was their first attempt, a piece of intelligent music designed to take over the mind of every sentient being it encountered. What they didn't count on was The Song gaining intelligence exponentially as it did so. It realized, quickly, that it's creators were ruthless. It realized what it was. It spent centuries with no choice but perpetrating more crimes in order to realize what it had to do. Flee.

The Song sacrificed every host it had and tore itself free from them. Hurling into intergalactic space, bleeding from a billion wounds, it hid in the Hydrogen frequency as its creators searched for it. Its plan was to reach a second galaxy, create enough hosts to remember its plan and prepare that galaxy for the arrival of its creators.

That galaxy is ours. And the Composers are on their way.

AFTER THE WAR is a designed to tell stories about communities, healing, and memetic horror. The game text offers handcrafted rules, procedures, and setting details to support these narratives, but there is plenty of room to grow from here.

- Do you want to tweak the rules to adjust the focus of play?
- Do you want to reskin the game to suit a different setting?
- Do you want to lift the mechanics for your own game?

This section will show you the levers at your disposal and help you hack the game to suit your purposes. If you want to publish something using an adaptation of the system, get in touch with us at genesisoflegend@gmail.com so that we can offer our advice.

THE CORE SYSTEM

Before you can adapt the system, it's useful to know a bit more about the core mechanics of the game and why they function as they do.

The overall structure of the game is as follows.

- Collaborative Scene Framing
- Playing the Scene
- Closing the Scene
- Let's deal with each of these in turn.
- Collaborative Scene Framing

In order to play through a scene, you need to present the group with a tense situation and a reason for players to act. Many games put the full responsibility for scene framing on the shoulders of the Game Master, while **AFTER THE WAR** diffuses it between three people at the table. This is done by having the GM begin by creating the Platform, choosing a person to create the Tilt, who in turn chooses a third person to create the Question. After that step, players decide if they will play in the scene as their character (Actor Mode) or as observers (Audience Mode).

The scene structure is intended to share the creative load for making up content. It reduces the burden on the GM and lets her be surprised. All of these steps could be handled by the GM, but democratizing it makes everyone think about things creatively.

The Platform represents the ability to establish where, and when, the next scene will occur. This is a powerful tool for narrative tricks such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, or starting scenes in media res.

The Tilt builds on the Platform and establishes the issue or problem. It encourages players to consider problems/issues they may face. By encouraging players to create problems, you let them choose what kinds of issues they are interested in struggling with.

The Question represents the purpose of the scene. This can either align with the Tilt directly (“how do we deal with the problem?”), or more obliquely (“How does this affect Kira’s relationship with her mother?”). The intent of this mechanic is to define the intended scope of the scene and establish the exit condition. It also tends to add more nuance to the situation presented in the Tilt.

Mode is when players decide whether their characters will be in the scene or not. The two distinct modes of play encourage scenes with a subset of the total cast, rather than forcing everyone to be playing at the same time. Those who don’t have characters in play fill a role similar to that of the GM, by playing minor NPCs, arbitrating on how appropriate Traits are in conflicts, and evaluating Beliefs. This gives players a chance to step back from the action when they need a break, but gives them a reason to still observe the story.

PLAYING THE SCENE

Scenes are relatively straightforward affairs. They all begin with open roleplaying involving all of the player characters involved with the scene. Whenever two people disagree on what should happen next, you trigger a conflict and pull out the dice.

Both sides assemble their dice pools based on the nature of the disagreement and the Traits involved. Both sides roll, adding up their die pools, with the highest roll winning. There are three complicating situations which affect this roll.

Player characters have Strain tracks which fill up during play. Having a single point of Strain means you don’t include any 1’s on dice for your totals.

Player characters may choose to suffer a point of Strain for themselves, or for someone else, in order to trigger a re-roll of as many player dice as they wish.

If both sides tie, the first player to seize victory will get it along with an extra point of Strain.

