

EVE™
ONLINE



EVE: THE BOOK

VERSION 1.4

DRAFTER: FISCHER MARTIN AKA fiLa AKA turnschuh

Thanks to:



"We are Eye Of God, being so, we see the big picture."



"Strength thru Unity!"



Special thanks to:

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All members of EOG
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All members of ASCN
Everyone I forgot

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EVE – EXODUS



EVE takes place in a cluster of stars far from mankind's original habitat, planet Earth. How far away, and whether or not that cradle of civilization still exists, is a mystery. Humans arrived through a natural wormhole and, gazing up upon an alien sky they had never seen, were completely unable to determine where this new world was located. From the New Eden solar system, where the gate of EVE once led to the old world, humans expanded in all directions at a furious pace, exploring and colonizing rapidly.

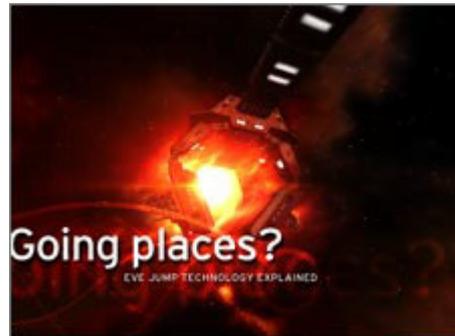
Then, unexpectedly and seemingly unprovoked, the EVE gate collapsed in an apocalyptic catastrophe of a scale never before witnessed by the human race, ruining the New Eden system in the process. Thousands of small colonies were left in complete isolation to fend for themselves, cut off from the old world. For millennia they endured, clinging to the brink of extinction, and only a handful managed to survive.

Of those that lasted, five were to rise up and become the major empires that, between them, hold the balance of power in the world of EVE. Today, they are known as the Amarr Empire, the Gallente Federation, the Caldari State, the Minmatar Republic, and the Jovian Empire. Additionally, the world is full of several small, independent factions and states.

For more than a century, the five empires have lived together in relative peace. They've continually strived to maintain this peace, as each faction realizes only too well the grave consequences of a massive inter-stellar war. Recent technological breakthroughs in FTL travel, and the ensuing increase in space travelers, have shaken, but not broken, the fragile peace... at least not yet.

Interstellar Travelling

Well, here is a detailed description for all you techno-buffs on jumps - the amazing technology on how and why it is possible to traverse the vastness of space in a matter of minutes. Tacked along are various interesting tidbits on the history of the races and their elusive search for their ancestry. Written by one of the best recognized intellectual in the world of EVE, this is an insightful glimpse into the minds and beliefs of those that live there.



By Alain E. Topher

Where do we come from?

For centuries men speculated from where mankind came. Today, it has been established beyond reasonable doubt that all the different races and factions found in our part of the galaxy must have originated from a common source.

Yet it has proven difficult to piece all the different artifacts together into a coherent picture. In any case, it seems logical from a biological standpoint that humans evolved on the same planet. Even if various differences can be found between and within factions, the likeness in the DNA structure clearly points to a common origin. But then the question is: where is this fabled planet that humans evolved on and how did the human race end up in numerous separate places?



Lets look at what we know: It is now undoubted that a race capable of interstellar travel roamed our space many thousands of years ago. A number of ancient jump gates, or fractions of jump gates, are known to exist in numerous solar systems. Whether these jump gates were built by our own ancestors or a totally alien race is unknown. These jump gates have some peculiar traits. First of all, age tests have shown that all these jump gates were built within the space of 50 to 100 years. And yet the design of many of the jump gates is a little bit varied between places, like they were constructed by different people. These facts raise many questions: why were they all constructed within this short time-span, and none since? Were they built by the same race, or maybe two or more conflicting races?

The answer most favored is that of war. Only a conflict could explain this quick construction of dozens of jump gates and why everything seemed to come to an abrupt halt one day. But who were fighting? And where are the combatants now? It seems highly unlikely that factions capable of inter-stellar warfare suddenly disappear into thin air.

By studying the layout of the jump gate remnants, a curious pattern emerges. The jump gates snake out like a spider-web from a central point. And what is the central point? It is the system known to Amarrians, who first found it, as 'Imlau Eman', or the 'Mouth of God', but is today better known as EVE.

The EVE system is an enigma that is still very much a mystery to us. The system itself is not that impressive – just some space debris and a few asteroid belts orbiting a pale white dwarf. But at the outskirts of the system is a phenomenon that has puzzled us for centuries. At the center of this phenomenon lies a huge structure, obviously built by some advanced civilization eons ago. The structure looks very much like a jump gate, except it is many times bigger than any space structure of ours. The gate is fairly plain all around, but there are markings here and there, in some ancient language that has not been fully decrypted. At the top, the largest of these markings is a three-letter word that says EVE. There isn't full agreement among scholars about the meaning of this word, but most people regard it to be simply the name of the gate.

Now, every indication points to this being the gate that our forefathers used to enter this world, but despite massive studies on the gate and the EVE system in whole, we still haven't uncovered what happened to the gate all these millenniums ago.

Extremely bright and powerful electromagnetic turbulence emits from the EVE gate, as it is commonly called. This turbulence seems to originate from within the gate, so it is believed that the gate is actually open and the electromagnetic storms are coming through from wherever the gate is linked to.

In any case, the turbulence makes it extremely difficult to study the gate. Fortunately, the storms pulsate rhythmically, meaning that every other year or so they recede enough to allow closer scrutinizing. But even then the turbulence is enough to rip to pieces any vessel foolish enough to wander close to it.

The immense brightness emitting from the gate can easily be seen in solar systems close to the EVE system as a vibrating bright star on the night sky. But even in systems in the farthest regions of the known world it can still be seen with the aid of a telescope. The Amarrians, whose home system is only a few light-years from the EVE system, were in the best position to marvel at the gate. Many thousands of years ago, while still on a primitive level, the Amarrians actually coupled the peculiar phenomenon they saw in the sky with their age-old religion and even today the EVE gate holds great importance in the Amarrian state religion.

The search for our ancestors goes on. Even if the facts lead us to the EVE system, it seems to be the end of the road. The extensive studies done there over the decades seem no closer to providing the answer to this important question.

The earliest jump gates and the first inter-stellar travelers.

Once the Amarr Empire had reached the technology level where it could enter space, it started to vigorously chart their home system. Due to technological limitations this survey took a long time. Finally, the Amarrians stumbled upon the remains of a jump gate at the outskirts of their solar system.

By studying the remains, which were more or less intact, the Amarrians were able to garner enough information to build a jump gate of their own. The jump gate was operational but obviously it lacked connections to other jump gates, as it was the only one of its kind. Thus the Amarrians were forced to physically send ships capable of building jump gates between solar systems before a stable wormhole could be

formed into the system to connect the two gates. These gate construction ships often took decades to arrive, the crew suspended in cryo-tanks for the duration of the voyage. Only in recent years with the coming of jump drives capable of jumping between systems with no jump gates in them is it possible to overcome this time-consuming prelude to inter-stellar traveling via jump gates and still today dozens of gate construction ships are enroute to a distant system.

But patience is a virtue the Amarrians have mastered well and they steadily expanded in every direction from their Amarr home system. Now, more than two millenniums since the construction of their first jump gate, the Amarrians occupy hundreds of solar systems.



The Gallenteans and the Caldari discovered jump gate technology at relatively the same time, due to the simple fact that their home worlds were then in the same system. This was a little over 700 years ago. The Gallenteans and the Caldari did not enjoy the luxury of finding a relatively intact jump gate relic in their system as the Amarrians did. Instead there were only fragmentary pieces to be found, so they had nothing to build on. Still, these fragments pointed the researchers into the right direction and

many jump gate theories were tried out. It wasn't until after the discovery of a companion brown dwarf, making the system a binary system, that the gate research got on the right track. It wasn't long after that before the first working jump gate was erected. The Amarr type of jump gate and the Gallente/Caldari one both work on the same principle (see next chapter), but there are some minuscule differences in how the different parts of the gate work exactly.

At that time both the Gallente and the Caldari worlds were bursting at the seams and major effort was made in sending ships to nearby systems to build jump gates. The mass exodus of the Gallenteans and the Caldari to other systems was nothing like the calm, deliberate expansion of the Amarr Empire, where only one system was



colonized at a time and every aspect of the expansion was rigidly controlled by the state. Instead, private firms, the first of the Caldari Corporations among them, were chiefly responsible for surveying systems, sending the constructions ships, and selling the territory to the colonists. In the space of 500 years or so the combined expansion of the Gallenteans and the Caldari had almost equaled the total expansion of the Amarrians in 2000 years.

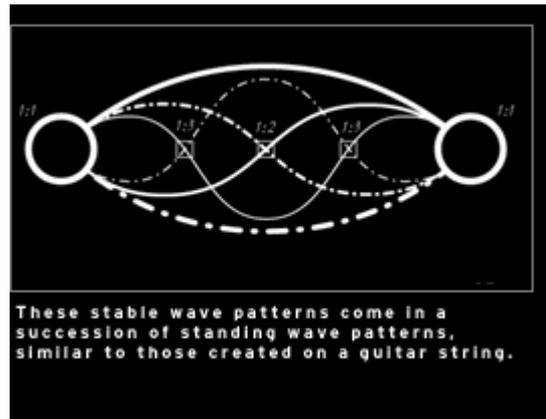
The Jovians are not very forthcoming with information about their technological advances in this regard. Today they employ jump gates functioning on the same principle as the other's, but nothing is known on where or when the Jovians acquired their jump gate technology. However, they've revealed an interesting fact: according to ancient Jovian legends, the Jovians used the ancient jump gates that scatter the

world to travel between solar systems a long time ago, before the jump gates crumbled. The legends stay silent about the makers of the gates.

The principles of jump gate technology.

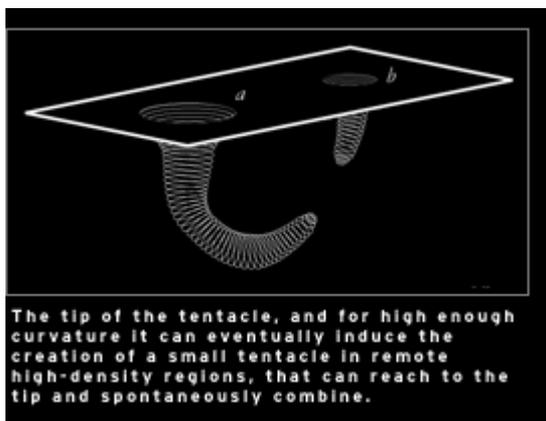
Jump gates are built around artificial wormholes, created by exploiting gravitational resonances found in binary systems. This resonance is as a friction between gravitational waves of stellar objects, the more massive the objects, the stronger the resonance between them. Positions of planets in a solar system, as well as the complex structure of dust rings around heavy planets illustrate this resonance.

In binary systems there exists strong resonance phenomena, where the gravitational field of two stars in a stable binary formation would interfere with each other, like ripples from two wave sources. These stable wave patterns come in a succession of standing wave patterns, similar to those created on a guitar string. The strongest resonance is the 1:1 resonance (the first harmonic, so to speak), with two stationary node points situated in the center of each of the two stars. The second strongest resonance is the 1:2 resonance (the second harmonic), where an additional stationary node point appears in the field exactly mid-way between the stars (if of equal mass), and so on for successive resonances.



At the node points, the rapid oscillation of the gravitational field in opposite directions creates strong shear in the contravariant energy-momentum tensor. Under normal circumstances this stress is dissipated by high-frequency graviton radiation, and does thus not create any noticeable macroscopic phenomena.

But if this stress is confined and forced to build-up in a limited region of space, then the tensor-field will eventually develop a steadily growing high-curvature tentacle like structure in the space-time continuum. More specifically, the tentacle constitutes a self-avoiding 4-manifold that attempts to grow farther and farther from itself. The tip of the tentacle, where the curvature is highest, effectively acts like a magnet on space-time, and for high enough curvature it can eventually induce the creation of a small tentacle in remote high-density regions, that can reach to the tip and spontaneously combine.



An analogy of this phenomenon is when lightning strikes ground, where the tip of the downward lightning actually creates a small upward lightning emanating from the ground and the two combine

somewhere above the ground, thus closing the electrical circuit.

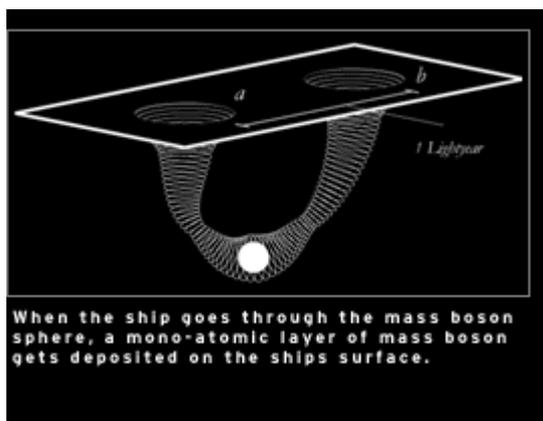
The main device of jump gates is a so-called mass boson sphere, based on one of the fundamental physic fields that mediates mass, and thus interacts strongly with

gravitational waves. The sphere is filled with mass boson plasma, which reflects gravitational waves, pretty much in the same way as a mirror reflects light. By adjusting the plasma density so that it reflects the high-frequency gravitational waves involved in the dissipation of tensor shear, this radiation is trapped within the sphere, thus leading to a steady net increase of the gravitational stress within the resonance node, which eventually leads to the creation of the high-curvature tentacle. An analogy of this is the laser, which builds up a highly coherent and intense beam of electromagnetic energy by enclosing oscillators within a reflecting cavity.

The distance between the two ends of the wormhole depends on the mass of the suns in the binary system and on what resonance node the jump gate is located. In order to connect two jump gates a trial-and-error method is needed, often lasting many years. This is because the tentacle created by the tensor-field cannot be controlled or directed in where to open. But by having another jump gate in a nearby system build up gravitational-stress in it its own, without reaching critical point, at the same time that the tentacle is growing, then the likelihood of a connection being made increases statistically, although many attempts are still often needed. This is similar to raising a metal rod in a thunder storm.

The first jump gate versions built by the Amarrians were limited in the way that once a wormhole had been created and a ship slipped through a new wormhole had to be made before another ships could pass. As it could take several days or even months to re-connect the two jump gates, passing was slow. Later versions of jump gates allowed the jump gates to hold the wormhole open for a longer time and modern day jump gates can keep a wormhole connection open for several dozen years before it has to be reset. Also, the first jump gates were only able to connect and hold a single wormhole at a time but today they can hold several wormholes open at the same time, allowing jump gates to be connected to several other jump gates at once.

In an average binary system the jump gate has a range of around 5 light-years, provided the jump gate is constructed on the third resonance node. More powerful jump gates can be constructed on the second resonance node between the stars. Because these nodes are much farther from a solar system (often up to 0.5 lightyear away) and, more importantly, are also harder to harness, they have only recently started to be utilized. On the other hand, they have much greater range than the basic jump gates.



There are several strict limitations on jump gate travel. First of all, jump gates can only be constructed in systems with two or more suns, because of the resonance nodes. This effectively makes one in every three systems ineligible for jump gate construction.

Secondly, only one jump gate can be in operation in a system at any given time. This is due to the erratic fluctuations in the resonance fields caused by a mass boson sphere; if more than one such sphere is

active at the same time in the same system, they both become highly unstable and impossible to operate.

And thirdly, ships can only travel through wormholes if both ends of it are connected to a jump gate. This means that ships must travel between systems in normal space in order to build a jump gate. The reason for this is the extreme dilatation of the

metric along the longitudinal dimension of the tentacle, meaning that the spatial coordinate along the length of the wormhole is expanded, while the radial component is cyclically curved. A spaceship entering the wormhole is subject to a strong metric gradient that would put its structural integrity in jeopardy. This can be prevented by locally countering the stretching around the immediate vicinity of the ship. Here the mass boson sphere plays its second role in the gate mechanism. When the ship goes through the mass boson sphere, a mono-atomic layer of mass boson gets deposited on the ships surface. This layer counters the stretching of the ship against the metric gradient, enough to keep the structural integrity of the ship for the duration of the trip through the hole. This doesn't mean that the gradient is completely wiped out, and even seasoned space veterans still know the feeling known as 'going down the drain' when entering a wormhole.

Space vessels get a boost – the first jump drives.

Even with advanced propulsion systems it took space ships days or weeks to move between planets in a solar system. Anything that could quicken this travel was thus of immense interest for everybody.

Various efforts were made to increase the speed of ships, but most of them failed either because of too high fuel volume and cost, or because they were too limited in scope. The most successful attempt was that of the old Minmatar Empire, which built acceleration gates that employed gravity in a unique way to slingshot ships between planets. This gave the ships enough momentum to fly between planets in a much shorter time than before. But the Minmatars never discovered how to build interstellar jump gates, so their acceleration gates were limited to their home system (where they still exist today). They had begun experimenting with much larger acceleration gates capable of sending ships between solar systems, but they never got a chance to build them before the Amarrians invaded and enslaved the Minmatars.

The Amarr Empire itself was slow to make any breakthroughs in this regard, despite their ever-growing space empire. For a long time they made do with ships traveling at ca. 10% of the speed of light, this speed seemed sufficient to them. At last they discovered the principles behind jump drive technology more or less accidentally, while researching new weapon technologies. The first Amarrian jump drive was built nearly 300 years ago.



The situation was different for the Gallenteans and Caldari. Their home planets were in the same system and this meant that intra-system trade runs became an important element in their society right from the outset of their space activity. Thus there was a much greater incentive to find an acceptable solution to intra-system travel. The first jump drive built is the Sotiyo-Urbaata Drive, built by Caldari engineers more than 600 years ago. It was immensely big, tremendously expensive and outrageously inefficient, but it worked. The Sotiyo-Urbaata Drive, along with later versions, sped considerably up the social and technological development for both the Gallenteans and the Caldari and is without a doubt one of the most important discoveries ever made.

Since their first appearance all these long centuries ago, jump drives have become ever more advanced, making them cheaper, more reliable and more efficient. Yet the difference between the Sotiyo-Urbaata Drive and a modern day drive is not so great; both work on the same underlying principle, both allow very fast travel within the solar system. But the latest versions of jump drives are for many the true jump drives, for they allow ships to traverse solar systems even where there are no jump gates. These revolutionary jump drives, which are still relatively rare and expensive, combine traditional jump drive technology with jump gate technology and create a whole new piece of equipment.

Faster-than-light travel – how?

So what is the elusive answer to FTL travel? It was found through advanced research in the field of quantum electrodynamics. By creating depleted vacuum, that is, vacuum as found in space but completely stripped of all energy, and then expanding this depleted vacuum to envelop a ship, the ship is capable of moving faster than light through this bubble of depleted vacuum. A depleted vacuum bubble is more than frictionless – it is so anti-friction that things (including light) actually move faster in it than they would in complete vacuum.



The jump drive creates depleted vacuum by repeatedly 'compressing' vacuum between two polar discs, draining all energy neutrons and quarks out of it.

All space ships are equipped with a jump drive device. The jump drive creates depleted vacuum by repeatedly 'compressing' vacuum between two polar discs, draining all energy neutrons and quarks out of it. A laser-locked field is then created to hold the ever-increasing depleted vacuum bubble until it has enveloped the whole ship. When that happens the ship is able to enter FTL speed. Although initial experiments with the jump drive were very encouraging technology wise, problems arose in regard to navigation. Once the ship has attained FTL speed, it is very difficult for it to act or

react to the world, such as for communication or scanning purposes. Numerous experiments were made, for example with compactified dimensions radio, but without success. The unpredictable nature of quantum mechanics made it very difficult to create a stable enough vacuum bubbles to allow for precise time measurements due to fluctuating speeds. Finally, a solution was found. It was discovered that gravity capacitors similar to the control system used in jump gates were able to pick up gravity signals from 'normal' space while the ship was on FTL speed. By locking the capacitor onto one of these signals, the ship travels to it. The bubble is then automatically dispersed once certain distance from the gravity well is acquired. The only problem is that these capacitors can only efficiently pick up signals from gravity wells of certain size or above, with the minimum being a small moon or a cluster of asteroids. Also, in order for the gravity capacitor to align correctly on the destination object in relevance to the position of the sun, it must follow a relatively narrow route towards it, resulting in a fairly restricted emerge area for the ship. This puts some limits on the jump drive's usage, but as all major objects in a system can be detected, this is not such a great problem. Furthermore, it is now possible to construct 'fake' gravity wells on space stations and jump gates, which can be detected and thus homed onto by the gravity capacitor that is part of a ship's jump drive.

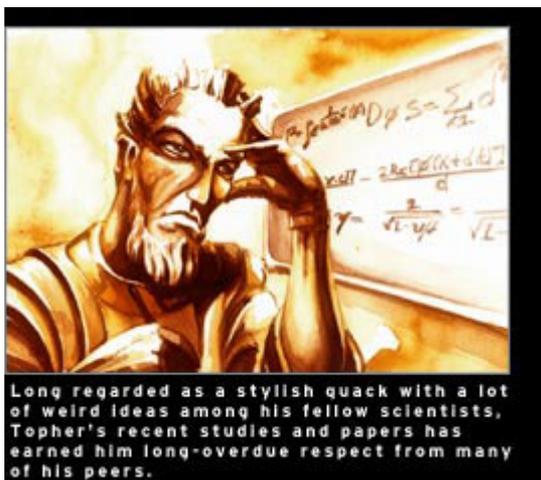
Further research into jump drives, especially those aimed at amalgamating the technology used for jump drives and the one used for jump gates, has led to more

and more advanced jump drives becoming available. It is now possible to fit a ship with a jump drive capable of inter-stellar travel. The first versions of these allowed the jump drive to connect to a jump gate in another solar system and jump to it just as if the ship had moved through a jump gate. The later versions allow ships to jump from a system with a jump gate to another system that has no jump gate, and the latest version, still only available as a prototype, allows a ship to jump between systems even if no jump gate exists in either system. The first versions of these drives simply aligned the drive with the nearest resonance node in the system (often using nodes 1:4 or even 1:5), then created instant mini-wormholes through it for just enough time for the ship to slip through. More advanced versions, allowing jumps into systems with no jump gates, are a bit more complex. They send out a constant barrage of high frequency neutron rays, based on the flat-space principle of trans-relativistic physics, through infinitesimal cosmic strings to scout out the destination system. This survey can last for several days before enough data is gathered to allow the ship to create a wormhole (through a resonance node of course) to the destination system.

About the author.

Alain Embrosius Topher has a degree in applied physics and experimental psychology from the Caille University on Gallente Prime. Topher, a brilliant but unruly student, signed up with an exploration company after his graduation and spent the next twenty years roaming around remote solar systems, collecting astrophysical data. He has always been enthusiastic about foreign and alien cultures and the main reason for his exploration scurries was the hope to discover alien artifacts. Until now he has not found any artifacts older than a few thousand years old and all which are of obvious human origin.

Having amassed a sizeable sum during his days with the exploration company, Topher finally decided to try his luck on his own and spent the next few years combing several promising systems. Working alone, or at most with a couple of assistants, made these excursions highly dangerous, and thus prime entertainment material. Topher made a deal with one of the largest entertainment network in the Gallente Federation to make vid programs about his adventures. These became hugely popular for a while, but the lack of bug-eyed monsters or glittering treasures soon turned the public indifferent. Topher, who had thrived in the limelight, decided to shelve his excursions for a while in favor of taking more exciting (and lucrative) excursions in vid studios.



Topher was content to live the life of a vid star for some years, but in the end the scientist in him begged for attention. Feeling too old to start running around barren planets again, Topher settled instead on making education shows and info clips, often in the form of games of some sort. Yet again he hit the jackpot and for billions of Gallenteans Topher is a household name associated with education and knowledge.

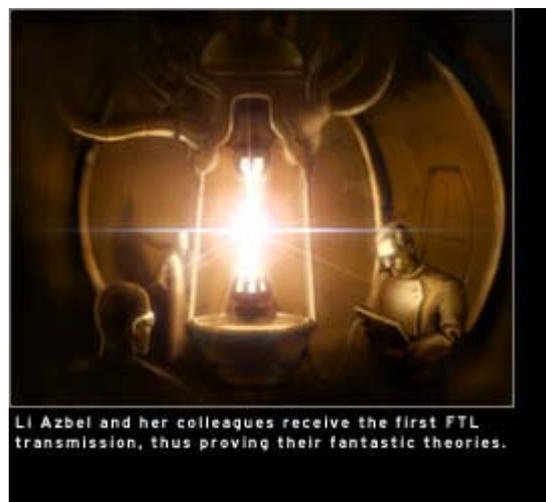
Now in his early nineties, Topher is finally settling down to a quiet academic life. His vid appearances are now few and far between and instead he's focusing on pure science, more or less for the first time in his life. Long regarded as a stylish quack with a lot of weird ideas among his fellow scientists, his recent studies and papers has earned him long-overdue respect from many of his peers.

Faster Than Light Communication

After mastering the technique of wormhole creation, it was thought that distance had finally been conquered. But despite of this communication still needed to be transmitted at the speed of light, and though wormhole did shorten distances between distant regions, interactive communication remained impossible. This problem was quickly identified as being one of the most important handicap remaining in the conquest of deep space.

The Amarrians were the first to master the jump gate technology and thus the first to face the problem. They launched massive state-funded research and tried out several radical solutions, but without success. In the end they stopped all research, accepting the fact that FTL communications were unattainable.

Centuries later the Gallenteans and the Caldari faced the same problems following the creation of the Sotiyo-Urbaata Drive. The Drive allowed FTL travel within the system the Gallenteans and Caldari lived in and communications with ships using the Drive were naturally impossible with conventional communication devices. To stimulate research in solving this, all both the Gallenteans and the Caldari promised huge awards for anybody who could come with some solution to the problem, which led to one of the most frantic goose hunt in the history of science.



Li Azbel and her colleagues receive the first FTL transmission, thus proving their fantastic theories.

Like the Amarrians before them many solutions were tried out, but none with success. Finally it was a young Gallentean woman, Li Azbel, who came out with a solution that was so simple but yet deeply rooted in arcane physics, that at first it was rejected as a hoax.

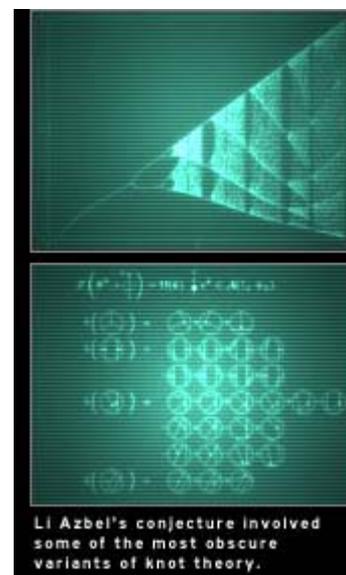
It wasn't until the famous Azbel-Wuthrich experiment that the functionality was demonstrated with success. Industrialization quickly followed, leading to one of the greatest stock market surge ever as thousands of companies extended their reach to the whole known universe.

The roots of the solution lay in an ancient paradox, often called the EPR paradox, the name shrouded in mystery. The EPR paradox is famous for contradicting quantum physics in some very important ways. Specifically it shows another old physic theory, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, to be untrue. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, believed to be named after a place or a person, affirms that the exact state of quantum particle cannot be determined with full accuracy, no matter how refined the measurement equipment is. The classical example being the measurement of the velocity and position of a free particle: to be able to measure the position of a particle you must be able to 'see' it. This means that you have to illuminate it at least with one photon. But the collision between the photon and the particle changes the velocity of the particle, thus making it impossible to determine what the velocity was before the position was measured.

The EPR paradox describes the possibility of creating a pair of particle whose quantum state was entangled in such a way as to be mirror of each other. For example a pair or particle with position and velocity given as (x_0, v) and $(x_0, -v)$, i.e. a pair of particle that at given time are at the same position, but have exactly opposed velocity vectors. After some time, the two particles would be separated by a large distance, and measurement could be done on each of them independently. Now by measuring, say, the position of particle A and the velocity of particle B, the EPR paradox states that you would thus have determined the exact state of both particles, thus violating the Heisenberg relationship.

But later experiments confirmed the Heisenberg principle, thus making the EPR paradox void, to the surprise of many. Mathematically, this didn't cause any problems as the collapse of the wave function due to measurement was an instantaneous happening. From a physical point of view, this was more difficult to comprehend, as it seemed to imply that the state change propagated instantly between the two particles. This was immediately suggested as a way to create faster-than-light communication: by making a measurement on a particle it would lead to an instantaneous change in the remote particle's state, thus transmitting one bit of information. A detailed mathematical analysis of this scenario though showed that due to the statistical nature of the quantum particle, only noise would be transmitted, thus laying to rest these speculations for millenniums.

This is precisely where Li Azbel took up the problem, with a rare insight leading to a breakthrough. She argued that even though the output of the transmission was pure noise, the structure of the noise could be used to encode the information. Indeed, it was well known that the bifurcation cascade leading to purely chaotic time-series had a universal structure, governed by the Feigenbaum constant. Taking a parametric family of functions called logistic maps, defined in the interval $[0,1]$, there existed a parameter and an initial condition of the map that could generate any arbitrary random sequence of number. Azbel considered the problem from the other side, i.e. given a finite chaotic sequence, how could you trace yourself back to the initial condition? By using a maximum entropy analysis on the Shannon information entropy of the signal she devised a way to solve this inverse problem. Furthermore, she demonstrated that by carefully modulating the measurements of tangled quantum states, basically willfully introducing noise in the measurement process itself, that specific noise structure would be carried across to the measurements of the other particle.



The process was thus the following: A byte of information is mapped on an initial condition of the logistic map leading to a chaotic attractor. This noisy sequence is then used to modulate the measurements done on a sequence of entangled particles. At the same time on the other side, measurements are made on the particles and a noise sequence is extracted. Maximum entropy analysis is then done to determine the initial condition from which this series has been generated and thus map it back to a given byte of information. Note that in this case, the noisy sequence sent is totally uncorrelated to the one measured. What they do have in common is to be from the same chaotic attractor, and that is the information that actually gets transmitted instantly, regardless of distance.

As stated before, this theoretical result was originally considered to be too incredible, to be true. The Azbel-Wuthrich experiment used a very similar setup as the ancient Aspect experiment, and it was a historical moment when the first Smiley :-)) was sent over this channel. Following that, a great gold-rush started on who would be the first to industrialize this.

The result of that rush is the familiar Fluid router, which forms the building block of universal communication as we know it today. Ignoring the mathematical intricacies, the architecture of these routers is deceptively simple. The first step of their manufacturing is the creation of the entangled quantum states. This is done by using superfluid 4-Helium, where essentially all the Helium atoms are entangled in a single quantum state due to Bose condensation. A droplet of such liquid 4-Helium is then carefully separated in two. From this point, the two droplets, and more specifically the Helium atoms in the droplets are intrinsically tangled. Each droplet is then placed in separate router box, that contain necessary mechanism to encode and decode bytestream into quantum state measurements performed on the atoms of the droplet. From that point on, these two routers are linked together, regardless of their separation. Thus a spaceship will usually buy a router pair from a network provider. One box will be placed in the spaceship, while the other one kept in the network provider's backbone, that will have connections to other routers, thus effectively forming a decentralized network, where messages can be routed across many routers and many providers. This architecture is similarly to the ancient Internet.

The only limitations of this communication system is in the capacity of the channel. Indeed, the manufacturing of the entangled 4-He superfluid is an expensive process. Furthermore, a large number of atoms are used for each byte, as a statistically relevant chaotic sequence needs to be created. The sequencing introduces a limit to the bandwidth, allowing only the transmission of x bytes/second. The amount of data sent then depletes the pool of available entangled atoms, thus limiting the total amount of data that can be sent with a given router pair.

The FTL communication services have spread to every corner of the world of EVE since they first appeared a couple of centuries ago. The services and routers, albeit owned and run by independent companies, are under constant scrutiny and regulations by a CONCORD sub-committee to enforce both security and privacy in the communications channels and to make sure the companies are correctly rendering the services they claim. The fierce competition on the telecommunication market makes it cheap, efficient and reliable to talk, transfer data and even conduct business for people light-years apart.

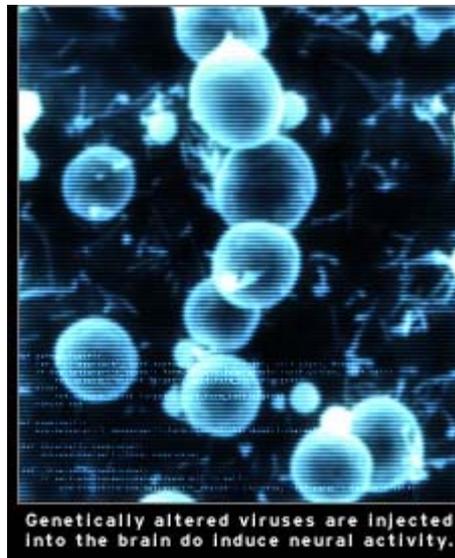
Neural Boosters

*Committee on Transgressions on Illegal Substances vis-à-vis the Space Industry
Department of Behavioral Studies, University of Caille On Behalf of the Gallente
Federation Senate Report A-4-1 (Revision Update #2)*

For the last few years there has been a marked increase in demand for Cerebral Cognitive Inducing Neural Booster (commonly called boosters) in the space industry, notably amongst space pilots. These boosters have been for number of years banned by all governments on grounds of health hazards. But the unique situation of the space pilots puts them at reduced risk and many are seemingly willing to take their chance of health failure to enhance their abilities, even momentarily. In the last few years new boosters have become available on the black market and the demand increases by the day. Underground laboratories are being set up in the outer regions, often heavily guarded or highly secret.

Through increased surveillance by DED and other law enforcement agencies more than two dozen laboratories have been closed down in the last 12 months alone. Most of them were operating in small space stations far from the main travel routes. But a recent investigation conducted by DED shows that as many as 50 laboratories are still in operation, with at least 2 new being set up every month. With the increased profits booster manufacturers are getting, new laboratories are not only getting bigger and better equipped, they're also being constructed further and further away from empire space, and hence from empire jurisdiction. Furthermore, with the increased secrecy surrounding new laboratories their defenses are stronger now than ever, requiring stronger measures on our part to take them out.

The first boosters appeared a century ago, the product of advancements in recombinant DNA technology, where bacteria are infected with virus to induce protein production in the bacteria. The basic method has been known for centuries and used for instance in the treatment of diabetes. In a Gallentean funded research project headed by Dr. Hollows and Dr. Tancrez the next step in the evolution of this method was taken, when this same procedure was used to directly infect cells within a human body with gene-altered viruses. The cells affected are nerve cells in the brain, where the viral vectors are used to induce production of membranous proteins at synapses, aiding the structural changes of the synapse necessary for formation of memories. In a breakthrough experiment, this procedure was shown to vastly reduce the maze-learning times of laboratory animals, with minimal adverse effects.



After further animal experiments, the first human trials were performed on one of Dr. Tancrez' students, who volunteered to participate for the advancement of science. Dr. Tancrez' student showed remarkable learning capabilities for a period of time after the experiment. The skills he acquired during this period were retained until his untimely death from an unrelated infection two years later. The Federation permitted

further human studies a few months later during the Waschi Uprising, when the Caldari and the Gallente were at the brink of war for some time. The Federation foresaw a huge need for space pilots in case of war, so they authorized the tests in the hope that the boosters would hugely speed up the training time for new pilots. Being able to test and develop boosters on human subjects made it possible for the research team to take the final steps in completing the gene therapy and the first marketable boosters were born.

Boosters quickly became very popular, especially among the social elite, which could easily afford the high costs involved. The pioneers of the booster industry became household names, with none more famous than A.R. Louria, the founder of Booster-Tech Inc., the largest of the booster producing companies. The benefits of the boosters were marked, even at this early stage in their development when they were not nearly as potent as those available today. In few years time boosters had become the norm for a lot of people. The booster producing companies steadily improved their manufacturing techniques, resulting in cheaper and more powerful boosters, as well as more convenient injection techniques. Instead of cumbersome and often painful shots, techniques for introducing the virus through the neural link have been developed, making the boosters all the more attractive to space pilots.

All the major booster companies made extensive tests on boosters before making them available to the general public. These tests did not reveal any serious side effects, even for regular consumers. These results were confirmed in tests conducted by independent research firms and governmental institutes. But as with most things that seem too good to be true, they turn out to be, in practice, too good to be true. Unfortunately, the side effects of boosters did not materialize until decades after they first appeared.

The most serious side-effect of boosters known from the outset was epilepsy. It was discovered that certain genetic elements made some individuals more prone to this side effect than others. Once the genetic cause had been identified it became possible to determine the risk beforehand and thus limit the damage from this side effect. But about four decades after the first boosters arrived another, much more serious, side effect was discovered. It was established that a deadly brain disease caused by prions was directly related to the usage of boosters. It seemed that the boosters caused a somatic mutation in the cells affected, greatly increasing the possibility of incorrect protein formation and consequent deposition of protein plaques in nerve cells. This caused gradual nerve damage and loss of function of brain tissues. The incurable disease slowly eroded the brain, causing the person to lose memory, motor skills, sanity and ending with functional failure of the vital organs.

At first people ignored these events and treated them as singular incidents, but as the cases increased day by day it became clear that an epidemic of sort had started. Even if only 1 in 10 was affected this was a great number of people because of the popularity of boosters. Furthermore, as the disease was fatal in over 90% cases, the mass hysteria threatened to escalate into social upheaval unless the governments responded swiftly. This they did by putting a temporary ban on the usage of boosters. Still, this didn't prevent millions of people dying a horrible death.

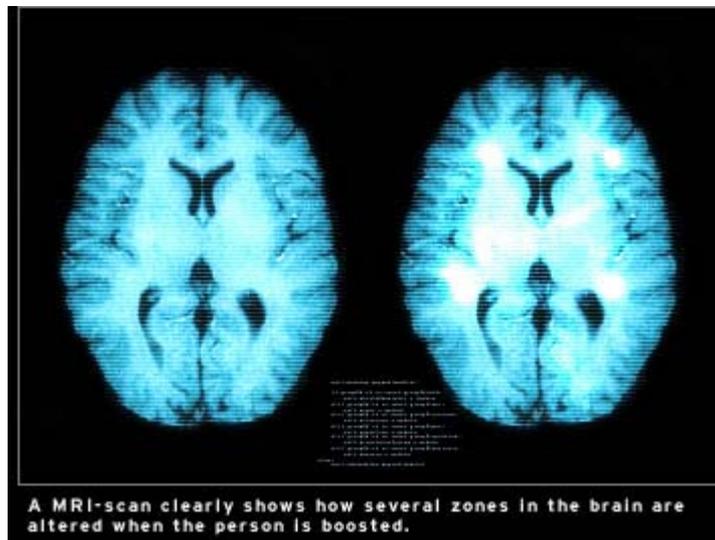
It didn't take long for the booster companies to go under one by one, being bled dry by massive lawsuits. The Gallente Federation initiated further studies into boosters, the results clearly showed without any reasonable doubt that the boosters were at fault, prompting all the governments to put a permanent ban on the manufacturing, distribution and ownership of boosters.

The ban held true for a few decades, with none or next to none boosters to be found anywhere. A Senate committee formed after the booster catastrophe to investigate the matter and evaluate the future of boosters had this to say in their final report:

“It is the uniform belief of this committee that society has learned its lesson regarding boosters and that we will never again have to deal with the threat of its kind. Striving for improvement is one thing, but injecting poison into your body is hazardous at best, lethal at worst, and common sense dictates that boosters are now a thing of the past.”

It can now be safely said that these optimistic predictions made half a century ago have turned out to be false. It is true that for a number of years there never was any mass-scale distribution of boosters, the only incidents were limited production of old booster recipes that could easily be contained. But the lure of the boosters has tempted people into reckless behavior in the past and despite the all too well-known dangers of boosters it can now be asserted that boosters are back, and back for good unless some drastic measures are taken.

The new boosters, the one that are currently available on the black market, are in many ways revolutionary. Even if their effects are the same they've been developed considerably. The latest procedures have aimed to minimize the risk of the old side effects. The methods involve performing multiple smaller scale procedures, while suppressing the immune system. With earlier methods there was no option of repeat



procedures, as the only virus design available was quickly targeted by the immune system and destroyed. The most obvious advantage of the newer methods is a reduced incidence of encephalitis, but there also seems to be less risk of epilepsy. This can most likely be attributed to the neural riggers all space pilots have, which can be used to suppress or stem epileptic seizures. By suppressing the immune system during the operation for a period of time after each injection, the effects last longer and the therapy is more effective. This also increases the success rate of subsequent therapies, as the viral vectors are not attacked by the immune system as soon as they are introduced.

But the obvious downside to suppressing the immune system is that the body becomes vulnerable to diseases. However, space pilots spend most of their time locked up in their capsule, a completely sterile environment. It makes it more difficult for them to leave their capsule (although not impossible), but on the whole suppressing the immune system is a non-issue for space pilots. But it must be stressed that even if these boosters are relatively harmless for space pilots because of their sterile capsules and neural riggings boosters are still very dangerous to the common people and must at all costs be kept out of the hands of the unwary or we may have an even greater catastrophe on our hands than before. This fact makes it all the more important to apprehend those responsible for the manufacturing and distribution of the new boosters.

One persistent problem with the earlier methods was that genetic variation between different individuals seemed to have a relatively large effect on the outcome of the boosters. Some individuals were more prone to side effects, while some didn't benefit at all from the procedures. Later, genetic variations between bloodlines was proven to account for most of these differences. Some boosters were of course more universal than others, but recently custom boosters have been designed specifically to take advantage of the genetic make up of various bloodlines, resulting in race-specific boosters.

The kind of R&D needed for these new boosters could only have been undertaken and funded by a wealthy group with access to all the newest theories and technologies. The only independent group with the means and the motives for this would be the Angel Cartel, but DED has found nothing linking the development of the advanced boosters with them. But the fact the Cartel became heavily involved in distribution of the new boosters right from the start suggests, in the words of Col. Jeanrick Cavalery "that either the Cartel is very close to the booster manufacturers or they themselves are the manufacturers." However, we cannot rule out the possibility that those responsible for the R&D and perhaps the manufacturing of these advanced boosters are in the employment of one of the other empires.

In conclusion we recommend that further measures to be taken to stem the increasing tide of illegal boosters. Granted, there is considerable demand for this among a large group of otherwise lawful space pilots, but boosters are not a requirement to make a good pilot. Thus the marginal benefits pilots gain from boosters should not outweigh the great risk of using them.

As the majority of boosters originate outside empire space we recommend increased border surveillance, as well as heavier punishment for those caught smuggling or selling boosters. Furthermore, that an investigation should be launched to determine who is developing these boosters.

Lastly, our own research teams should start analyzing the new boosters with the intent of understanding them fully in case we need them at a later date when war threatens. Naturally, this will have to be done in the strictest secrecy. Intelligence sources indicate that similar steps are being taken by the other empires and we can't run the risk of being left behind if and when boosters become standard items for space captains.

Cloning

Statement of purpose

Cromeaux Inc. aims to become the largest provider of high quality clones within the Federation. The cloning business is becoming one of the most lucrative industries in the world of EVE and an innovative and vigorous company can quickly get a good turnover. Cromeaux Inc. has in recent months hired some of the best scientists in the field and intends with their help to develop further its pioneering cloning-technique to gain a sizeable market-share within the next five years. Cromeaux Inc. was founded 7 years ago as an independent division of the Chemal Tech, which owns 2/3 of the company. The rest is held by key employees (25%) and the Bank of Luminaire (8%). The funds raised in this round of finances will allow the company to grow to the level where it can start offering competitive products on a Federation-wide bases.