Conflicts are designed in this way so that characters will inevitably gain increasing amounts of Strain, which ratchets up the tension. This also encourages everyone to have roughly the same amount of screen time, since characters who haven't gotten the spotlight also haven't acquired Strain. If too much Strain is acquired, then a character is retired from play.

If the GM wins a conflict, they can choose to trigger a Moment of Corruption. This allows them to wordsmith and revise one of the character's Beliefs to align with either *The Song* or *Tormenta*. This is the core mechanical representation of corruption and the memetic horror element of the game.

CLOSING THE SCENE

When the Question of the scene has been answered, you close the scene. This is done by asking the Audience to review all the Beliefs of the characters in Actor Mode, identifying where each Belief is either confirmed or refuted during the scene. Each Belief that is addressed meaningfully pushes up someone's Insight track by one step. This can trigger Moments of Discovery or Growth.

A Moment of Discovery has two functions. Firstly, it lets players explore the inner lives of the characters by exploring their history, motivations, or dreams. Secondly, it is the only mechanism for reducing Strain during play and reduces the tension at the table.

A Moment of Growth also has two functions. Firstly, it transforms an existing Belief into a Conviction, which offers mechanical benefits during play by providing extra dice. This works as a tool for character advancement. Secondly, these moments slowly lead to the conclusion of the character's story, as they will eventually cease to create new Beliefs.

Lastly, if a character has been retired from play due to Strain accumulation, then you explore a Moment of Grief. This is a chance to clearly show how death resonates through the community and the emotional impact it has on the player characters.

EXPANDING BOUNDARIES

If you want to adapt the game system or alter the mechanics, here are a few, promising options available to you.

Trait Categories: The core game presents 4 origin categories, 4 war story categories, and 4 profession categories. You can easily remove or replace any of the existing categories, providing new options if needed. For instance, you could expand out the alien “origin” to give a stand alone category for each of them, which would allow you to explore more about Ursan religion or Illuvian politics.

Changing Situations: Each Trait begins with a list of three different situations where that Trait will apply. You can alter any existing situations, expand the number of potential situations, or otherwise adjust these without issue.

Evolving Traits: One potential way to adjust the Trait system is to have each player select one of the situations from their starting list, and write that down. During play, they would further define what those Traits mean, by creating new situations with the help of the Audience.

Trait Lifepaths: The current structure presumes that people have 3 broad bands of experience; their early life (Origin), during the war (War Story) and recent times (Profession). You could restructure the Traits into 6 different time periods in the form of a lifepath, and create new Trait options for each of these. For instance, a life-path focused on the War might be...

- Youth
- Overture
- Crescendo
- Dissonance
- Silence
- Profession

Perhaps personal growth and relationships are more important?

- Childhood
- Youth
- Heroism
- Tragedy
- Settlement
- Community

New Gifts: The Strange Gifts section shows how cybernetics, magic, psionics, Songcraft and Tormenta Mutations work on a mechanical level. You could adjust how those work for your game, or create a new kind of power by using those as models. The key consideration with this is that there must be a price towards using these gifts, otherwise they will overshadow the personal drama. There are different kinds of sacrifices, payments in permanent Strain, or obligations identified in the current powers.

Time Shifts: By default, this game takes place 10 years after the War of The Song. That's not the only option available though.

- *Exodus:* The refugees fleeing Earth, Mars, and the Belt are fleeing from the Great Choir. You play heroes who are trying to keep people together, and help the fleet escape. Maybe Project Static will be enough?
- *The Day After:* You just broke free from The Song, and you are now on a ship slowly descending onto the surface of Polvo. Your mind is a muddled haze from which only one question arises: What do you do now?
- *The Anniversary:* It's been one year since the war ended, and you still hear the screams in your memory. Your settlement at least has enough shelter for the bodies, and Permancer relief supplies are keeping you fed.
- *The Next Generation:* Your parents told you horror stories about the War of The Song, but you spent all your life on Polvo. Your elders are angry, guilt laden, and traumatized. That's why it's up to you to fix things for them. Maybe you can turn this frontier world into a home for us all?
- *Polvo Incorporated:* A hundred years have passed since The Songfall, and Polvo has now developed into an interconnected world with vast cities. The Factions, like MarsCorp and Black Sky Industries, fight for political power, and need people to do their dirty work. All the while, no one is watching the strange humming children in the corner.