Business

Clones are a luxury commodity in high demand. The number of illegal clone clinics, often using inferior and even dangerous materials, clearly indicates that a substantial market is out there ready to be serviced by high quality, reliable and governmentally approved clones.

Cromeaux Inc. was founded 7 years ago by Dr. Yomir Veschens, an established expert in biochemistry and the entrepreneur Eron Jascete. Today it has more than 4.000 employees, including many of the leading geneticists and bioengineers in the world. Some of the key personnel currently employed by Cromeaux Inc. are:

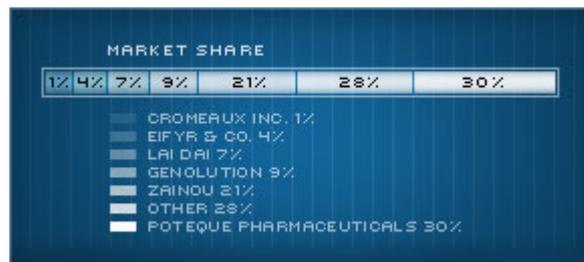
- Dr. Yomir Veschens. CTO. Graduated from SWS in '74 EST with a Ph.D. in both Biochemistry and Gene-design. Member of Dr. Jurg Akrael's team and contributed to its successes in perfecting the brain mapping technique. Co-founder of Cromeaux Inc.
- Marika Alois. CEO. A respected manager, Alois has been director of several startup companies, including KS Manufacturing and DioSec. Became CEO of Cromeaux Inc. earlier this year.
- Daphnie Fonterouche. CFO. Former bank manager for Bank of Luminaire. Worked as an independent financial advisor before joining Cromeaux Inc. four years ago.
- Dr. Roul Gonzi. Senior Engineer. Former employee in the clone department of Poteque Pharmaceuticals, where he supervised the clone research team.
- Dr. Araham Keredin. Researcher. Dr. Keredin was a Biology professor at the Royal Institute on Amarr Prime before joining Cromeaux Inc. in the spring. He is an expert on mnemonic theories and psyche restoration.

Cromeaux Inc. already operates five cloning facilities in the Federation, all in high density, high yield areas. The company plans to open seven more facilities in the coming months, thereof four located on space stations. This is to tap into the clone demand from space ship captains, which are quickly becoming the largest group of clientele.

The largest manufacturer of clones within the Federation at the moment is Poteque Pharmaceuticals. Being the largest biotech company within the Federation Poteque made an easy transaction into the clone business as soon as the technology became financially viable and the laws for their use firm. However, the fact that the clone production is only a small subsection of the huge conglomerate means it is not a priority. Cromeaux Inc., on the other hand, by focusing solely on clones, have a unique opportunity to become a leader in the field of clone manufacturing.

Here is the current market breakdown between the largest clone companies:

- Poteque Pharmaceuticals [30%]
- Zainou [21%]
- Genolution [9%]
- Lai Dai [7%]
- Eifyr & Co. [4%]
- Cromeaux Inc. [1%]
- Other [28%]



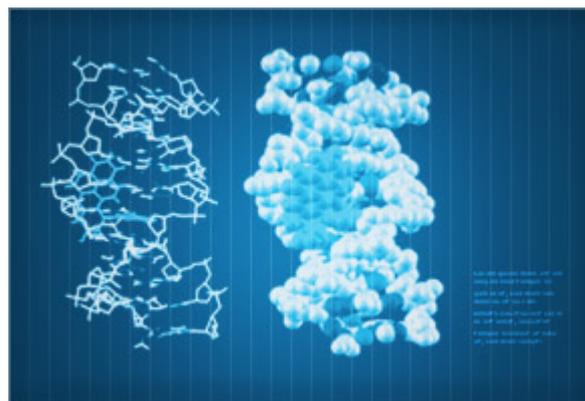
Cromeaux Inc. intends to control 5% of the clone market in five years.

Operation

Cloning technology can be divided into three major components: clone manufacturing, brain growth & storage and clone quality. Each of these areas requires intimate knowledge and skilled staff to operate, something Cromeaux Inc. is very proud to possess in abundance.

Clone manufacturing:

Clones are manufactured using biomass. Modern methods allow pretty much any kind of biomass to be used. The best clones are constructed from human cadavers, but anything from animal carcasses to organic soups can be used. Using lower quality materials requires more extensive structuring and chemical processes and introduces a greater risk for error in the transfer of the customer's features.



At the time of purchase, the customer undergoes a thorough examination and several tissue samples are taken. This is then used to construct a clone of the customer – a clone that receives the consciousness of the original at the moment of death, granting a new life.

At Cromeaux Inc. all clones are made from certified human cadavers, all of them received from willing donors. The biomass has not been tampered with or thinned out – only highest quality preservatives have been introduced to hinder tissue

decomposition. Cromeaux Inc. mission is to establish itself as the manufacturer of clones of the very highest quality and its clientele can rest assured that the underhanded tactics used by so many clone stations do not apply for its operation. All federal laws and regulations are applied rigorously, with governmental inspectors a permanent feature on all our stations.

The biomass is used to construct a functioning body. This body is complete in every sense, with fully functioning organs and peripheral neural system. Instead of a brain there is only a primitive cluster of ganglia which is capable of maintaining heart rate, blood pressure and respiration. Core body temperature is dependent on the environment, and so has to be controlled very carefully in order not to damage the cells. The immune system of the donor is crippled and the thymus is removed and replaced with implanted cells from the customer. The clone body will thus not reject any implant – this makes it possible to seed the body with stem cells from the customer. The clone's body cells divide very slowly, allowing the new cells to take over in time.

Culturing a clone takes several months, but all clone stations store generic clones that are only put to use when a client buys it. The skull, and frequently other bones as well, is replaced by osteoplastic materials – soft synthetic bone polymers that can be shaped and then hardened by gamma laser irradiation. In this way, facial features and other body marks and textures can be applied very quickly. The process is very quick and is applied as soon as the clone is purchased. A similar technique is also used to adjust skin tones and give special skin marks, such as tattoos and scars. This means that the featureless clone is quickly transformed into an identical twin of the client.

Any respectable cloning company must take into account the physiological differences between the human races and bloodlines in existence. Each of them has unique DNA imprints that must be replicated so that the transfer process goes as smoothly and with as little deviances as possible. If done properly the unique characteristics and traits that each bloodline has can be kept intact. This is very important during the brain growth process (see below), as the memory restoration is closely linked to the exact neuro-strata layout of the brain tissue, which varies greatly from one bloodline to the next.

Brain growth & storage

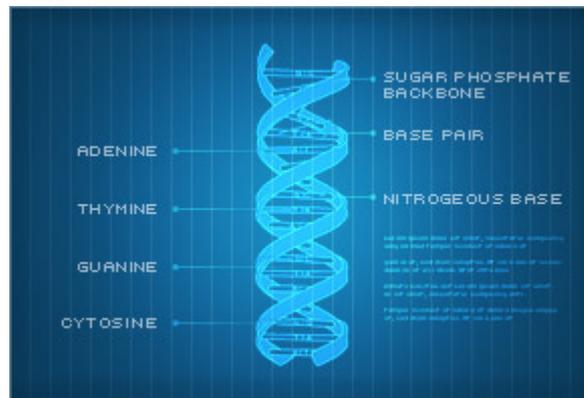
Clones are never bred with an intact brain as this is obviously very much dictated by the client. Once a clone is bought a thorough brain scan is made of the client to determine the shape of the brain and the placement of nerve cell nuclei. Then a three dimensional gel structure that matches the shape of the client's brain is constructed.

The cranium is constructed by seeding this gel structure (heavily impregnated with nutrients and inactivated growth factors) with nerve cells and glia, in accordance with information from the brain scan. Bound to the growth factors are molecular receptors that are coupled (using the well known FTL-communication technology) to molecules placed in the customer's burning scanner (see Clone quality, below). After seeding, the gel structure is suspended until the final moment of the original. As the burning scan is made, the molecules bound to the inactivated growth factors become unstable and cause activation of the growth factors by cleavage. The activation is an exothermic process which produces sufficient heat to melt pathways into the gel model of the brain. Thus dendrite paths in the model will be the same as in the original's brain, their growth fuelled by the activated growth factors

This process alone is not sufficient for an exact replica of the original's brain. The precise shape of the dendrites and the potentiation level of the synapse, which together determine memories and skills, have to be fine tuned through a neural link. Impulses are sent through the link to stimulate further growth and shaping of the dendrites, until they fill in the paths formed with the activation process. In the final stages of this tuning, as the clone regains consciousness, potentiation at synapses is quickly adjusted to recorded levels, generating a feeling often described as one of memories "coming back".

Clone stations store client clones (also termed readied clones) as well as still-to-be-used featureless clone bodies. The cloning process is always on a one-to-one basis, as the molecular receptors bound in the gel structure are coupled to the burning scanner carried by the customer. Premium members will of course always have clone copies of themselves in every Cromeaux Inc. clone facility – service that Cromeaux Inc. pioneered when it started and has since been imitated by all the other major clone companies – but as there is only one burning scanner for each clone, they will have to use a scanner that is coupled to a clone in a facility close to their current position.

In the final stages of this tuning, as the clone regains consciousness, potentiation at synapses is quickly adjusted to recorded levels, generating a feeling often described as one of memories "coming back"



Clone quality

The moment the capsule sensors detect a breach in the capsule they activate the emergency uploading of the mind of the person in the capsule, as described above. The capsule makes an analog scan of the brain of the person. This extraordinary snapshot records the exact state of the mind, including every neuron connection between every brain cell. Because the scan must be instantaneous and efficient it brutalizes the brain in the process. In early tests, the subjects were left with permanent and severe brain damage after being scanned, a fact that is impossible to escape. But as the person is about to die in any case, this unfortunate side effect has little consequences. All modern capsules are highly tuned to when to take the snapshot – if it is done too early there is a chance that the subject will not die at all, but live on in a vegetative state. And if the snapshot is taken too late there is the risk that the scan will fail or even that the revived clone will remember its own death, a very traumatic experience that can introduce severe psychological and functional problems in the clone.

The quality of the clone is always critical and this is a point that cannot be stressed enough. The closer the clone's brain is to the original in shape and form the better the reviving process will work. The more different they are the more memory will be lost during the synaptic growth process. This is most clearly seen in the space industry. For a space captain to retain his license he must be connected to a cloning facility. But if he fails to buy himself a suitable clone, which he is not required to do by law, he will be given a generic clone instead at the time of death. As these generic

clones are bound to have very different brains than the original the memory loss can be very severe. The best clones, made from certified human cadavers in perfect condition, are able to retain up to 99.99% of memory – a figure close enough to call the revived clone a true doppelganger of the original person.

Market analysis

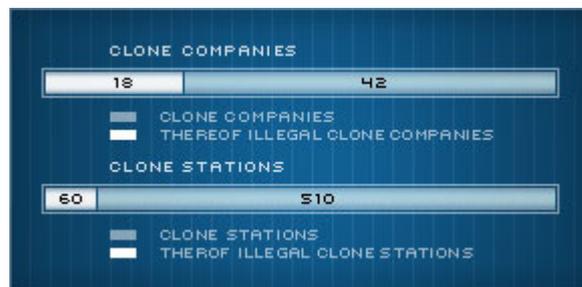
The cloning clientele has risen steadily for the last several years. There are several reasons for this:

- New cloning techniques that are cheaper and easier to employ.
- Increased visibility of cloning stations due to competition.
- Increased number of space captains – the single largest customer group.
- New laws and regulations in allowing the use of clones in areas where it was impossible before.
- Cloning no longer considered a risky experiment or a social taboo in most areas.

It is impossible to know with any certainty the size of the clone market due to excessive number of illegal or hidden clone stations. Although many of these illegal stations produce inferior clones they still steal a lot of potential customers from the legal clone stations. To be fair, these illegal stations do provide a service to people that would be denied service in any respectable cloning facility. Here is break down of various stats of the clone market today, note that numbers are not totally accurate due to lack of information from illegal stations:

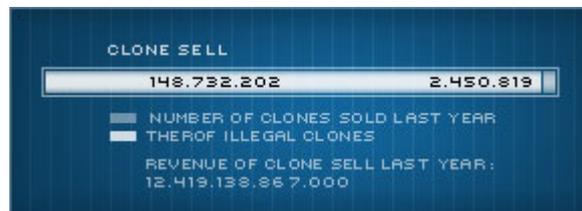
Clone companies:

- Total number of clone companies [42]
- Thereof, illegal companies [18]
- Total number of clone stations [510]
- Thereof, illegal stations [60]



Selling clones:

- Total number of clones sold last year [148.732.202]
- Thereof, illegal clones [24.450.819]
- Total revenue from clone sell last year [12.419.138.867.000]



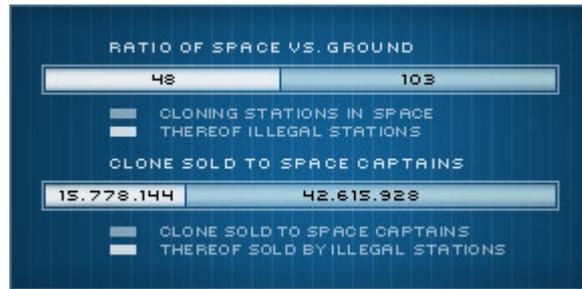
Clone composition:

- Certified human cadavers (Grade A+) [37%]
- Uncertified human cadavers (Grade A) [32%]
- Animal carcasses (Grade B) [23%]
- Organic materials (Grade C) [8%]



Ratio of space vs. ground:

- Number of cloning stations in space [103]
- Thereof, illegal stations [48]
- Number of clones sold to space captains [42.615.928]
- Thereof, sold by illegal stations [15.778.144]



As can be seen in these figures the space industry is proportionally very big considering that space farers are only a fraction of the total population in the world. This is understandable as space captains are the only profession required by law to do business with a clone station, not to mention the many hazards of space faring, which time and again has demonstrated the need for such a law. The space industry is also the fastest growing industry there is. Planetary clone stations increased their sale last year by 3% on the average, while clone facilities on space stations increased their sale on the average by a whopping 11% during the same period.

Income project and future prospects

The first 2 years Cromeaux Inc. focused on research & development. The first clone facility was opened in the third year and since then another clone station has been added every year. With the first clone station came the first earnings, but last year was the first one that earnings matched spending. This means that the business has stabilized and a solid foundation has been created for further expansion. The new funding will allow Cromeaux Inc. to expand its operation to space, which, as has been demonstrated, is where the clone industry is growing fastest. Of the seven new clone facilities that are planned, four will be located in space – the company has already secured very promising sites for these stations, all in high traffic systems. These stations are expected to become the heart of Cromeaux Inc.'s operation. These sites are on the following stations:

- Miroitem II
- Reblrier Prime
- Deven I
- Colcer II

The projected earnings of the company once these seven stations are up and running is expected to quadruple. At the same time the cost of running the company is expected to double. Thus, in 2 years time, a profit of between 1-2.000.000.000 is expected.

The board of Cromeaux Inc. considers that the risks involved in this expansion are minimal, while the potential payoff is huge for all investors involved.

The Capsule

Initially the hydrostatic capsule, as given to the Caldari by the Jovians 78 years ago, contained no facilities for the clone-body retransplantation of those dying inside it. In addition, it proved fiercely maladaptive to the human body in myriad ways. All sorts of physiological differences between ordinary humans and their genetically enhanced Jovian counterparts served to make the pod extremely dangerous to humans in its original incarnation, and even the most rigorous training regimens usually failed to save people from the horrors of the mind lock or wetgraving.

Added to this, the mere thought of hooking wires and tubes into one's body and stepping into something as seemingly alien as a hydrostatic pod, filled with fluid intended to nurture the body through a state of what is essentially suspended animation, didn't (and still doesn't) appeal to the vast majority of pilots. For decades horror stories abounded as to the hideous things that could happen to a person inside a capsule (most of which, unsettlingly enough, were true).

For years, no single political or commercial entity had enough vested interest in pod tech to attempt a change in this public perception. The Jovians had held the official patent on the technology since releasing it to the Caldari, but had adamantly refused all monetary remuneration for its production. For this show of apparent nobility they gave no explanation; nor did they make any attempt to increase the technology's practicality for those not endowed with their genetic superiority. Their motives in not doing so have been speculated upon broadly and extensively, but no consensus has ever been reached.

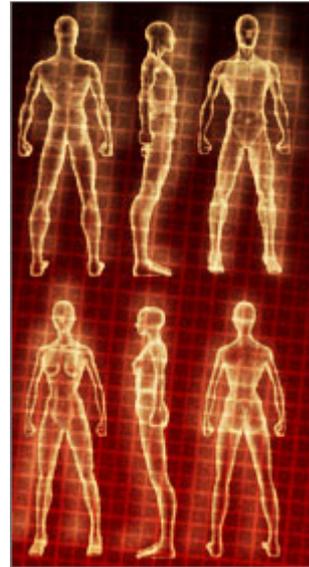
Throughout the period where the capsule and the clone had not yet begun their courtship, pods saw some use among those select few able to handle the intense nausea, hallucinations and general mental instability engendered by prolonged occupancy. Stories are told of pod pilot heroes flying on the side of the Caldari during the twilight years of the Gallente-Caldari war, executing maneuvers unthinkable to those encumbered with a full crew complement and the bothersome necessity of using vocal commands and hand-eye coordination to steer their vessels. Such pilots were a rare breed, though; because of the technology's inherent dangers, capsule-fitted ships were not yet in mass production and existing models therefore had to be retro-fitted at great effort and expense.

Excluded from general usage due to drawbacks which rendered it a ludicrously expensive exercise in mortal danger, the capsule lay dormant for years.



Clones

While new techniques in clone creation and retransplantation have made the process cheaper and more efficient today than ever before, the inherent unreliability of non-capsule cloning and the still-extravagant cost involved for prospective clients effectively prohibits the vast majority of planetside inhabitants from considering it an option. Additionally, moral and religious objections to the work done in the field have surfaced to some extent in every society where its products have become available. Derogatorily known as “Doomies” by those who don’t share their beliefs, these objectors, sometimes numbering among them major political and religious figureheads, have nonetheless exerted a considerable amount of influence on the way cloning is perceived by the general populace. Protests and riots over the issue, while rare, have taken place on numerous worlds since commercial cloning began, and while the cloning companies’ ceaseless marketing has yielded significantly greater public acceptance in the past few years, a number of people still feel strongly that the whole field represents a denial of humanity’s spirituality and should be abandoned for “safer” scientific pursuits.



Despite the advances made in cloning tech, in almost every single environment retransplantation of the mind at time of death is still risky ground. The crucial element in the process relies on a brain-scan snapshot being taken at the precise time of death and transmitted to the waiting clone, and so the transneural burning scanner required to do so needs to be mounted somewhere close to the person at all times. Since the snapshot itself causes massive physical damage to the gray matter, there can be no margin of error; it needs to be done at the exact time of death. In planetary vehicles, the cloning companies have experimented with mounting the transneural scanner in a variety of locations, but the almost limitless potentiality of planet-bound environments has proved time and again that it just isn’t safe – snapshots either go off due to false stimuli, leaving healthy clients in a vegetative state, or fail to go off due to circumstances unforeseen by the safeguard mechanism, leaving clients dead with no chance of retransplantation.

In the capsule, however, things are different. All the equipment needs to do is detect a breach in the pod, because – as every cadet has hammered into his head from the moment he starts training – pod breach, without exception, spells doom for the person inside. Therefore, the instant the egg begins to crack, two things happen: the wire-cap on the pilot’s head injects an instantly lethal nanotoxin into his bloodstream and the scanner sends its piercing light into his skull. Scarce seconds later, he begins the muddy climb towards consciousness in a new body, light years away.

A Match Made in Heaven

It was not until eight years ago that clone manufacturers realized the vast potential of the hydrostatic capsule as a platform for their own technology. Funded by some of the largest megacorporation conglomerates in the universe, they set to work on capsule research and development, buying permission from the proper agencies to make modifications to the original blueprint.

After years of dedicated research, a breakthrough was made. In YC 104 (two years ago), the first transneural burning scan interface was successfully installed in a capsule; technology that would, within six months of testing, allow for perfect clone transplantation upon pod breach in 99.7% of tested instances – a level of reliability far surpassing anything the cloning industry had ever achieved before.

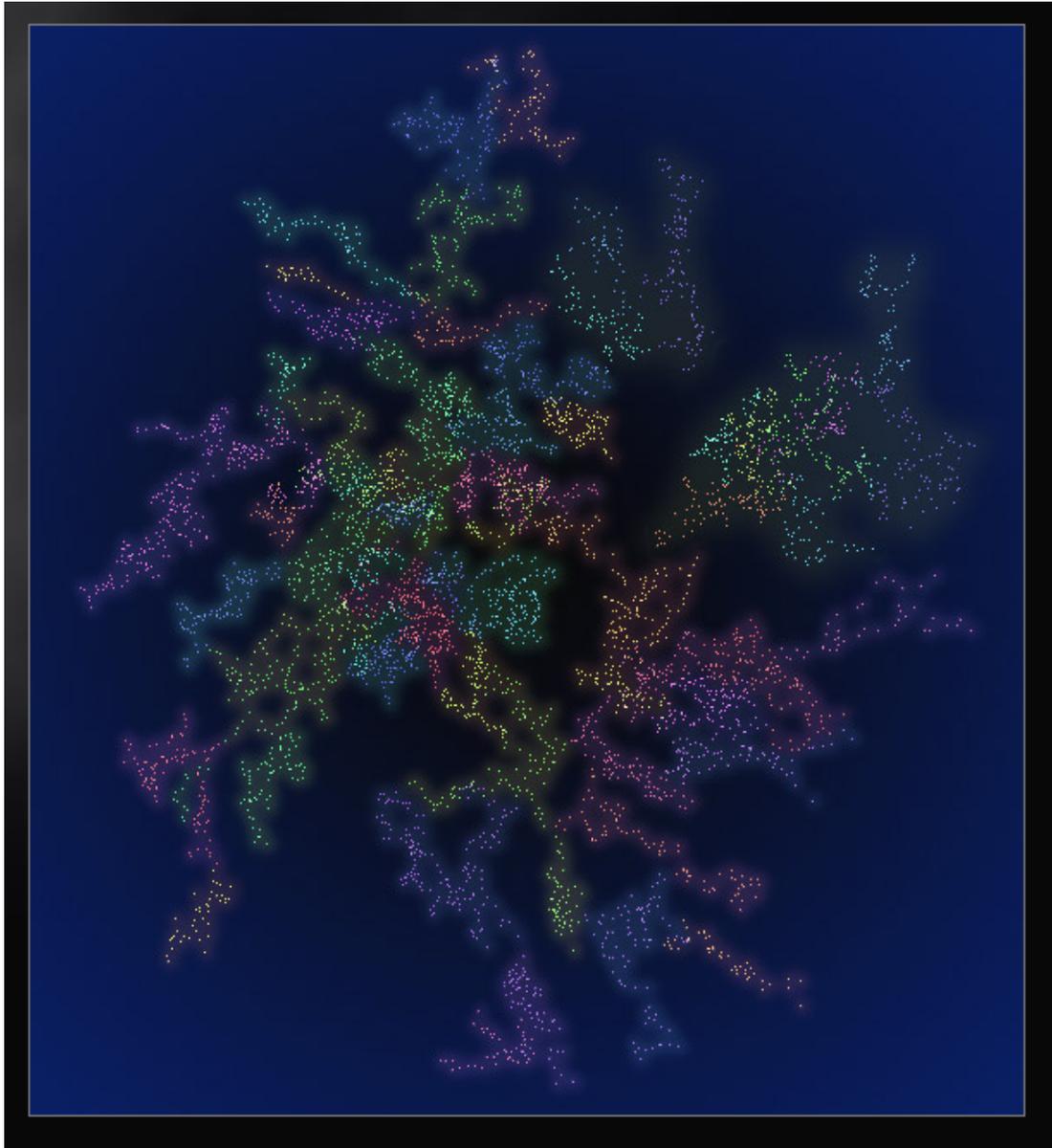
At that point, utilizing the considerable capital at their disposal, the cloning corporations managed through incessant and insidious marketing strategies to change the public perception sufficiently to allow them to push their industry into the limelight through the avenue of the hydrostatic capsule. After six months of exhaustive testing and tireless marketing, the transneural burning scan interface was finalized and public perception had been primed.

At the same time this was happening, CONCORD prepared and adopted legal acts which required every single manufactured capsule to be fitted with a transneural echo burning scanner, in addition to mandating clone contracts for every single pilot cleared to fly a capsule-fitted vessel. The official rationale given for the laws was that an increase in the viable applications of capsule equipment would allow for further exploration along the technological frontier as well as the trackless fathoms of deep space. It was, of course, widely whispered that the cloning companies had used their megacorp backing to effect these legislative changes, but those theories were never conclusively proven.

Whatever its real causes, the fact remained – the capsule and the clone were now inextricably joined, the legislative mandate consolidating their bond. Thus was born the PC pilot.

RACES & BLOODLINES

The world of EVE is inhabited by five major races: the Amarr, Caldari, Gallente, Jove, and Minmatar. All of these races are of human origin; their ancestors entered this little part of the universe thousands of years ago through a natural wormhole. Though most of the first settlements collapsed when the wormhole suddenly closed, a few survived. Today's races are the descendants of those scattered colonies.

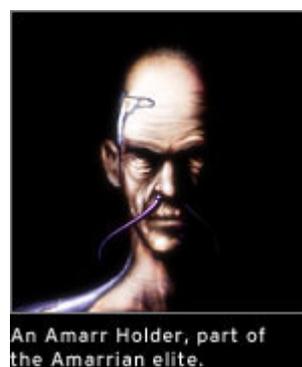


AMARR

The largest of the empires in the world of EVE, Amarr spans 40% of the inhabited solar systems. The Amarr Emperor is the head of a ritualistic, authoritarian imperial state, and below him are the Five Heirs, the heads of the five royal families from which a new Emperor is chosen. The Emperor's authority is unquestioned and absolute, but the archaic and bureaucratic system of government makes it difficult for him to exert his rule unless directly in person. Otherwise, the Five Heirs rule in his name, dividing the huge empire between them.

The Emperor and the Five Heirs can expect to live for at least 500 years. Extensive cyber-implants keep their frail bodies alive, even when their organs begin to fail. These cyber-enhancements date back many millennia, and have become a symbol of royal divinity in the eyes of the Amarrians.

Always a deeply religious people, religion remains of great importance to every Amarrian, a fervour which at various times has been responsible both for great good and great evil. Shortly after recovering from the closure of EVE, they began to expand their realm at the expense of neighbouring states. The nations they conquered were enslaved, a practice justified by their religion. Ever since, the Amarrians have enslaved every nation and race they have encountered, and today slavery is an essential part of Amarr society. This has, of course, tainted their relations with other races, especially the individualistic Gallenteans.



An Amarr Holder, part of the Amarrian elite.

The Amarrians were the first of the races in EVE to re-discover Warp technology, notably Jump gate technology. After accomplishing this more than 2,000 years ago, they immediately began expanding to nearby solar systems, slowly building up their empire in the process. On the way, they encountered two human races, both of whom suffered the fate of being enslaved by the far more powerful Amarrians.

In recent years, however, the Amarrians have begun to run into serious opposition. First, they met the Gallente Federation. Although much smaller than the Amarr Empire, the Amarrians soon found the economic and military might of the Gallenteans a match for their own.

Soon after, the Jovians arrived on the scene and the Amarrians made a futile attempt to subjugate them, resulting in a humiliating defeat. To make matters worse, the Minmatars, enslaved for centuries by the Amarrians, used the opportunity to rebel against their slave-masters.

Since these fateful events almost two centuries ago, the Amarrians have learned restraint. They have slowed down their expansion and are less forceful in their dealings with other races, but still view themselves as the most powerful race in EVE, if only because of their sheer numbers.

MINMATAR

A tough, no-nonsense race, the Minmatars are a determined and independent people. Their home planet of Matar is a natural paradise, although centuries of abuse have taken much from its beauty.



For the Minmatars, the most important thing in life is to be able to take care of yourself on your own, and although kin and family play an important role in their society, they prefer identifying themselves by the clan or tribe to which they belong. A clan can have any number of people in it, and its size is largely dictated by the main activity of its members. Most specialize in one area of activity. While those who live on a planet can focus on agricultural or industrial activity, others who travel around the world of EVE concentrate on trading, pirating, and suchlike.

In the distant past the clans constantly warred against each other. Since then, however, Minmatars have learned that cooperation is more important, and although the clans still try to maintain their regional and ideological identities, they act as a single unit towards other races.

The fortunes of the Minmatars have ebbed and flowed continuously. At one time they had a flourishing empire with a level of mechanical excellence never before or since seen anywhere. Later, however, they had to endure centuries of enslavement, toiling and dying for the benefit of foreign masters. Today most of them have regained their freedom, but the legacy of their enslavement has been the diaspora of the race.



The Minmatars are the most numerous of all the races in the world of EVE, but their vast numbers are divided into many factions. While the Minmatar Republic is the official state, only a quarter of all Minmatars are part of it. The largest proportion, almost a third, are enslaved within the huge Amarr Empire, while a fifth resides within the Gallente Federation, creating a powerful political bloc which keeps relations between the Gallenteans and the Amarrians in a constant state of tension. The remainder, who are not part of any formal organization, live as freemen throughout the world. Many are itinerant labourers, roaming from one system to another in search for work. A fair number make their living on the darker side of the law, acting as pirates, smugglers and peddlers in all kinds of illegal goods, and many of the larger criminal groups in the world of EVE are run by Minmatars.

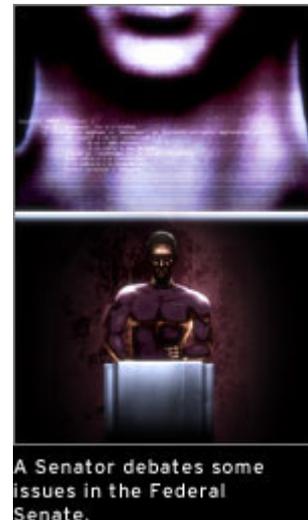
GALLENTE

The Gallenteans. Self-righteous, meddling, pompous and tiresome, or virile liberalists and defenders of the free world. Love them or hate them, you simply can't ignore them. Everybody has an opinion on the Gallente Federation, it all depends from which side of the table you view them. For many, it is the Promised Land, where any dream can become a reality. Descendants of Tau Ceti Frenchmen, the Gallenteans remain strong believers in free will and human rights, despite numerous setbacks in their long history.

It has been said that, once you have seen the Crystal Boulevard in Caille you've seen it all. True, the view is spectacular, but if there's one thing you can never see in its entirety, that is the Gallente Federation. You may travel its length and breadth, marvel at the Sunspiral on Troux, climb the Akat Mountains on tropical Intaki or thrill to the Mendre dancers on Sovicou. Wherever you go, you will always see something new and exciting, even when you visit the same place again. Gallente society is in a constant state of flux, vigorous, vibrant and progressive.

Few societies display such stark contrasts. Many of the wealthiest people in the world are Gallenteans, creating a constant demand for luxury goods. At the same time, the ranks of the poor number millions, because while the liberal market-driven economy and individual freedom may allow everybody the chance to advance to the top, they make it just as easy to plummet to the very bottom of the social ladder.

In the world of EVE, the Gallentean are the kings of entertainment, mass-producing everything from cheap porn-flicks to elaborate stage-shows for an ever-hungry public. They boast the most elaborate luxury space yachts, and the most glittering hotel reservoirs. Anything your mind or body could ever crave, the Gallenteans have plenty of it.



The Gallenteans are not alone in their Federation, whose boundaries are home to pockets of residents, varying in size and representing all the other races of EVE, most of whom left their own empires due to political or ideological differences, or simply in search of peace and prosperity. In addition to these there are two human races, the Intakis and the Mannars, both of whom the Gallenteans found while exploring and expanding their empire. Both were at a very primitive level when the Gallenteans found them, but since coming under the protection and guidance of the Gallenteans, both races have flourished and are today a full-fledged members of the Federation.

The Caldari were initially part of the Federation but deep-seated differences and mutual animosity between them and the Gallenteans drove them out to found their own empire. For a time, the two empires warred against each other, but as neither could gain sufficient advantage to claim victory, peace was settled in the end.

CALDARI

A state built on corporate capitalism, the Caldari State is run by a few mega-corporations which divide the state between them, controlling and ruling every aspect of society. Each corporation is made up of thousands of smaller companies, ranging from industrial companies to law firms. All land and real estate is owned by a company which leases it to the citizens, and government and policing are also handled by independent companies.



A ship of the Kaalakiota corporation enroute to New Caldari.

Although this gives the corporations dictatorial powers, they are just as bound by Caldari customs and laws as the individual, and the fierce, continual competition between the corporations ensures a healthy, consumer-based social environment, which benefits everyone.

While the Caldari State may not be nearly as big as that of the Gallenteans, let alone the Amarrians, they are still universally feared and admired. Their economy is strong, and their military might parallel to that of the larger empires. Coupled to the fact that they are more unscrupulous than the Gallenteans and more combative than the Amarrians, this makes them in many ways the most meddlesome of all the empires. As most Caldari trade is conducted by individual companies rather than the State itself, this makes it difficult for the other empires to deal with them at a political level. If a company is found guilty of unethical business dealings, it simply disappears into its parent corporation, and before long another one appears to take its place. But if a Caldari company is threatened, the whole corporation and often the whole State backs it up with full force.

Caldari society is steeped in military tradition. As a people, its members had to fight a long and bloody war to gain their independence, and even had to surrender their home planet to their hated enemies, the Gallenteans. It was at this time that the corporations established themselves as the driving force behind creating and maintaining the new Caldari State. Even if the Caldari have not engaged in war for many decades, they still strive to be at the cutting edge of military technology and their vessels, weapons and fighting methods are inferior to none but the enigmatic Jovians.



Scene from Splinterz, robotic duels that the Caldari love betting on.

To curb their aggressive tendencies, the Caldari actively pursue and sponsor a range of sporting activities. Many of these are bloody, gladiatorial-like competitions, while others are more like races. But whatever the sport, the Caldari love betting on the outcome, making gambling a massive industry in the State.

The Caldari State offers its citizens the best and the worst in living conditions. As long as you keep in line, do your job, uphold the laws and so forth, life can be fairly pleasant and productive. But for those who are not cut out for this strict, disciplined regime life quickly becomes intolerable. They lose their respect, family, status, everything, and the only options left to them are suicide or exile. Although not xenophobic as such, the Caldari are very protective of their way of life and tolerate only those foreigners that stick to the rules

JOVE

The most mysterious and elusive of all the peoples of EVE, the Jovians number only a fraction of any of their neighbors, but their technological superiority makes them powerful beyond all proportion.

Although definitely human, the Jovians often seem to the other races as though they are not, the reason being that they embraced genetic engineering as the way to solve any and all the problems which plague the human race. Over the thousands of years since, the Jovians have experimented with every kind of genetic modification their technology allowed. As their powers grew, they began to believe they were capable of anything, and this led them into increasingly more bizarre mutations of their bodies and minds, a policy rigorously backed up by strict governmental control.

But one fateful moment in their history made them lose this control for a few generations, and the results were catastrophic. By this time the Jovians had begun interfering with their basic instincts, curbing their aggression and sexual instincts and cultivating strange new ones instead. Since the Shrouded Days, as the Jovians call their momentary social eclipse, they have been trying to put the pieces together again, but their DNA-structure has in many ways been damaged beyond repair. The consequence is the dreaded Jovian Disease. Genetic in nature, it is not infectious to other races, but among Jovians it causes a depression so deep and serious that the victim loses the will to live, and death results within a few days or weeks.



Picture of Miko Bour, who united the Jovians in the Second Empire more than 3,000 years ago.



Fetus-tubes, the Jovian way of reproduction for many millenniums.

Despite this, the Jovians escaped the chaos that followed the closure of EVE remarkably well. Within the space of only a few centuries they had recovered, and were once again running a hi-tech society. They settled in a number of systems and founded an empire lasting for nine millennia, but even if the Jovians are by far the most technologically advanced of the races of EVE, they have still not recovered the splendour of their first empire. The disease within them keeps them in a reproductive straightjacket, preventing them from increasing their numbers sufficiently for their current empire to flourish.

The Jovians crave knowledge, any knowledge at all. Their superior technology has enabled them to infiltrate the other races with bugging devices and sensors, giving them unrivalled access to information, which they use to maintain their strong position among the races. The Jovians sell a lot of their advanced technology equipment to the other races and it is this, more than anything else, which keeps the others at bay.

Jovian society is mysterious and difficult to comprehend. For this and other reasons it remains very much closed to the other races, and few foreigners reside within the Jovian Empire.

Organisations



Caldari State

The Caldari State is ruled by several mega-corporations. There is no central government to speak of - all territories within the State are owned and ruled by corporations. Duty and discipline are required traits in Caldari citizens, plus unquestioning loyalty to the corporation they live to serve. The corporations compete aggressively amongst themselves and with companies outside the State, resulting in a highly capitalistic society.



Minmatar Republic

The Minmatar Republic was formed over a century ago when the Matari threw out their Amarrians overlords in what is known as the Minmatar Rebellion. The Matari had the support of the Gallente Federation and to this day, the two nations remain close allies. Yet, only a quarter of the Matari people reside within the Republic. The rest are scattered around the world, including a large portion still enslaved within the Amarr Empire. Minmatar individuals are independent and proud, possessing a strong will and a multitude of tribal traditions.



Amarr Empire

The largest of the five main empires, the Amarr Empire is a sprawling patch-work of feudal-like provinces held together by the might of the emperor. Religion has always played a big part in Amarrian politics and the Amarrians believe they are the rightful masters of the world, souring their relations with their neighbours. Another source of ill-feelings on part of the other empires is the fact that the Amarrians embrace slavery.



Gallente Federation

The Gallente Federation encompasses several races, the Gallenteans the largest by far. The Federation is democratic and very liberal in a world full of dictators and oligarchies. The Caldari State was once part of the Federation, but a severe dispute resulted in their departure and a long war between the Gallente Federation and the Caldari State. The Gallenteans are the masters of pleasure and entertainment and their rich trade empire has given the world many of its most glorious and extravagant sights.



Jove Empire

The Jove Empire is isolated from the rest of the world to all but a selected few. The Jovians are a mystery to the other races, fueled not only by their elusiveness, but also their highly advanced technology, eons ahead of the other races. The Jovians have been civilized longer than any other race in the world of EVE and have gone through several golden ages, now long-since shrouded in the past. The current Jovian Empire is only a pale shadow of its former self, mainly because of the Jovian Disease - a psychological disorder that is always fatal.



CONCORD Assembly

CONCORD is an independent organization founded a century ago to facilitate negotiations between the races to improve relations, as well as to foster inter-stellar trade through policing and regulations. Starting as a fledgling meeting ground for diplomats CONCORD has in the decades since it was founded slowly increased its power and influence. It has become an entity independent of the races, as it is able to largely fund its own operation through customs, confiscation of contraband goods, and other means.



Ammatar

The Ammatars are part of the Amarr Empire, but are of Minmatar origin. During the time the Amarrians occupied the Minmatar home worlds one of the Minmatar tribes, the Nefantars, collaborated heavily with the Amarrians. The Nefantars fled Minmatar space during the Minmatar Rebellion and the Amarr Emperor set them up in Amarr controlled areas close to Minmatar space. Soon everyone had started calling them Ammatars. Today, the Ammatars enjoy a semi-autonomy in their own space and are still embroiled in war with their former Minmatar brethren.



Khanid Kingdom

The Khanid Kingdom, also known as the Dark Amarr, was founded a few centuries ago when the last Amarr Emperor was chosen. Khanid was one of the royal heirs at the time and, in accordance with tradition, should have killed himself after failing to become emperor. This Khanid refused to do and split his vast domains from the Amarr Empire. The empire retaliated, but only managed to conquer some of the vulnerable outer regions from Khanid. The Kingdom still upholds many of the tradition of Amarr society, but has also wholeheartedly embraced the customs of others, mainly the Caldari. Many visitors to the Kingdom feel like it is a surreal mix of the Amarr and Caldari empires.



The Syndicate

Formed by Intaki exiles from the Gallente Federation during the Caldari-Gallente War. The Syndicate has slowly grown in stature and influence and now serves as an important link between the empires and the illegal elements in the outer regions. Syndicate space is a pirate haven, but still retains enough civility to allow pretty much anyone to travel there to do business. The Syndicate markets are always chockfull of contraband goods and illegal wares that are hard or impossible to come by elsewhere. Each Syndicate station is a autonomous entity, but they cooperate on security and information issues. The unofficial leader of the Syndicate is Silphy en Diabel, a former Sister of EVE that returned to Syndicate space to save her family's fortune. Since then she's turned out to be just as resourceful and ruthless as her late father.



Guristas Pirates

Formed by two former members of the Caldari Navy, the pair go by the names Fatal and the Rabbit, the Guristas are a constant thorn in the side of the Caldari State. The Guristas are traditional pirates in the sense that their operation is not based around some creed or ideology, but rather a plain and simple greed. The Guristas have bases close to Caldari space and from them they embark on daring raids, often into the State itself. Though the Guristas are considered more honorable than many of their counterparts, they are still extremely dangerous and not to be tampered with.



Angel Cartel

Operating from the heart of the Curse region, the Angel Cartel is today the largest and best organized of the space-based criminal factions. The Angels are divided into several groups, each with a very special function. It is commanded by the Dominations and in the century they've been lurking in deep space they have stolen, plundered or sabotaged countless number of ships and kidnapped, molested or murdered thousands of people. The Angels recruit members from all the races, and are thus not bound to any one zone of operation, which spans almost the entire known world. Many believe that the Angels got their power by uncovering Jovian technologies hidden in their ancient homes, now infested by the Angel Cartel.



The Blood Raider Covenant

The Amarr Empire has had its share of religious cults and fanatics in the past, but few have been as successful, or been feared as much, as the Blood Raiders. The Blood Raiders are a sect of an ancient cult called Sani Sabik, which uses blood in their rituals. The Blood Raiders believe that cloned bodies have 'purer' blood than other bodies and this explains while they operate mainly in space, attacking unwary space farers and draining their bodies of blood. The Blood Raiders are led by the fearsome Omir Sarikusa, who has remained on top of the DED most wanted list for many years now. Under his leadership the Blood Raiders have become more organized and they have established several bases in the Bleak Lands region.



The InterBus

The InterBus is one of the more successful joint ventures the empires have undertaken. It was formed some 30 years ago to act as a neutral passenger transportation company that would span the entire known world. Since then it has evolved a bit, especially when it started to ferry goods too. The InterBus is used by the SCC to ferry goods between stations, as they are reliable and operate in every station in the world. As InterBus has to operate not only in empire stations, but also in pirate havens and other stations associated with organized crime, the company has to uphold a very strict policy regarding neutrality and secrecy. Even if the company is owned by the empires, no information regarding to shipments or station locations is ever given out. The strict adherence to these rules has allowed InterBus to operate without harassment in every corner of the world of EVE, making them one of the pillars of the inter-stellar community.



ORE

Outer Ring Excavations, or ORE, is the largest independent mining corporation around. ORE was originally a fledgling Gallentean company, but struck gold when they found extremely rich Nocxium asteroid belts in the Outer Ring region. When the Gallente Federation tried to force ORE to reveal the location of the asteroid fields the company left Gallentean space and set up base in the Outer Ring region. They used their massive wealth to buy protection for their bases and keep their operation secret. Several pirate factions have tried to muscle in on the ORE territories, but with little success.