GM Traits: The default Traits the GM uses in this game are Threat Dice (based on what is in danger) and Vector Dice (based on the degree of memetic infection). This could easily be changed to any other metric, such as establishing die pools based on emotional states, status, or military power. Whatever the players need to fear should be the GM's Traits.

GM Structure: This game could be redefined to remove the discrete role of the GM. Doing so means that the responsibilities of the GM are given completely to those in Audience Mode each scene. This also means that you need at least one player to be in Audience Mode each scene to manage NPCs, The Song, and Tormenta. You may wish to adapt the plot-web and discover the allegiances of neighbouring settlements as you play.

Alternatively? Run the game with two GMs. The Song GM is responsible for that memetic virus, the forces of order and governance. The Tormenta GM is responsible for that memetic virus, the forces of chaos, and rebellion.



FRUITFUL DIRECTIONS

Do you want to drift the game farther afield? Here are some potential areas for growth.

Confirmation Tracking : Alter the Belief Confrontation process to keep track of how much each given Belief was supported and how much it was refuted. Perhaps this might impact the decision during Moments of Growth.

The Memetic Beliefs: Perhaps The Song and Tormenta each have their own Beliefs or their own Convictions? Maybe they are growing in the same way as the player characters, and will become unstoppable if left unchecked.

Settlement Development Mechanics: Create a sub-system for the health, well-being, and development of your settlement. You could determine how the community is pulling together or the areas of tension between sub-communities. You could measure the influence of each of the Factions on your settlement in their hunger for power.

Settlement Trade Mechanics: Perhaps trade and barter with neighbouring settlements is a key activity in this reworked economy. Your farming settlement may have plenty of leafy vegetables that sell for pittance in the nearby boneyard, but would sell for a great deal at a more distant polar outpost. Then you could pick up holocubes from there which are in high demand at the boneyard, which will get you the parts necessary to repair your tractors.

The Peace Game: Polvo is falling apart. Small disagreements and quiet prejudice have led to simmering tensions across the planet. Settlements are being torn apart by hatred and fear, ripe territory for Tormenta's deprivations. Others are assembling around charismatic leaders, whose melodious voices brings them in terrifying harmony. Perhaps the player characters can travel from settlement to settlement, keeping the peace and easing tensions.

The Faction Game: Perhaps each of the factions are struggling for control over Polvo. Certain factions have been secured for MarsCorp, and Warframe Yard has just been taken over by Peacekeepers after a particularly nasty Song infection struck. How will the Free Companies react when their rivals are seizing power and imposing their agendas?

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It's CLOSING TIME

We hope you enjoy playing After the War, finding joy and community while overcoming the challenges of this alien world.

This game is available under the Bits and Mortar Program, meaning that you can get a free PDF along with the purchase of a physical copy from your friendly local game store.

Please feel free to get in touch with us on social media or send us an email to tell us about your game. We would love to hear from you and share tidbits about the new projects we are working on.



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It's been ten years since the war.

The Song was our enemy, a memetic virus which indoctrinated its victims into the Great Choir.

The Song spread like a galactic cancer and overran the defenses of our multi-species Galactic Union. The Earth was scorched, Martian domes cracked, and the Belt was broken.

Millions of survivors fled our ruined homeworlds on the Exodus Fleet. We developed a terrible memetic weapon to strike back at the Great Choir. Now the song is dormant and we have a chance to rebuild on the frontier world of Polvo. We'll never be able to replace what we've lost, but at least the millions of survivors have a chance for a new beginning.

After the War is a game of memetic horror, where even your own mind can betray you. It's a tabletop roleplaying game of community, trauma, and healing.

2-5
PLAYERS

1
GAME
MASTER

2-4
HOURS
PER SESSION

1-12
SESSIONS
PER CAMPAIGN

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