Thukker Tribe

The Thukker tribe is one of the seven original Minmtar tribes. After the Minmtar Rebellion the Thukklers left Minmtar space and took up the nomadic lifestyles of their ancestors, only this time in space. The closest thing they've got to home is the Great Wildlands region, where they are very numerous, but the Thukklers like to be on the move, constantly going from one solar system to another in their huge caravans, trading and scavenging. Respectable citizens of EVE frown upon the Thukklers, considering them to be nothing but scoundrels and thieves. Indeed, the Thukklers often operate on the shadier side of the law, but their resourcefulness and diligence count a lot more for their success than their criminal activities.



The Servant Sisters of EVE

The Sisters of EVE are mainly known for their humanitarian aid efforts to those suffering because of war, famine or even just being lost in space. But the Sisters of EVE base their existence on strong religious beliefs, which they have coupled with scientific facts. They believe that the EVE gate is a gateway to heaven - that god resides on the other side of the gate. As well as dedicating themselves to aiding those in need they are also busy with scientific experiments around the EVE gate, hoping to gain a better understanding of the forces at work there.



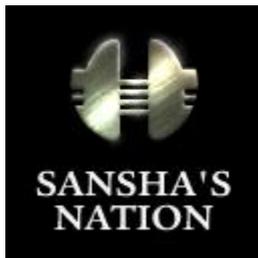
The Society

The Society of Conscious Thought is three centuries old and was founded by a Jovian named Ior Labron, who was in search of spiritual enlightenment. The Society has since then taken many guises and been anything from a religious sect full of hermits to a political institute playing the power game. Today, the Society is mainly known for their scholastic achievements, their schools are widely regarded as the best ones in the world of EVE and rich and influential parents everywhere fight to get their kids admitted. Offering large sums of money is, however, no guarantee for admittance, as the Society has its own peculiar selection process that seems to have little rhyme or reason to outsiders. The Society operates in remote areas, where they build strongholds called kitz. Not all kitz are schools, some are still devoted to spiritual enlightenment or scientific pursuits.



Mordu's Legion Command

The origin of Mordu's Legion lies in the Gallente-Caldari War when a group Intaki military personnel sided with the Caldari. The Intakis were put into a separate unit with a Caldari officer named Mordu. After the war the Intakis settled in Caldari space, but unwillingly became entangled with Caldari locals in the Waschi Uprising. Mordu's Legion was formed at that time as a mercenary fighting force and after the uprising it continued in existence. The Legion is loosely associated with the Caldari Navy, but are in most part totally independent. Mordu's Legion is commonly hired by companies to protect valuable assets outside empire space, for instance Outer Ring Excavations pays them handsomely to patrol the Outer Ring region.



Sansha's Nation

Sansha's Nation was founded more than a century ago, shortly after all the empires had come into contact, just when space exploration and colonization was taking off. Sansha was a Caldari tycoon that carved out a sizeable piece of space for himself. There, he set out to create an utopian state. His vision and charm attracted thousands of people and for some time the Nation flourished. But Sansha became ever more warped as his success increased. He started experiments, combining capsule technology with the human mind, creating a zombie like creatures that had the cold, calculating mind of a computer, but the ingenuity of humans. When this became public knowledge Sansha was condemned and the other empires joined forces to bring him down. His forces were decimated and scattered to the winds. Remnants still remain far in the outer regions, but the once glorious Nation has been reduced to pirates and pillagers.



Serpentis

The Serpentis Corporation was founded a few decades ago by V.Salvador Sarpati. At first it was engaged in hi-tech research, but with time its ties with the underworld grew and the Serpentis research stations, scattered around in remote areas, became infamous pirate havens. Sarpati made a deal with the Angel Cartel early on to provide protection for his stations and the duty was taken on by the Guardian Angels. Both sides have prospered enormously for this deal - Serpentis can operate in peace and the Angel Cartel gets access to the illegal research efforts of the Serpentis. It is strongly believed that Serpentis is the main developer and manufacturer of illegal neural boosters, especially since Sarpati's father was a renown specialist in that field. The home of Serpentis is in the Phoenix constellation in the Fountain region.

Fedo



A Fedo is a fairly small (ca. 30-50 cm long, 20-40 cm high) animal originating in underground caves on the planet Palpis. The planet was settled by the Amarrians long ago, and the Fedo has spread with Amarr vessels throughout the galaxy cluster ever since.

The Fedo is an omnivorous, sponge-like creature. It has reddish skin and numerous small claw-like tentacles which it uses to move around and protect itself. A primitive being, the Fedo's method of eating and absorbing nutrition is slow and inefficient. This means that food stays for a long time in the Fedo's body, and will most often have rotted or turned foul before the animal passes it out of its system. The Fedos eject fumes from their body which, for the reasons explained above, have a most horrible odor. The Fedos possess a fantastic sense of smell and so use these fumes to communicate with each other; they are however both blind and deaf, having no eyes or ears. The mouth is located on the underside of the beast, and the Fedo feeds by positioning itself over the food and lowering itself down on it.

Fedos are an incredibly strong and resilient species. They can live in total vacuum for several hours before succumbing to the cold and lack of oxygen. Some Matari have used this fact to their advantage, employing Fedos on many of their ships for cleaning and garbage disposal. The Fedos are especially useful in that they can clean the ship on the outside as well as the inside; they can get to hard-to-reach areas on the ship and, most importantly, will exterminate many of the pesky bacteria commonly found on space ships. The Matari feed the Fedos with every scrap of waste produced on the ship, letting the beasts roam free around the vessel and even outside it. This saves money, but the downside is the foul stench produced by the Fedos, something which discourages most everybody from using them.

There is a distinct difference between male and female Fedos. The female is slightly larger and has redder skin. It has a point-like tail or sting, approx. 10 cm long. The female Fedo can emit highly toxic fumes from a small opening at the end of the tail, which can cause intense skin irritation and discomfort for a human. For this reason, only male Fedos are used as ship cleaners. Most ships employing Fedos have a special nursery room where female Fedos are kept to replenish the on-board Fedo stock. This is necessary as the Fedo's life cycle is only a few weeks long.

Mind Clash



Mind Clash is a very popular sport throughout known space. It is as enthusiastically played in the royal court on Amarr Prime as in the gambling halls of the Caldari. The Clash Masters – the best players from around the worlds – are superstars, awed and adored equally among Gallentean yuppies and Minmatar punks.

The game itself evolved from a simple computer game called Clash of Wits, where two participants played the roles of puppet masters, using various kinds of creatures and forces to attack each other until either one of them caved in. The game was fairly popular among teenagers and young adolescents, but not a phenomenon in any sense of the word.

The extensive advances made in neural- and cyber-technology through the years then paved the way for a new version of the game, where the players didn't control a computer-generated puppet master, but rather stepped into the role of puppet-master themselves. The illusions – fantastical creatures, monsters, phenomena – were still only bits and bytes in a computer, but due to the strength of the connection between the mind and the machine, this didn't make them any less dangerous to a puppet master made of flesh and blood. Even if participants couldn't be ripped to pieces in the literal sense, the potential psycho-trauma caused by the constant barrage on the brain could easily reduce a stout man to a whimpering wreck in mere moments.

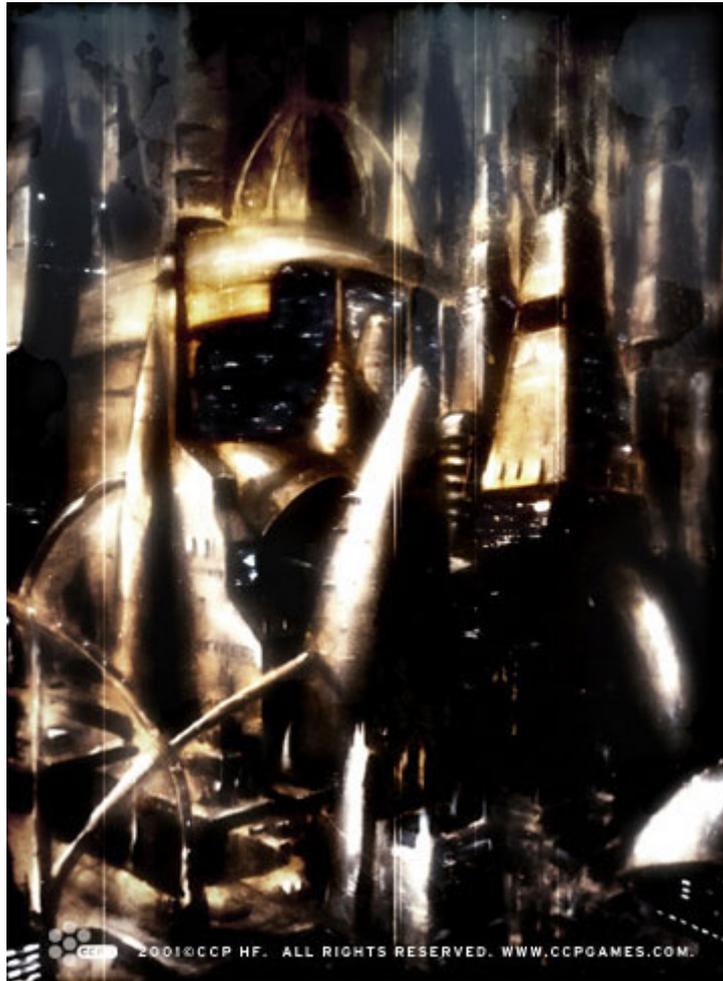
Actually, the illusory creatures and phenomena are only there for the show – doing nothing by themselves, they simply portray in visual terms what actually is going on behind the scenes in the minds of the participants. The actions and state of the illusion give ample indication of the actual events of the struggle to the spectators. These illusions are, in modern arenas, often projected as holograms above the participants. All the stars of the game have their own exclusive repertoire of personally trademarked illusions. This, coupled with flashy outfits and catchy

nicknames, makes each of the major stars easily distinguishable to the fans. In addition to the illusions huge screens dot the arenas where duels are held, broadcasting images and information to the masses ogling the match. These consist mainly of things like facial close-ups of the sweating contestants, or detailed data-charts on the status of their mental and bodily state.

The new version of the game was called Mind Clash. Since its release over a century ago the game has grown into a full-fledged sport, with billions of fans and billions in revenue generated. The inevitable development has been that Mind Clash is now one of the biggest entertainment forms around – with all the stardom, hangers-on, aspiration dreams, gambling and showmanship that goes with it. For many, the Worlds Championship is the major event of each calendar year. During that massive event, the sixteen best players from all around the star cluster gather to slug it out. Although rumors of fixed matches and rigged results have somewhat tainted the image of the event (and the sport as a whole), it remains a huge attraction for more or less everybody, and Mind Clash betting is one of the favorite pastimes of billions of people.

The current Mind Clash Worlds Champion is Joelyn Donalokos, a Gallentean of Intaki ancestry. Donalokos, a 7-year veteran Clash Master, is the Worlds Champion of the last two contests and has for the last three years topped the Clash Masters' income list. Donalokos' specialty is his Blue Tiger illusion, something which has become one of the most widely-recognized symbols in the whole world.

Dam-Torsad



Dam-Torsad - the Imperial City of the Amarr Empire - marked me. It marked me even though I consciously tried to fight its corrupted presence. It is built on memories - nightmares, really - and you can't stop them from perverting your mind in the end. For fifty long years I've struggled to rid myself of those haunted memories, memories of a human society turned sour and bitter. I may have escaped the oppressive walls of the city, but the vivid memories will always remain. Memories of a city more like a monument than a thriving metropolis; of people saturated with its sluggish nature, their minds weighed down with traditions and customs so strong, so dominant, that it was like their ancestors of a thousand years ago were living their lives through them.

I couldn't fail to notice - almost immediately - the injustice entrenched in the society. The Holders tread on the Commoners, which in turn tread on the slaves. Talent means nothing; people are judged solely by their social position. The only merits nurtured are backstabbing and back-nagging. The twisted old Holders are deeply envious of zealous young upstarts and find sick pleasure in squashing them. And yet the Commoners look with awe up to the Holders, craving their position and power, but bound still by tradition more sturdy than any iron shackle.

Progress is a term alien to the Amarrians. It's almost like this huge empire was built on pure coincidence and luck. But once you get to know their intricate system you get

the feeling that they're like this great big beast trudging heedlessly onwards, trampling any opposition. Their advancements are not by leaps and bounds, but rather through deliberate and articulate planning that can span decades, even centuries. Getting caught in the finely woven spider-webs of a Holder can trap more than just you - it can trap your children and your children's children. Getting out is not a problem. It's getting out alive that's troublesome.

My years in Dam-Torsad made me loathe and despise the Amarrians. Their society is in so many ways radically different from the Gallentean one. But I also learned never to underestimate the Amarrians. In their own way they're ruthlessly efficient, and I cannot help but feel in awe of all their accomplishments through the ages.

*Excerpt from the autobiography of Yanou Lautere,
First Gallente ambassador to the Amarrians*

Society of Conscious Thought



The Society of Conscious Thought, or SCT, was founded three centuries ago by the Jovian Ior Labron. As a rule, Jovians are not very spiritually inclined, but those Jovians that take to their spirituality with the same vigor and zeal as to everything else. The SCT has, through the ages, acted as the outlet for the spiritual needs of the Jovians, although that role is only a secondary one today.

The Society's story is a long and complex one. Starting out as a cult created to explore humanity's spiritual and religious feelings and needs (with the primary aim of discovering the meaning of life, no less), it later expanded into the realm of politics and, for a little while, effectively became Jovian society's shadow government. This, however, did not last for long; other political factions joined together to break their power, with the result that the Society was banned for a considerable period of time. Yet they still lurked in obscurity, reverting back to their mystical past. As the years passed the Society again began to exert itself, but wisely and carefully this time, making sure to just skirt the borders of the hostile political arena.

Once again, the search for spiritual enlightenment became the focus of the SCT. They embarked on a journey of frenzied technological research on the matter, resulting in some very interesting theories and facts on the nature of man and his connection to the universe.

The SCT had, in the traditional way of secluded spiritual sects, sought refuge in remote areas, building their residences there. Even while the Society was most active in politics, they still maintained their homes far away from large human settlements, favoring isolated regions planet-side or in deep space. Only in recent years has the SCT become a little less reclusive, setting up offices in urban settlements in order to increase their visibility to the general public.

In their remote abodes the Society has built up mini-societies emphasizing self-sufficiency; a trait strong among the Jovians. These sprawling places, often resembling huge fortresses, house everything from living quarters and food-growing facilities to laboratories and libraries. Each enclave, called a *kitz*, is a separate entity, but communication between kitzes is frequent.

Each kitz maintains a school for educating their members in the scholarly or scientific fields. At first, all the students were children of SCT members, but a few decades ago the Society started admitting, each year, a small number of children from 'outside,' even non-Jovian ones. The applicants are chosen by the Society and their choices seem to many to be almost random, because there is no visible pattern as to who gets in: neither race, gender, social standing, nor even talent and intelligence by themselves seem to play instrumental roles. Many wealthy parents have tried to increase their child's chances by donating large sums of money to the SCT, but statistics have shown that this has little or no effect.

In any case, most people agree that the education the children receive within the Society's walls is first-class and every graduate is a sought-after employee anywhere he or she goes. An astonishing proportion of SCT graduates reach a prominent position later in life, becoming presidents of multi-stellar corporations or governmental ministers. Little wonder, then, that people regard the SCT schools as breeding grounds for world leaders.

Vitoc



A fair proportion of the Amarr Empire still consists today of slaves, mainly of Minmatar origin. Through the ages the Amarrians have employed various methods of keeping the slaves in line. Many of them are deemed, by the standards of the Gallenteans and others, to be highly immoral and cruel. One of the more recent and controversial methods is called after the antidote drug involved - Vitoc.

With the Vitoc method, slaves are injected with a toxic chemical substance that is fatal unless the recipient receives a constant supply of an antidote. The method first appeared a few centuries ago when the Amarrians started manning some of their space ships with slaves. As space crew the slaves had to be cajoled into doing complex, often independent work, making older methods of slave control undesirable. Although the more conventional ways of subduing slaves with force (actual or threat of) are still widely used in other forced labor areas, the Vitoc method has proven itself admirably for the fleet.

There are two major downsides to the Vitoc method: the method works only as long as the toxic substances remain in the body, and as long as there is no alternative way for a slave to receive the antidote. If either applies, a slave can obviously not be forced to do anything.

For the past decades a fierce R&D battle has taken place between the Amarr Empire on one hand and the Minmatar Republic and the Gallente Federation on the other. The Amarrians are constantly upgrading and altering the toxic chemicals they use on the slaves, while the others are struggling to research and manufacture a permanent remedy. For many years this battle waxed and waned, with the Amarrians releasing a new version every few years, but the others managing to discover a remedy shortly thereafter.

But then, a little more than a decade ago, the Amarrians introduced a new and revolutionary toxic drug, which resembles a virus in many ways, and no cure has yet been found for it. This is mainly due to the erratic nature of the drug, which constantly changes its appearance and behavior on a regular basis. These changes seem to be either controlled, or at least predicted by the Amarrians, as they always seem to have the right antidote for their own use out in time before the toxin changes again. Thus, the Minmatars and the Gallenteans are constantly chasing a ghost - a toxic virus that shifts into something completely different just when they think they've finally nailed it down.

There are more novel features about this new toxic chemical, letting many believe that either an Amarrian scientist genius suddenly appeared or the Amarrians got some crucial help from the outside; the Caldari and even the Jovians have been mentioned in this regard. One of the additional features in the new virus is that the resulting death is much more horrifying now; those that fail to get antidote will suffer excruciating pain that can last for days before death finally comes. With the older versions, death by lack of antidote was never so horrible, sometimes even peaceful. This led to mass-suicides at times when slave crews refused to take the antidote; preferring death over humiliating slavery. Now, although still an option, few people are brave enough to dare it. Another new feature is the very pleasurable side-effect created by the antidote: for the first few hours after injection the receiver gets a very powerful euphoric sensation - as long as he is affected by the toxic virus. Both these extra features have helped bind the slaves to the drug, and thus to their slave-masters.

The transformation of the struggle this past decade has been like a god's gift for the pirate and smuggling industry. Not only is it much easier for this industry to quickly and repeatedly adapt to the ever-changing products (the antidote in this case) than for conventional industries, but the fact that no permanent cure for the new drug had been found means that the ever-increasing number of newly freed Minmatar slaves still need the antidote to survive - hence creating a thriving business outside the Amarr Empire for the antidote for the first time. A lot of people have made fortune beyond their dreams by dealing in the Vitoc antidote, but just as many have been ruined when all their expensive antidote stock became obsolete due to a sudden change in the toxic virus.

Quafe



Quafe is the name of the most popular soft drink in the universe, manufactured by a Gallentean company bearing the same name. It first appeared two centuries ago and, like so many soft drinks, was initially intended as medicine for indigestion and a tender stomach. The refreshing effects of the drink appealed to everyone, however, and the drink fast became hugely popular.

Quafe is one of the most widely recognized brands in the whole universe and can be found virtually everywhere. The marketing gurus at the Quafe Company have often joked that the drink was the best Gallente ambassador there ever was, and an incident between the Gallente Federation and the Amarr Empire ten years ago showed these claims to be more than just amusing hype. At the time, the Federation and the Empire clashed over ownership of the mineral rich system Girani-Fa, located close to both their borders. After the Empire discontinued negotiations with the Federation delegation, the dispute seemed to be headed straight for all-out war.

But a few days later an extraordinary thing happened. The Amarrians declared that while they were ready to continue negotiations, they would only conduct them with representatives from the Quafe Company, claiming the latter were the only group within the Gallente Federation with enough vested interest on both sides of the border to be able to look at the matter from a neutral perspective. The Gallente government, looking to avoid war, agreed to these requests and so a delegation made up of top Quafe Company executives was sent to meet with the Amarrian delegation. A few weeks later an agreement was reached: the system was to come under Gallentean control, but a fixed amount of minerals was to be sold to the Amarrians each year at cost price.

The Girani-Fa incident, as it has become known, clearly demonstrates the respect consumers have for the Quafe name and how strongly the company has managed to

penetrate into every market. A further indication of this is the fact that the Quafe Company is the only Gallentean company that's been given corporation status within the Caldari State.

This amazing success, which has mostly come about in the last three decades or so, can be largely accredited to one man: Poire Viladillet, CEO of the Quafe Company for the past 35 years. Under his leadership the company has ascended from a position as one of several leading soft drink manufacturers into clear and undisputed market supremacy.

Fatal and The rabbit



Jirai Laitanen and Korako Kosakami, today better known by the nicknames they gave themselves: Fatal and the Rabbit, began their careers as promising space ship captains in the 37th (Octopus) Squadron of the Caldari Navy. Laitanen was a shrewd and gifted captain, with a glib tongue and charismatic smile. Many expected him to reach a position of authority in the end. But he was also vain and greedy; traits that led to his eventual desertion. Kosakami was much more introvert than his friend Laitanen, but he had a brilliant mind and was a technical wizard.

When, in the space of one week, Laitanen was passed over for promotion and Kosakami was blamed for a lethal crash landing, the two friends decided to desert. They stole a couple of Condor-class frigates, the same they still use today, and set off to a pirate-infested sector between Caldari and Gallente space. This took place a decade ago.

It didn't take long for them to establish themselves among the criminal society and few months after their arrival they'd set up their own criminal organization, called the Guristas, which is an amalgamation of two Caldari words meaning 'naughty people' and is also a slang term for 'gang'.

The Guristas are famous for their raids into civilized territory, something that very few pirate clans are willing or able to do. The mission of these raids is most often simply to steal cargo or passengers (for ransom) from freighters, but on numerous occasions their main intention seems to be to sabotage empire installations (mining facilities, sentry guns, and the like). This has led to speculations that some unscrupulous empire companies or even governments are hiring the Guristas to take out property of the competition.

But by far the most celebrated of the Gurista raids was when they kidnapped the Gallentean ambassador to the Caldari State and received an enormous ransom from his family. The kidnapping itself was a brilliant feat and clearly demonstrated that Fatal and the Rabbit were far from being the stereotypical brainless brats that most people regarded pirates to be.

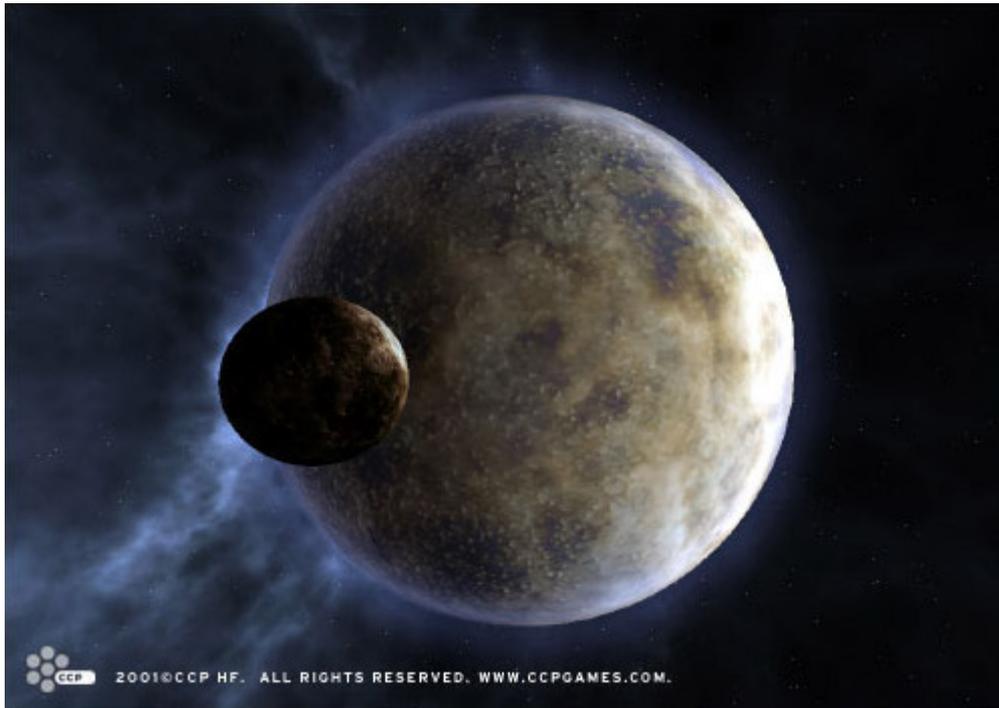
Ambassador Luecin Rileau, son of the diamond-king Darouen Rileau, had only one noticeable vice, and that was gambling. His gambling fascination was probably the main reason why he had sought to become the Gallentean ambassador to the Caldari State, a notoriously tricky position. Ambassador Rileau frequented the Grand Tiegjon Casino on Tiegjon Station in the Caldari system of Vellaine. It was there that Fatal and the Rabbit struck.

The two of them docked at the station under in disguise. The Rabbit (Kosakami) stayed behind in the ship while Fatal (Laitanen) entered the casino. Fatal involved himself in a game of Pettokori, a popular electro-board gambling game, which Rileau was participating in. In the course of the game, Fatal deliberately lost money to the ambassador and finally, when he'd run out of money, Fatal offered his ship to the ambassador. The ambassador accepted and proceeded to win the game. Fatal offered to show the ambassador his newly won ship and Rileau, accompanied by several bulky bodyguards, accepted.

But while the game was underway the Rabbit had been busy. He rigged the boarding ramp to the ship with tanks filled with sleeping gas. Needless to say, when the ambassador and his bodyguards entered the boarding ramp, they were promptly put to sleep. Ambassador Rileau was then carried into the ship and Fatal and the Rabbit innocently left the station. It was only when another ship docked in the same berth an hour later and discovered the boarding ramp full of snoring bodyguards that the alarm was raised, but by then the kidnappers were long gone.

The Gallente Federation was unable to apprehend the culprits and in the end the ambassador's family paid a huge ransom in uncut diamonds to the Guristas. All this drama received a great deal of media attention and even if Fatal and the Rabbit relished the attention for a time, in the end it only hampered them. Being the most notorious criminal in the world of EVE has a downside, mainly that traveling around is not as easy as it used to be. This has forced the Guristas to lay low for the past few months.

The moon of Ndoria



The moon of the planet Ndoria in the system of Uplingur has in recent years been at the center of the struggle between the Minmatar Republic and the Ammatars, a semi-independent state within the Amarr Empire. Uplingur is located in the disputed zone between Minmatar and Ammatar space and until now neither faction has managed to make more substantial claims to it than just words. But the Ammatars, apparently backed by the Amarrians, have recently been able to exert their authority in the system to the point where they have been able to construct huge mining installations, for now limited on and around the Ndoria moon. The reason for that is simple, the Ndoria moon has huge deposits of several highly valuable minerals and has been coveted for years by all the empires.

War tattoos



For most of the Minmatar tribes the act of painting one's face before going into battle is an age-old tradition. In days past, some of the more warlike tribes took this a step further by tattooing their faces in the same style, giving them what effectively amounted to permanent war paint. The main disadvantage of these facial war tattoos was obviously that they were a permanent feature. This made their usage quite a bit less common -- after all, portraying as aggressive a state to others as the war paints represented did not lend itself equally well to all forms of interpersonal communication.

But high-tech developments have opened up a new way of expressing one's aggressive intentions. The latest fad in tattooing is so-called nano-tattooing. The nano-tattoos are very small microchips, surgically implanted between the epidermal and dermal layers of the skin. These microchips are connected to the nervous system via the hair and sweat glands' paravertebral ganglia, and are activated when the host becomes emotionally upset or excited. When active, the microchips emit dark or light color (depending on the person's skin color), resulting in patterns appearing on the face.

These nano-technology war tattoos come in various versions. The most common ones link the microchips' activation directly to the host's emotional state, making it necessary for the host to control their own feelings if they want to influence the appearance and disappearance of the war tattoos. Other versions allow the person direct conscious control over activation, but Matari tend to frown upon those, the general consensus being that these more user-friendly chips suggest a lack of self-discipline in the host.

Since they first arrived on the open market a decade ago, the nano war tattoos have taken Minmatar society by storm. They are especially popular among the younger generation of aviation and space faring personnel. While the custom has spread to other races, most notably the Gallenteans, it is still almost exclusively confined to the Matari.

Outer Ring Excavations



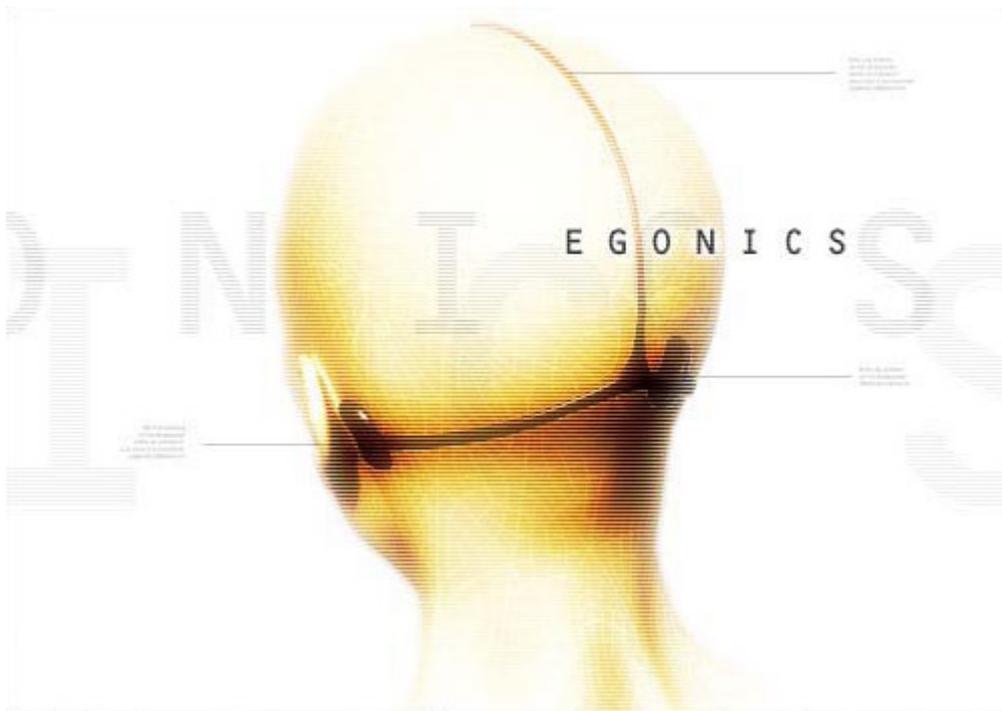
Nocxium is one of the most sought-after materials around, as it's one of the vital ingredients for capsule production. Due to the fact that this strange matter forms only during supernovas, it can only be found in a few exclusive regions. As the nocxium breaks down when under intense heat and pressure, it only exists in asteroid fields and not in larger stellar objects. A few years ago numerous asteroids containing nocxium were discovered in the extensive Miennue cloud ring just outside the jurisdiction of the Gallente Federation, propelling the otherwise desolate cloud ring into the international political limelight.

Thousands of prospectors have flocked to Miennue since nocxium was first discovered there, but as always only a handful reap the rewards of their efforts. Yani Sar Arteu was one of the few to hit the jackpot big time. He and his small company named Outer Ring Excavations recently stumbled across an asteroid reportedly containing the biggest nocxium deposit ever found in this region. Although rumors abound nothing has been confirmed, as only Arteu and his companions have seen this alleged super-asteroid and are not about to disclose its location. In fact, they only spend the minority of their time actually mining the asteroid, hunting it down on weekly excavation expeditions. This is because they don't want to flood the market with nocxium, thus bringing down the price. In between, they spend their energy playing elaborate games of hide-and-seek with jealous competitors eager to get their hands on the asteroid.

The empires monitor the goings-on in Miennue closely and all of them have made both overt and covert proposals to Outer Ring Excavations, offering security for a stake in the company. Outer Ring Excavations have rejected all these offers, but ever-increasing pressure from competitors is making it harder and harder for them to keep their secret safe much longer. Sooner or later, one of the numerous methods employed by those pursuing the asteroid -- bribes, threats, tracking devices, bugs -- is bound to unveil the secret that Arteu has so meticulously kept concealed. In the

meantime, Arfeu and Outer Ring Excavations are getting richer -- fantastically so -- by the minute.

Egonics Inc.



The Gallentean entertainment industry is highly competitive and show biz companies are willing to do anything to gain an edge over their competitors. The size of the entertainment industry means that a mere 1% shift in market share means billions in extra revenue. This has led many companies to employ questionable methods, such as espionage and sabotage, while others engage in a constant technological race. An example of the latter is Egonics.

Egonics Incorporated is a fifty year old company that today specializes in making and distributing music that fits each and everyone's personal taste. There are a few essential steps in this process.

First of all, Egonics runs and maintains a huge database, containing personal profiles of billions of people. The Egonics database is arguably the largest database of personal information owned by a non-governmental company. At first, Egonics planned to use this database for numerous products, but only the musical one became truly successful. Early on, conservatists within the Gallentean government vehemently opposed the data gathering of Egonics, but the company ingeniously used this opposition to their advantage by rallying the young people to their cause, advocating personal freedom of all things. This was one of the major factors in the subsequent growth of the company and the 'Egone' became a symbol of liberty among young people everywhere.

The information in the Egonics database is extremely detailed, it lists both the social status of a person: job, education, marital status and so on, but also very thorough genealogical and biological data, including DNA samples. Egonics uses every method possible to enlarge their database and keep it up to date. Some of these methods are frowned upon by many, but others find it good how dedicated the company is in making sure the customer gets exactly what he likes and there are

some that thrive on selling Egonics DNA samples from people not in their vast database.

Secondly, Egonics employ thousands of sound engineers and musicians that are constantly creating music according to the specs of a certain group of customers. Egonics recognizes hundreds of distinct taste patterns in the populace and they make sure that everybody can find music that caters to their very special preferences, thus Egonics publish thousands of songs every single day. Although the musicians employed by Egonics are total non-entities while in its service, they gain invaluable experience during their stay and a number of them have gone onto fame after their stint there.

And finally, Egonics use a unique method in distributing their music to their customers. The Egone may look like a head ornament instead of a headphone. This is because it doesn't broadcast sound to the ears as normal headphones do, but instead it projects the music directly to the zones in the brain that govern hearing, bypassing the ear altogether. This has many obvious advantages, both for Egonics and the customer. Most importantly, there is no danger of illegal copying and distribution, as there is no actual sound to record. Also, there is no noise pollution and people can easily converse with each other as the ears are clear.

Music is broadcasted to the Egone over wavelength, similar to radio, so in effect every Egonics customer is listening to his own personal radio station, playing only those songs he likes and has paid for.

All in all, Egonics is steadily increasing their popularity, although there are many that find the ruthless data gathering and intrusive broadcasting methods to their disliking. The Amarr Empire has for instance forbidden Egonics to operate within their boundaries.

Language translators.



The most obvious problem in inter-racial communication is the language difference. All the major races in EVE speak their own language and all attempts to make one the *lingua franca* have failed because of stubbornness over accepting any one language as the dominant one. Amarish, the language of the largest empire, is obviously the most common language, especially as most Minmatars also speak the language. But the Gallenteans refuse to acknowledge Amarish as the official language in inter-racial communications as they don't want to give the Amarr Empire the political prestige that would follow. On the other hand, the language of the Gallente Federation (Gallentean) is by far the most common second language, largely because of their very influential entertainment industry. But the Caldari absolutely refuse to speak Gallentean and the Amarrians are also not too keen on it for the same reason that the Gallenteans won't speak Amarish.

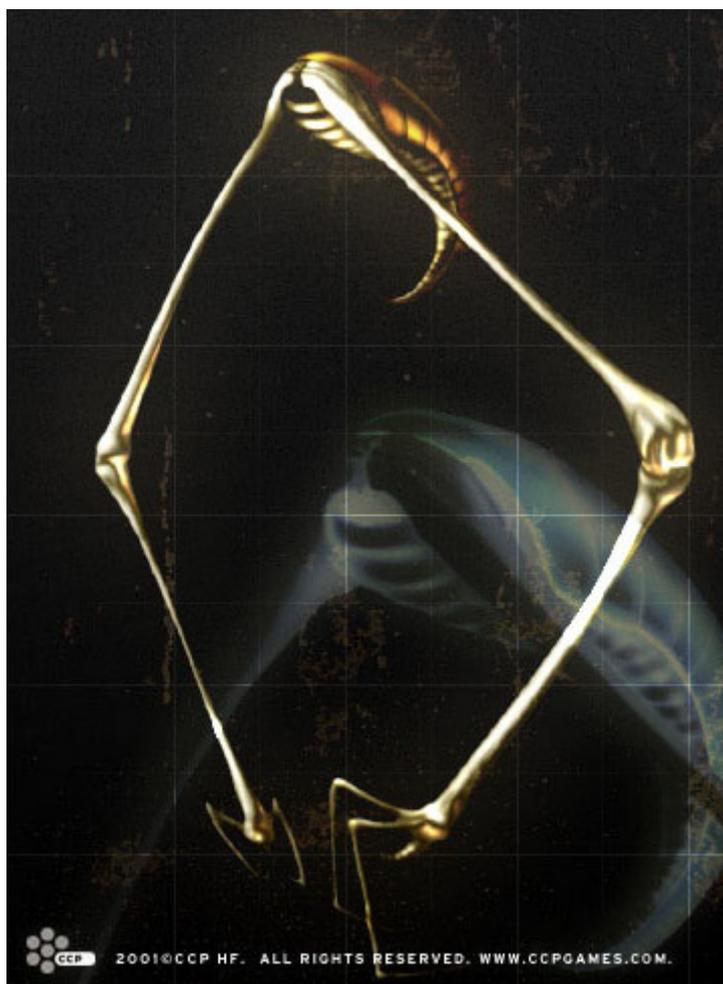
This means that most high-profile discussions between representatives of the empires, such as in the numerous inter-racial organizations, rely heavily on interpreters. But in one field the language a person knows has become irrelevant and the field is that of a space captain.

The unique nature of the capsule with its sophisticated neural rigging gives ship captains the option to link their minds to all kinds of computer systems, which they can use to their advantage. One of these devices that is today a standard feature in all capsules is the translator module.

The translator module is a software module that is a part of the communication system of the ship. It intercepts all incoming communications and translates them into the language preferred by the captain. The first translators were pretty lousy by today's standard, they could only translate written communications and frequently

messed up the text. But the latest versions are able to translate voice as well as text and have become very good at projecting mood-swings, slang, weird accents and such, for a near perfect translation. With the steady increase in cyber-implants these translators have begun appearing outside the capsule as well and many predict that within a few years translators will make the debate over which language should prevail in inter-racial communication a futile one.

The Hanging Long-limb.



In a mass manufacturing and marketing society like that in the world of EVE, everything that is for one reason or another only found in short supply tends to become more sought after because of the rarity factor alone. This is especially true in the field of gourmet cooking, where the finest restaurants compete in offering the most exotic food there is.

The eggs of the Hanging Long-limb are among the most sought after delicacies in these fancy restaurants. This is because the Hanging Long-limb is only found on one planet, Theruesse IV in the Theruesse system, located within the borders of the Gallente Federation. The Hanging Long-limb belongs to the Long-limb family of species, which are also only found there. The planet is almost entirely covered with inhospitable marshy jungles and the methane filled atmosphere is unbreathable by humans. The Hanging Long-limb gets its name from its habit of hanging by its hooked tail from branches that slope over water. It then uses its long claws to catch small fish and other amphibian animals.

The Hanging Long-limb lays its eggs in thousands at a time in a cluster, usually attached beneath a branch. It is this egg-cluster, or roe, that humans so eagerly seek. The main reason why the roe of the Hanging Long-limb is so rare is because no one has succeeded in breeding the species outside their natural habitat. Many

individuals and companies have through the years attempted to simulate the environment on the planet in order to mass breed the Hanging Long-limb, but without success. Similarly, all attempts to artificially generate or clone the eggs have only met with very limited success and such products are regarded as vastly inferior to the real thing.

Most of the restaurants offering Hanging Long-limb roe are situated within the Gallente Federation, as the demand for exotic food is highest there. These restaurants are frequented by the upper strata of Gallentean society: industrial tycoons, celebrities and the idle rich. Many ship captains are also fond of the exotic food found there; they love to treat their digestion system to something special after weeks of disuse while in-flight.

The Truth Serum.



*What if Truth was like a tiny speck of sand?
A speck that has been washed and weighed, polished, smoothed and curbed into
one shiny point, the Universal Truth.
What if we could take this grain of sand and collect it into a book? We would treasure
the book like our own life. We would lock it with the purpose of our mind.
And when we craved the truth we would open it up and let the grains wash over us.
We would soak ourselves in its depth and bask in its radiance.
But the book is flawed. We can take more truth from it than we have earned. And
soon we would be turning empty pages.
Thus the search begins. The search for the truth; the truth we crave; the truth that
has the only meaningful value in an otherwise meaningless world.
The search continues, it goes on and on. In this search for the ultimate truth
everything is allowed. We learn to lie and cheat in hope of progress. We see no
success, no breakthrough of any kind.*

*We're flooded by substitute truth, made up truth, whose only purpose is to sooth us
and lull us.
Absolute truth loses its meaning. There is no absolute truth, only greater and lesser
truth. We've lost our standards, we've lost our talent to distinguish what is real from
what is deception. We no longer know the difference between the right truth and the
wrong truth. All we care for is truth in any form and any guise; corrupted, filthy truth,
we want it all, need it all.
So this truth can make us free, like any other truth. Maybe this substitute truth
suffices? Maybe.
But when we've become enslaved to this freedom, then it is freedom no longer.
It is the worst kind of prison.*

A prison with no walls and no chains. We cannot break free for we cannot see what binds us.

We talk of freedom like it was something to hope for. I hope real freedom never finds us, because we wouldn't know what to do with it.

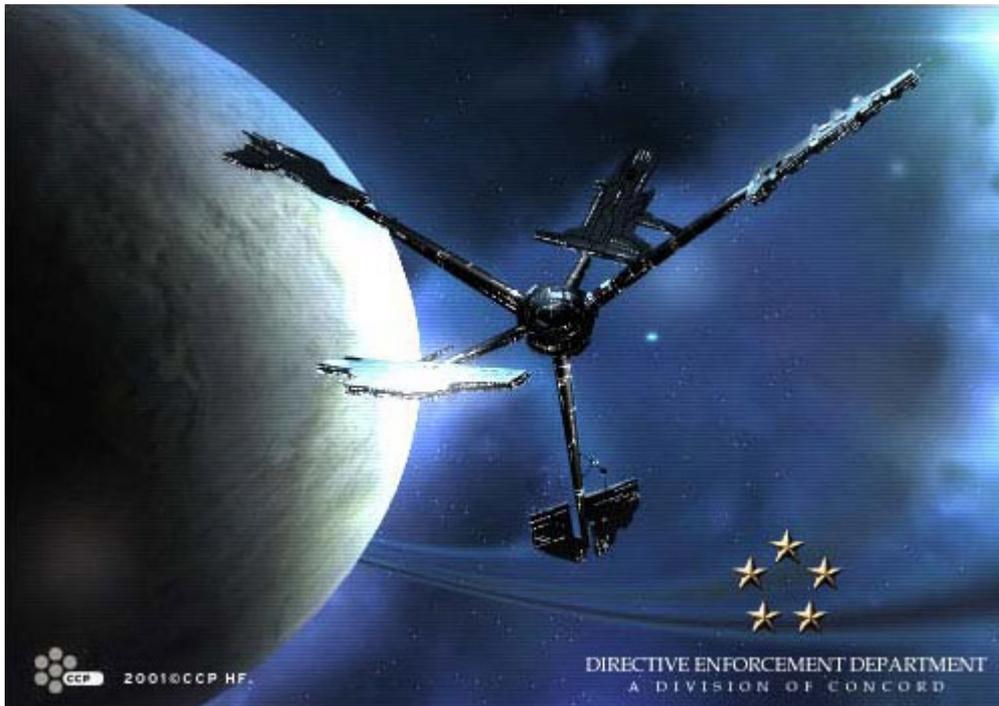
Yet we continue the search, for the searching has become a way of life for us. We know no other. It is what we've become.

Let us only hope the search never ends, that the Absolute Truth stays hidden forever. For if the search ends, we end.

Then we become nothing more than dust, specks of sand on the shore of universal lie.

And maybe, just maybe, this has already happened.

Directive Enforcement Department.



Soon after the empires initiated contact with each other they recognized the need for independent institutions, jointly run by all the empires, to handle the numerous issues regarding the relationships between them, such as trade, monetary policies, crime-fighting, and so on. The earliest forms of these organizations were established decades ago and now there are a few dozen that exist of various size. All of the organizations are controlled by a central organization, called Consolidated Cooperation and Relations Command, or CONCORD.

One of the largest and most powerful branches of CONCORD is the Directive Enforcement Department (DED). DED is the police force of CONCORD and is by far the strongest armed force in the world of EVE that doesn't pledge fealty to any one empire. The main responsibility of the DED is to track high-profile criminals. For this they often hire independent contractors (better known as bounty hunters). The DED handles the licenses and legal issues of all bounty hunters for the empires, although some of the empires have been known to bypass the DED in special circumstances. Also, the most notorious criminals are marked as free-for-all targets by the DED.

Among the other responsibilities of the DED is aiding customs officials in patrolling areas where smuggling is rife. The DED ships are usually equipped with the latest and greatest in surveillance technology, so their service is always a great support for customs patrols, especially because they are incorruptible. In addition, the DED takes care of all kinds of security issues regarding meetings and conferences between the empires, they lend ships for operations by the other branches of the CONCORD, and they often support local law enforcement in dealing with large-scale crime activity or similar matters. For this the DED often uses their special force unit, named Special Affairs for Regulations & Order, or SARO. The SARO is one of the toughest police units around and are notorious for their brutal, but efficient, methods.

They're mostly used in hostage situations, for the assault of heavily armed pirate havens, and similar tasks.

The DED's jurisdiction is limited to space and this has often put severe limits on their operations. However, in recent years, the DED has increasingly been authorized to operate in stations and on planets, and the result is a much more effective fight against organized crime. But even if the DED is getting more and more efficient in dealing with criminals within empire borders, they have yet to gain any significant foothold in the outer regions where empire presence is almost nonexistent. Also, the power of DED, and in fact the whole of CONCORD, differs widely between the various empires, or even between different regions of any one empire, as local governments or magnates often oppose strong DED presence for one reason or another

Kyonoke Pit.



In the deep recesses of the Taisy system lies a lonely mining station called Kyonoke Pit. The station, built 40 years ago by a Caldari mining company owned by the Hyasyoda Corporation, was at that time the largest mining and refining station of tasc (twin atomic superconductor crystal), the core component of inter-stellar communication devices.

For years the mining operation went smoothly and Kyonoke Pit soon became one of the most profitable mining stations of the Hyasyoda Corporation. Kyonoke Pit is located on a huge asteroid and as the years went by the mining shafts dug ever deeper into the heart of the asteroid.

Five years ago the space tower orbiting Taisy Prime received an emergency signal from Kyonoke Pit. An epidemic of some sort had broken out on the mining station and the crew was dying rapidly. The tower personnel lost contact with the Pit a few minutes later and were unable to re-establish it.

A scout ship was sent out to investigate. On its arrival at the Pit, no lights were visible on the station and no life-signs were detected. An emergency team, clothed in protective suits, that was dispatched into the station was greeted by the horrific sight of the station's crew strewn all over the place dead and decaying. The mask of agony on the men's faces spoke volumes about their last terrible ordeal and the garish red spots on their bloated bodies clearly indicated that the cause of their death was by poisoning or some sort of a plague. It was clear that the infliction had surfaced suddenly and slain the crew in a matter of minutes.

The emergency team reported their findings to the scout ship docked outside and then continued exploring. Some two hours later members of the emergency team started complaining about discomfort and the captain of the scout ship ordered them

back to the ship. But on their way back the team-members collapsed in agony - it was clear they had caught the deadly malady despite their protective suits. The captain, fearful for the safety of himself and the rest of the crew, detached the ship from the Pit and left the station while the rest of the emergency team died on the docking ledge.

Thus began the story of the Kyonoke Infection - one of the most deadly and mysterious pestilences man has come into contact with. The Caldari authorities sealed Kyonoke Pit off a few hours after the incident described above. Further research was made with great care and the results were not heartening. A biological speck resembling a protein causes the plague. It enters the body through the respiration system and then enters the blood stream. From there it moves to the brain, where it germinates. In its advanced state, the protein speck enters the medulla oblongata, where it infects the nerve cells very rapidly. The host quickly loses control over all bodily functions, accompanied by a great amount of pain, finally resulting in heart- and lung failure within the space of a few minutes. The specks can survive in an advanced state for a few days; they can leave a dead host and enter another living being close by, in such cases the new host dies within a few hours once the speck has reached the brain.

The speck can also be found in a basic state. As such, it can lie dormant for years and it can survive in extreme environments and conditions. When it enters a living being it usually starts developing to its advanced state, but this is not always the case; it can also lie dormant within a person for a long period of time. It can also enter the brain and start infecting proteins there, slowly but steadily killing the host by eating up its brain over a course of few months. This dual nature of the bio-speck makes it even more of an enigma, not to mention more dangerous.

It can be safely deduced that the biological speck was accidentally uncovered in the bowels of the asteroid Kyonoke Pit is on, but whether it originated there or not is impossible to tell. It is virtually impossible to detect the speck in a person, due to the fact it resembles normal proteins to such a high degree. This has led to speculations that the speck evolved in humans or was even manmade a long time ago, but these speculations have never been substantiated. In any case, because of the difficulties in detecting and tracing the bio-speck and because it has 100% fatality rate, the bio-speck has fascinated both military researchers and terrorist groups, both of which are eager to get their hands on the speck.

The space tower of Taisy Prime has today been converted into a huge research facility, where the Caldari are fervently trying to get to know everything there is about this curious biological speck. Kyonoke Pit itself has been sealed off and remains in a permanent quarantine. Caldari police vessels guarding the mining station make sure that no one without the proper authorization is allowed near it. Some two years ago an unknown group managed to infiltrate the security parameter around the Pit on two ships and entered the station. In addition to acquiring samples of the bio-speck, the group loaded their cargo holds with the highly valuable tasc from the station's vast storage vaults. But on their way out the bandits started showing the symptoms of being infected by the deadly protein. One of the ships crashed back into the Pit after disembarking, severely damaging the station and completely destroying the ship. The other ship managed to escape the investigating Caldari vessels, but it disappeared without a trace in an asteroid field and has not been heard from since. Today, debris and dead bodies from the Pit float around it, making it even more hazardous for ships to approach the crumbling mining installation. This, and tighter security measures by the Caldari, have prevented anyone else from making a raid on the Pit.

Slaver



The vast Amarr plantations on Syrikos V have used slaves as workforce for centuries. Scores of Ealurians, Minmatars, Ni-Kunnis and criminals or political dissenters of Amarrian origin have worked, bred and died by the millions through the ages.

The droves of slaves needed to work the fields coupled with the high mortality rate means that elaborate methods of keeping the slaves in check, such as Vitoc, are not cost efficient enough to warrant their usage. Instead, the Amarrians employ slaver, sometimes referred to as slave-dog.

Slaver is a native animal of Syrikos V and has been bred by the Amarrians from the time they first settled the planet more than a millennium ago. It's a vertebrate with four elongated feet and a slender, fur-clad body. A fully grown slaver can stand more than a meter tall from its shoulder-blades to the soles of its front legs. But the most noticeable feature of the slaver are its massive jaws and teeth, constantly slobbering in anticipation for something to chew on - hence the old name of the slaver before its role as slave keeper: Drooler. The slaver can run very fast and is able to jump vast distances, making this carnivorous beast a deadly foe against unarmed humans.

Slavers are extremely vicious and blood-thirsty, but they can be tamed as long as the training starts while they're still small cubs. The slavers are allowed to roam free outside the barbed parameters of the acres of the plantations. The agile slavers are quick to see or smell slaves that have ventured outside the fences and few can escape the slavers quick, merciless attacks. A preferred tactic of the slaver is to attack from above; for this it often lurks in high places, even trees, or by simply jumping many meters into the air and landing on their unsuspecting prey.

The favorable experience of employing the slaver as a guard animal has led to it being exported from Syrikos V to most other Amarrian agricultural planets and even some industrial and mining ones as well. In recent years, the slaver has become fashionable among Amarrians as pet for those willing to risk its often murderous nature; slavers can become extremely loyal and devoted to their owners if handled with care.

Amarr succession



Amarr Emperors can expect to live for at least 500 years through the use of extensive cyber implants. The Emperor's position has always had a divine aura surrounding it and this led the Amarrians to believe that the flesh of the Emperor and other members of the royal families was sacred. This fact forbids the sacred flesh to be cloned, as the Amarrians consider this to make it impure.

The Emperor's position is not hereditary and when the old Emperor dies a new one must be selected from among the Five Heirs. The Five Heirs are the heads of the five royal families, the most powerful families in the Amarr Empire. The Five Heirs are descendants of the original members of the Privy Council. The Council was a staunch supporter of the Emperor during the turbulent times 1,500 years ago, known as the Moral Reforms, which was a struggle between the Emperor and the Council of Apostles. Since that time the positions of the five members of the Privy Council have evolved into the current situation of five royal families vying for the throne.

When the Emperor dies, an elaborate ritual for selecting a new Emperor is put into action. These rituals are performed in strict order and take a few weeks to complete. The rituals are always undergoing some small changes to better reflect the current state of society and to fix problems experienced in earlier successor bids. The rituals mainly involve various ways in which the Five Heirs prove their loyalty to the empire.

and their ability to run it. As should be expected most of the rituals involve the Heirs directly, but some of them have changed through the ages to allow another person, chosen by the Heir, to perform in the Heir's place. In fact, in recent time the intricate process of selecting personal champions has become the focal point of an Heir's ability and prestige, by finding and hiring the right people for the occasion.

One of the more gruesome aspects of the whole inheritance process is that once a new Emperor has been chosen from among the Heirs, the other four Heirs must all commit a formal suicide. This is done to minimize the risk of conflicts between the new Emperor and the old Privy Council, by removing all of the old ones and replacing the Privy Council with the next-in-line of the five royal families, thus starting anew. Only once since this tradition first came into being more than a millennium ago has it been broken. This was when the Emperor before the current one was selected 300 years ago. Then, one of the remaining Heirs named Khanid II, a young man only who had only recently become the head of his family, refused to uphold the old tradition and fled the royal court. He set up a separate state, the Khanid kingdom, in the vast regions of his family estates and later attempts by the Amarr Empire to reconcile the two states either politically or militarily have all failed. A new minor-family took the place of Khanid's family in the royal court and the current Emperor, Heideran VII, is the first emperor from that minor family.

Tyma Raitaru



The name of Tyma Raitaru will forever be associated with the term freelance research. Raitaru, a Caldari by birth, pioneered what has today become a popular profession among rogue scientists and scholars around the world of EVE - that of the knowledge nomad, selling his work to the highest bidder.

Raitaru began his career working in the R&D department at a company owned by the Ishukone Corporation. He became increasingly frustrated about the fact that Ishukone took all his work and inventions and made them their own, giving scant credit to the creator. In the end he left and set up his own laboratory under his sole control. There he struggled for some years, constantly on the brink of financial ruin. It was only when he turned his focus toward the most practical of all inventions - that of weaponry - that his career really took off. Forty years ago Raitaru offered the blueprints for the Achilles missile for sale on the open market. The Achilles missile was at that time the best missile available and every empire and every faction wanted it. The Achilles missile didn't employ any revolutionary new technology, but instead it combined many solid concepts and designs to make it extremely reliable and powerful for a small price. In the design of Achilles Raitaru combined the innovative approach of the researcher with the practical mindset of the craftsman. Ever since, those that have followed in Raitaru's footsteps have been most successful when they take existing technologies and products and combine them to invent some superior product. Most of today's freelance researchers work predominantly in the fields of weapons and ship equipment, and they frequently operate out of space stations or lone research outposts.

Lady Phanca's pet furrier



The planet Radonis lies deep within the Amarr Empire in the fiefdom of Ardishapur, one of the five royal families. Radonis is the capital of Ardishapur's domain and is considered the leading place of theological scholarship within the Amarr Empire and is the seat of the High Court, the highest judicial institution in the Empire.

The current head of the family and one of the Five Heirs, Idonis Ardishapur, had his right hand amputated at birth and replaced by a cybernetic silver one. It's the same for all male members of the Ardishapur family. For more than 700 years an imperial law has decreed that every male born into the Ardishapur family would have his right hand amputated at the wrist right after birth. The laws do not forbid them from replacing it with a cyber-hand and today the silver hand is the unofficial symbol of the Ardishapur family.

The circumstances which led to this imperial law are as bizarre as the law itself. As it happened, Lady Phanca, the mother of the emperor at the time, was visiting Radonis and staying at the Ardishapur's royal palace. Lady Phanca was a legend in her time; a strict, extremely ambitious woman, in many ways ruthless but still charismatic in her dealings with people. Many thought she had unnaturally strong influence on her son, the emperor, and many cases can be cited where the actions of the emperor

can be directly linked to the wishes of his mother. The Ardishapur decree, as it became known as, is one of them.

Lady Phanca had a pet furrier, a small furry animal commonly found as pet among the Amarrian higher class. It was a well-known quirk that the otherwise severe and dispassionate lady loved her pet lavishly. When young Uri Ardishapur, son of the Ardishapur royal heir, killed the twittering creature at the dinner table, the fury of the old lady left no doubt in the minds of those present that the repercussions would be terrible. Persuading her son to pass the fore mentioned laws, Uri Ardishapur became the first of the Ardishapurs to lose his right hand, the hand that had slain lady Phanca's pet furrier.

Imperial laws are extremely strong within the Amarr Empire and are almost regarded as the written will of god. It is very rare for any of them to be changed or revoked. The Ardishapurs may at one time have wanted the law to be revoked, but today they revel in this old tradition and consider it one of their most important family heirlooms.

Myth of a salesman



Aeron Assis. Niques S. Leutre. Niemar Kokolen. Are any of these names the real name of the man who uses them? His best known alias is not even a name, the Broker. Mention the Broker to any governmental agent anywhere within the world of EVE and you'll be sure to get a response. The only thing more numerous than the number of aliases he is known by is the number of speculations on his background. There are precious few concrete facts known about this elusive spy, negotiator, informant, arms dealer and manipulator of men and states. As a master of disguise, who utilizes the latest in cloning and DNA technology to keep his appearance a secret, such basic details as race, height or hair-color are unknown. However, he's most often considered to be of either Amarrian or Gallentean ancestry, of average height and build, with no apparent quirks or physical marks of notice.

For more than 50 years the Broker has directly or indirectly been involved in various dealings between states, prominent warlords or intelligence agencies. Most of these dealings include exchange of information, weapon selling and espionage. In addition, various accounts of criminal activity and even terrorism have sometimes been credited to the Broker, but none of them are based on any solid facts. What is known is that the Broker operates a vast information net, mainly within the higher strata of the society. He uses this net to gain advantageous business deals, but he also uses the information garnered to blackmail, bribe or manipulate people or even whole governments. In these operations he's often working under contract from a third party, invariably a political or economical rival of the victims.

As befits the secretive and shadowy endeavors of the Broker, few of his deeds have reached the public eye. In the inner circles of the espionage world, everyone has a story of their own about him, often offering a glimpse of a piece of much grander scheme the Broker has undertaken. One of his more celebrated feats took place

early in his career, almost half a century ago and is known among intelligence agents as the Omicron Incident.

At that time two feudal Amarrian lords ruling adjacent domains at the fringes of the Amarr Empire were clashing over the privilege to extend their domains to include that of another feudal lord, recently deceased. The Broker, going by the name Aeron Assis, had just concluded a contract to buy a large quantity of Caldari and Gallente manufactured weapons. He was looking for prospective buyers and decided the two Amarrian lords to be ideal. The problem was that the two lords were just about to reach an agreement on dividing the disputed territories between them. The Broker acted fast and produced documents claiming that one of the lords, Hurid-Akan, had been conspiring to have the other lord, Kirion, assassinated. The news infuriated Kirion and made him break off all negotiations with Hurid-Akan. Determined to strike the iron while still hot the Broker set out for Hurid-Akan's domain and leaked (false) information to Hurid-Akan's intelligence arm that Kirion had broken of the negotiations because he intended to invade and occupy the disputed territories with the aid of an undisclosed ally. Hurid-Akan was hesitant to take up arms he considered his army too ill-equipped to be an efficient fighting force. But to his immense relief he learned that a Caldari arms dealer was visiting his capital (this was of course the Broker in yet another disguise). The Broker sold Hurid-Akan top-of-the-line Caldari weapons and then left, again heading for Kirion's domain. Meanwhile, Hurid-Akan hurriedly began mobilizing his armed forces.

Kirion, alarmed by the mobilization of Hurid-Akan's forces, began his own preparations for war. The Broker leaked the information about the advanced Caldari weapons Hurid-Akan had bought to Kirion and then proceeded to sell him Gallentean weaponry as counter measures.

For days, the Broker played the two lords against each other, employing a combination of falsified surveillance data, forged documents describing imaginary plots and plans and his net of agents and double-agents within both domains to increase the paranoia of the lords so they'd buy more of his weapons. In the end, the Amarr Emperor, notified of the increased tension in the region, was forced to send a royal arbitrator to calm things down. By that time the two lords spent their entire fortune buying all of the Broker's weapons and the Broker himself had quietly disappeared from the Empire. This was not to be the last time that the Broker ingeniously played factions against each other for his own benefit.

As the years have passed the Broker himself has become increasingly paranoid of keeping his identity and whereabouts hidden. His vast information net and accumulated wealth has made this relatively easy for him and today he works almost entirely through middlemen in his wheeling and dealing in the outer world. He is still considered to be very active, but the extent of his operation is for anybody to guess.

The Day of Darkness



The Day of Darkness was properly named. That day saw one of the worst storms ever on the biggest continent on Matar, laying incredible amount of destruction in few short hours. But greater danger loomed, because that same day six giant slave vessels entered the Pator system. From there each ship set out for a different Minmatar planet, escorted by heavily armed military ships. Once in orbit the Amarrians descended onto the surface and started rounding up people. The Minmatars put up a brave resistance, but to no avail, the superior Amarr technology swept all Minmatar armed forces away, then plundered the populace at will. In addition, the Amarrians took great care of destroying every Minmatar space ship and installation they encountered, with the intent of making it very difficult for the Minmatars to gain strong space presence.

All in all the Amarrians enslaved more than one million Minmatars in that first raid. During the next few weeks they repeated their slave-raids, capturing millions more and permanently throwing the Minmatar Empire into a state of confusion, sorrow and insecurity.

The Prophecy of Macaper



A century ago a Gallentean astrologer named Damella Macaper prophesized the end of the world in a book called 'The Seven Events of the Apocalypse'. Considered a hack and a nutcase by her contemporaries, the book was largely ignored outside the small circle of her cult following. A short while later Macaper died and her cult died with her as her followers dwindled rapidly.

The book describes seven calamities that will befall the world, culminating in the "return of the dark light from the heart of the mother", as Macaper described it. The book is written in a stylized prose and even if the general course of events can be followed, any detailed information is lacking. It can be deduced that the calamities will occur within a space of few months or years at the most, but when or where this will happen is not mentioned, decreasing the credibility of the prophecy as a whole.

For decades 'The Seven Events of the Apocalypse' had been all but forgotten by everyone except a handful of scholars. But in recent months the eyes of the world have increasingly turned towards this old tome for explanations. A series of strange natural occurrences around the world seem oddly similar to the first calamitous events described in Macaper's prophecy a century ago. Although few believe that the actual end of the world is near people is still wary and extensive studies are being carried out into the prophecy and other surviving Macaper texts for more clues on what the future holds for the world of EVE.

The first event in Macaper's prophecy she described as "the cosmetic kiss of the comets" and this is exactly what happened in a remote Caldari system almost a year ago, when two large comets collided head on. The clash occurred within the boundaries of the solar system, but not close enough to any of the planets to cause any drastic effects. Debris from the comets disturbed space traffic for a while, but that

was all. Albeit a very rare event, the comet collision was not connected to the prophecy at this time.

The second event occurred a few months later when the planet Fricoure in the Gallente Federation was literally flooded with rains that lasted for weeks. Scientists could easily explain this by citing shifts in the weather patterns in the upper atmosphere and it wasn't until a diligent astrology student pointed out the similarities between this downpour and the second event of Macaper's prophecy that people began taking notice.

The third calamity is described by Macaper as being a "roaring stone that silences the world." A week ago a huge asteroid entered the atmosphere of the Amarrian planet Rumida at a low angle. It cut across the surface of the planet for hundred of kilometers with a thunderous roar before finally slamming into the ocean. In its wake lay the ruins of thousands of homes; destroyed by the powerful shockwaves created by the asteroid, the shockwaves plowing the earth along a path several kilometers wide. Casualties numbered a few thousand; fortunately the asteroid's impact wasn't close to settled territories. But Macaper's prophecy came true in a very striking manner; dozens of thousands were left deaf by the meteor, as the sound waves streaming around it had exploded the eardrums of people many kilometers away from the meteor. The roaring stone had silenced the world for all those people and the name of Damella Macaper became renowned throughout the world.

Four more events are to take place according to the prophecy and speculations about their nature abound. Many claim expertise in the prophecies, but none can inform us with any certainty about what is to transpire. The fourth event is described by Macaper as "the appetite of nothing expands over the world"; the fifth is described as "the little brother makes the final sorrowful steps home; he is not welcome"; the sixth is described as "what was many now becomes one when one becomes four"; the seventh is mentioned above.

What this means is for anyone to guess, but the majority of people agree that Macaper's prophecy has put the fate of humans into perspective for the public and the next few months or years should be interesting indeed to watch.

Heaven



The Heaven constellation is a group of nine systems on the fringes of known space. In the middle of the constellation lies the Utopia system, where the headquarters of the Angel pirate clan are located.

The Angels are today one of the oldest and most powerful of the criminal organization found in the world of EVE. They established themselves in Utopia system a century ago and soon had the whole Heaven constellation under their control. At first they mainly acted as 'muscle-for-hire' for other criminal factions, but soon they started expanding their activities. They slowly but steadily increased their influence in the underworld and today DED consider them the most dangerous criminal faction around. The Angels, unlike most criminal organizations, recruit their members from among all the races. This makes their area of operation much larger than for most other crime syndicates. The Angel cartel is divided into many smaller operational groups, each of those having some special prefix-names describing their role, such as the Guardian Angels and the Dark Angels.

But many believe that there is another reason behind the power of the Angels. The Heaven constellation is the former habitat of the Jovians. The ancestors of the Jovians settled in Utopia while the EVE gate was still open. The Heaven constellation was the home of the First and Second Jovian Empires, both larger and grander than their current Third Empire.

The Third Empire was founded half a millennium ago amidst the devastation of the Jovian Disease, which threatened to disintegrate Jovian society. In a desperate attempt to escape the wrath of the mysterious epidemic, the Jovians decided to relocate to another part of the world. Three huge vessels were built, termed Motherships; they were the first Titan-class ships ever built. The majority of the Jovian population relocated in the Motherships. Those showing any sign of the Disease were left behind to die.

Some couple of centuries later, when space traveling had become a common thing, the constellation was entered by migrating scavenger groups. Many of those groups set themselves up within the constellation and eventually they evolved into criminal organizations. The strongest of those was the Angel cartel. They took over the abandoned but still intact Jovian space stations scattered around the constellation and rumors abound that some hidden secrets the Angels unlocked in these old stations is the real reason for the Angels' rise to power.

Gallente-Caldari War: The early days



By the time the Gallente Federation was founded two centuries ago the Caldari Corporations were already well established in Caldari society. Although not nearly as powerful as they are today, they were still preeminent in Caldari economic life.

Shortly after jump gate technology was jointly discovered by the Gallenteans and the Caldari some three hundred years before the Federation formed, the Caldari Corporations had started their own inter-stellar surveying and colonization, separate from those conducted by the Gallenteans. It was these colonies, kept as a secret from the Gallenteans, that became the source of friction between the Gallenteans and the Caldari, culminating in the latter's defection from the Federation and an ensuing war between the two races.

It all started when a Gallente exploration ship happened upon one of the hidden Caldari colonies. When the Federation Senate learned of this they demanded a full-scale investigation into the matter and that all hidden Caldari colonies should immediately be put under Federation authority. This was too much for the Caldari Corporations, which were already grumbling over increasing Federation interference into their affairs. For the Caldari it was a simple question of losing their autonomy forever by caving in or making a stand right then and there. They decided to make a stand.

What made the situation so tense right from the start was the situation on Caldari Prime. Being located in the same solar system as Gallente Prime made the Gallenteans very nervous and, more importantly, a sizeable Gallentean population was living on Caldari Prime. Right after the Caldari defected from the Federation they focused on securing the jump gates leading to their (once) hidden bases, as those bases provided the backbone to the Caldari military infrastructure at that time. At the

same time the Gallenteans moved their fleet into orbit around Caldari Prime and started blocking the planet.

For the next few days nothing much happened. The Caldari were content to sit by the jump gates, while the Gallenteans were debating how to best negotiate a peace agreement. But the Caldari on Caldari Prime were restless. They found the Gallente blockade intolerable and soon small-scale guerrilla activities escalated into all out hostilities. In the end the Gallente population on the planet had to pay the price for the Federation's indecisiveness.

The turning point came when Caldari partisans sabotaged the glass dome of the Gallente-inhabited underwater city Nouvelle Rouvenor. More than half a million perished. From then on a lengthy, bloody war between the two races was all but inevitable – the Federation retaliated at once by sending an invasion force down to Caldari Prime and began a systematic orbital bombardment of the planet. Soon, the Caldari population had been driven to the mountains and the forests; their resistance getting weaker by the day. The only question was: how would the newly formed Caldari State respond?

The Elite



In the time since all the races came into contact with each other about 150 years ago inter-stellar trading has steadily increased, especially since the races started cooperating more closely through institutes such as CONCORD.

Today all space ships are equipped with a capsule, which makes control of the ship much more easy and efficient for the ship captains. Not just anybody can become a ship captain. Captains need special kind of neural riggings and the training is extremely rigorous and taxing, only a small fraction of students actually make it through. This makes able ship captains a unique breed that have a special status within society. The ship captains are regarded by the empires as an expensive investment as well as a huge prestige - the number of inter-stellar traders an empire has in many ways reflects the economic vitality of the empire.

Yet despite the desire of the empires to keep their ship captains on a leash things have developed differently. Because of the exulted status of the ship captains they've managed as the years have passed to make themselves ever more independent from the empires that spawned them. Most ship captains are still employees of an empire company or organization, but what work they do is largely self-controlled. The ever-increasing number of ship captains entering the market alleviates this problem for the empires and has allowed them to increase the number of captains working for them despite the fact that proportionally more and more captains are going totally independent.

The prestige enjoyed by the ship captains is enormous. Apart from the celebrity status many of them enjoy they receive a number of other privileges. The most

important of these is their access to cloning, which is strictly supervised in all the empires. Although some rogue cloning stations are in operation the vast majority of cloning facilities are empire controlled and who is allowed a clone is rigorously controlled. Ship captains are one of very few professions that have, because of the nature of their job, more or less unrestricted access to clones, although any special types of clones must be paid for out of their own pocket.

CONCORD



CONCORD stands for Consolidated Cooperation and Relations Command. CONCORD was founded over a century ago, not long after the five empires had established contact with each other. Relationships between the five empires were strained right from the start and one of the main purposes of CONCORD was to ease the fragile tension and create a foundation for the empires to work their differences out in a peaceful manner. In this regard, the workings of CONCORD can be said to have been successful, since the empires have kept the peace over the last century. On numerous occasions relationships deteriorated to within an inch of all out war, but through the efforts of CONCORD a compromise solution has always been found.

CONCORD is branched into numerous divisions, each of which handles a certain aspect of the empire relationship. Of these divisions the CAD (Commerce Assessment Department), which oversees inter-stellar trade agreements and regulations; and DED (Directive Enforcement Department), which oversees policing in space, are by far the largest and most influential. Most space farers will only ever deal with these two departments on any regular basis and to many those two, and maybe mainly DED are the actual face of CONCORD.

The inner workings of CONCORD are democratic in nature, today each of the five empires have an equal saying in all matters. Early on the Amarrians were adamant that the Minmatar Republic would not get an admission into CONCORD, but later reluctantly agreed, even if they still refuse to accept the legitimacy of the Republic.

For the first few decades of its existence CONCORD wielded very limited power, but in recent years their authority has grown alongside that of inter-stellar trade, which is becoming more important by the day throughout the world of EVE. The growing power of CONCORD has caused some concern within the empires and many are

becoming alarmed by CONCORD's attempts to insert its autonomy in areas hitherto regarded as internal affairs of the empires. The root for this development lies in the evolution of CONCORD itself. It's no longer simply a neutral ground for the empires to hammer out diplomatic agreements - it has become an independent institution setting its own rules and regulations and, more importantly, is both willing and able to uphold them. The ever-expanding bureaucracy of CONCORD has become a-empirical, swearing fealty to no one race. The only hold the empires have had on CONCORD, that of financial support, is waning day by day as the revenues garnered through customs, confiscation of illegal goods, selling licenses, and more, are steadily increasing.

The empires haven't been bothered to interfere with this development as, on the whole, CONCORD is doing its job very well and there have been no major cases of abused power. But many fear that this may change one day.

Gallente-Caldari War: The Breakout



Following the attack on Nouvelle Rouvenor an extreme right-wing government grabbed the power reigns in the Gallente Federation and advocated a harsh response: bombing Caldari Prime and sending in troops to take control of the planet. Those within the Federation believing that peace talks should be initiated instead of an invasion didn't dare speak up for fear of being branded cowards or, worse, traitors; the Gallente war machine grinded into gear.

It soon became obvious that it was a question of when, not if, the Gallenteans would take full control of the planet. The newly formed Caldari government, led by the heads of the Corporations, was far from being in full agreement as to what the correct course of action was. This disagreement, which severely hampered the Caldari State in following a coherent strategy, was only settled after the Morning of Reasoning, when the six most militant Corporations jointly ousted the other CEO's from power. The Caldari saw that it was impossible to try to fight the much larger Gallente Federation for control of Caldari Prime. Instead, they started devising a plan to evacuate the Caldari population on the planet.

For the plan to work an evacuation window of at least one month had to be created by the Caldari Navy; it had to keep the Gallente fleet occupied and away from the planet for this period of time to allow the thousands of civilian and cargo vessels gathered for the evacuation to operate safely. The Caldari high command knew their fleet was heavily outnumbered and outgunned by the Gallente fleet, but they put their faith in several advantages: first, the surprise factor would help them in the initial stages; secondly, the ferocity of the Caldari personnel, fighting for their home and their families, would carry them through a lot of hardship; and thirdly, the Gallente ships orbiting Caldari Prime were large and cumbersome, little more than shooting platforms ideal for orbital bombardment. The Caldari hoped their small, fast one-man fighters would run circles around the Gallente ships.

It is doubtful whether the above-mentioned advantages had sufficed for the Caldari, but they enjoyed one further advantage that they knew nothing about. The extreme right-wing faction that held the reigns of power in the Federation was getting paranoid. They saw conspirators in every corner and started firing prominent figures from the administration and army, replacing them with eager yes-men with little experience and even less initiative. The result was total chaos in the Gallente war-effort. This chaos was not enough to completely halt the military operations on and around Caldari Prime, but it made the Gallente fleet and army ill-prepared for any drastic changes.

It was thus with a relative ease that the Caldari fleet managed to take control of the orbital zones of Caldari Prime and drive the Gallente fleet back. Even the most optimistic of the Caldari were taken by surprise and there were even talks that the Caldari fleet should continue to Gallente Prime and repay the Gallentians by bombing their home planet. But the more level-headed of the Caldari knew that decisively defeating the Gallente home fleet was impossible, indeed it would be hard enough to defend against it once it arrived to reclaim the space around Caldari Prime. So instead, the Caldari high command quickly set into motion their evacuation program and soon millions of Caldari were leaving the planet for their new homes.

Two weeks passed. More than half the Caldari population was still on the planet. Both sides employed dozens of scout ships to gauge the strength and intentions of the other. It was becoming obvious to the Caldari that the Gallentians were preparing a massive assault on Caldari Prime to drive the Caldari out and resume their military conquest of the planet. A new plan was needed. Days passed and desperation began seeping in; the Gallente attack was imminent.

Finally, the Caldari admiral Yakiya Tovil-Toba took matters into his own hands. He led the few dozen ships he commanded and jumped to Gallente Prime. Before the stunned Gallentians could respond he had attacked and destroyed a few stray Gallente ships. But the Gallentians were quick to recover and before long admiral Tovil-Toba was on the run. But he managed to beat the advancing Gallente ships off and retreat to the moon of Floreau. The Gallentians stop their pursuit to gather their forces and lick their wounds. The two fleets clashed again the next day and again admiral Tovil-Toba showed his remarkable tactical skills and managed to withdraw relatively unscathed. Tovil-Toba played this game of cat-and-mouse with the Gallentians for a whole week, except that he was in the role of the mouse. Eventually only one of his ships remained, a badly damaged fighter-carrier. In his dying breaths Tovil-Toba directed the huge vessel down towards Gallente Prime.

On entering the atmosphere the ship broke into several burning pieces, killing all aboard. But the largest of these pieces reached the ground and one of them hit the city of Hueromont, killing thousands. Admiral Tovil-Toba and his crew sacrificed themselves in order for millions more Caldari to escape. To this day he is revered as a national hero and his name is one of the first things every Caldari child learns.

The turmoil in the Federation created by the Hueromont Incident, as the Gallentians knew it, toppled the government and a new one took over, this one more willing to listen to those wishing for peace. The week bought by Tovil-Toba and the ensuing confusion following in the wake of the new government gave the Caldari enough time to finish the evacuation of Caldari Prime. Only a small fighting force remained, acting as a guerilla force.

One would imagine that peace would now be settled, but it wasn't to be. A large faction of the Gallente Federation was neither willing to forgive or forget Nouvelle Rouvenor or Hueromont and the Caldari, elated by their success and their belief in

superior fighting power with their small one-man fighters, dreamed of returning one day to their home planet. The war was to rage for years yet and some stunning military victories by the Caldari following their Breakout soon led the Gallenteans in a desperate search for an answer against the highly trained one-man fighters that lay at the core of the Caldari victories.

Rebel with a cause



Ten years ago security forces in the Caldari system of Suroken destroyed a civilian ship. The headquarters of Hyasyoda, a Caldari Corporation, are located in the system. The ship was found trespassing and refused to change course despite numerous warnings and was blown up in the end.

Aboard the ship where numerous radicals, both Caldari and Gallenteans, demonstrating against recently exposed information about dubious drug experiments the Corporation was undertaking, involving for instance slaves provided by the Amarrians.

All but one of the radicals were killed when the ship blew up, the only survivor was the ship captain Aki Onikori, protected by his capsule. Amongst the dead was his wife. Onikori swore that the death of his wife and his compatriots would be avenged and in the decade since the incident he has made his vow come true through several terrorist acts.

Onikori seldom goes by his real name and is best known to the public by the name Fiend, a play on words of his name in Caldari. In the past few years his twisted ideology has mutated from one of innocent anarchy to a bloody crusade against authority in every form. Early on his focus was first and foremost on the pharmaceuticals industry, but in recent years he has started targeting more diverse targets and seems especially fond of governmental institutions. Onikori is very persuasive and extremely driven and these traits have helped him secure support from various sources sympathetic to his cause. With these funds the Fiend has created a small, tight unit of experienced and dedicated terrorists. It goes without saying that the Fiend and his friends are high on the wanted list of almost every police and military organization there is. The SARO is particularly keen on getting its

hands on him, after he blew up a SARO ship recently. This embarrassment is something SARO wants to rectify as soon as possible.

But the Fiend is not only cunning, but also paranoid. He never stays long in any one place and even his closest associates are often in the dark about his whereabouts or future plans. This extreme paranoia has served the Fiend well in his on-going crusade against the pharmaceutical industry and other “totalitarian institutes with no regard for human life” as he himself phrases it. Even if he’s a hunted man the Fiend still finds time to plan and execute his terrorist acts that have made him famous. The Fiend is indiscriminating in the selection of his targets, a clear sign that he holds few customs or creeds dear, something that his critics have pointed out as a serious contradiction – on one hand he claims to be fighting against those that hold human life in contempt, while on the other he frequently kills innocent bystanders in his attacks.

The fact that many of his attacks have killed or injured civilian bystanders, often children, means that he is highly unpopular almost everywhere and that few people will be sorry when his reign of terrorism comes to an end.

The Khanid Kingdom



The Khanid Kingdom stretches over some dozen systems near the fringe of the Amarr Empire. The kingdom was founded some 300 years ago and is in every respect a sovereign state, even if the connections with the Amarr Empire itself are strong. It is still ruled by the man who founded the kingdom and whose name it bears - Khanid II, often called the Sixth Heir. Once one of the Five Heirs he defied the Amarrian succession rituals and split himself and his estates from the empire. The reasons were his fierce ambition and love of life, traits that later helped keep his kingdom intact through numerous upheavals. At the time of the succession Khanid was commander-in-chief of the military forces of the empire. After having refused to commit suicide he promptly confiscated one of the two Titans the Amarrians owned at the time, both of them personal property of the Emperor himself. Khanid escaped to his estates on the Titan, escorted by a portion of the Amarr fleet, claimed by Khanid by the power of his position.

For the first few years following the split the newly-founded kingdom faced grave dangers time and again. The greatest threat did not come directly from the Amarr Empire itself - the new emperor and heirs were still getting themselves acquainted to their new positions - but from the brother of Khanid II. This brother, named Dakos, was in the forefront of those relatives of Khanid that opposed his actions and wished to remain as one of the Heir families. Soon after Khanid was crowned as king Dakos rebelled against him and the infant kingdom witnessed its first civil war. The struggle raged for a few months, in that time the Amarr Empire had joined the fray, naturally casting their support for Dakos. For some weeks the survival of the Khanid kingdom hung in the balance, but when Khanid managed through trickery to have his brother assassinated, the opposition fizzled to nothing. Khanid lost some of the isolated regions of the kingdom, but the core of it remained intact.

This was not the first time that Khanid's own family acted against him. Khanid has always managed to smother all rebellion attempts, each time tightening the leash on his family. Today all women and children belonging to the family spend their time in the royal palace on Khanid Prime. Although they live in luxury and comfort they're still hostages, kept to keep their husbands and fathers in line. As for the men they must spend at least quarter of each year in the royal palace on Khanid Prime and there are strict restrictions as to what arms they can own or bear.

The Khanid Kingdom in many ways resembles the Amarr Empire. The caste system is intact - the Holders still reign as the social elite. The governmental structure and administration are all but identical, the only difference being the lack of checks-and-balances that many entrenched institutions and local barons exercise within the empire. Just as for the Amarr Emperor Khanid II is in name undisputed ruler of his realm, but in practice a number of powerful magnates share or dilute the power. In the empire's case it's the Heirs that compete with the Emperor for power, in the kingdom's case it's the members of the minor families that supported Khanid during his rift with the empire. Other features, such as the importance of religion and slavery, are also very much alike in the two states. In fact, the kingdom takes slavery even further than the empire. The Amarr Empire uses almost exclusively Minmatar and Ealur slaves, but the kingdom, denied many of their traditional slave sources, take slaves wherever they can find them. Khanid himself has a Gallentean - a former pop-star - as his personal slave, something he finds highly amusing but makes the Gallenteans frothing at their mouths.

But even if Khanid has tried to build his kingdom to mirror the empire he once belonged to, there are many discreet differences. The biggest of these are the way the Dark Amarrians - so called for the color schemes on their ships - conduct their trade and business. The Khanid Kingdom is not nearly as rigid and stale in their governing of inter-stellar trade, for the very simple reason that the kingdom absolutely needs outside trade to survive, which is not the case for the empire. Since the Amarr Empire seized their attempts to reconcile with the separatists decades ago trade has started to flourish between the two. The result is that today the kingdom acts in many ways like a window to the outside world for the reclusive empire. Trade goods that can't be directly transported into or out of the empire are carried through kingdom because of the much more lenient trade policies the empire has for them. Many Dark Amarrians have grown fat acting as intermediaries for Amarr traders and outsiders.

Many other notable differences can be seen between the kingdom and the empire - the Dark Amarrians embrace technology, including cloning, much more willingly than the Amarr brethren and even if most Amarrian traditions and customs still exist within the kingdom, they've been modified so that Dark Amarrian society is much more dynamic and robust than that of the Amarr Empire.

Gallente-Caldari War: The War Drones On



The bitter ferocity of the first stages of the war fueled the animosity and ill will between the two races, killing all hope for peace for years to come. The Caldari were getting stronger by the day as the refugees from Caldari Prime started to settle in, while the Gallenteans were still in a state of confusion following the fall of the fascist regime. The Caldari mounted a series of raids into Federation territory, which the Gallenteans in their slow and cumbersome ships were ill equipped to meet. But the might of the Federation was too much for the Caldari to overcome and their raids, even if successful military wise, had little impact beside draining the morale of the Gallenteans and bolstering their own.

After a while the Caldari agenda became clear - they were willing to sign peace if the Federation would return Caldari Prime and acknowledge the newly formed Caldari state. But the Gallenteans couldn't agree to these demands for two reasons: one, they were loath to admit a sovereign state into their midst; close to their own home planet and were unwilling to uproot the sizeable Gallente population on Caldari Prime, and second, the Gallenteans were not alone in the Federation and if they allowed the Caldari to leave the Intakis and Mannars, both of them starting to flex their economical and political muscles, might be tempted to follow, thus throwing the whole society into turmoil. The Gallenteans were forced to regard the Caldari as rebels and renegades and had to try to get them back into the Federation, with good or evil.

For a while the Federation could do little else than watch the Caldari play havoc upon the Gallentean fleet and the outermost provinces of the Federation. The Caldari were getting ever bolder and every few months they seemed to have a new and improved version of their nimble solo-fighters, which the Federation had few answers against. To many Gallenteans it seemed inevitable that, unless their demands were met, the Caldari would sooner or later overrun the whole Federation. Everything the

Gallenteans tried failed - their attempts for their own solo-fighters were utter failure and stationary defenses such as mines and sentry guns could only go so far in protecting space facilities for long. It seemed like every time the Gallenteans came up with something sleek and speedy and powerful the Caldari would soon respond with something even sleeker and more powerful.

Finally, the solution evolved from the stationary defenses of all things. The Gallenteans had employed mines for a long time with so-so results, but with the massive advances in robotics technology taking place at this time the mines were slowly transformed into a far deadlier object. The first drones were little more than mines with proximity detonators and some limited moving capabilities, but soon they had advanced to the level that a single drone almost rivaled a solo-fighter's capabilities. The fact that drones were many times cheaper to build than fighters and didn't require a highly trained pilot meant that the days of the solo-fighters were numbered. The drones reversed the tide of the war and now the Caldari were scrambling to come up with a solution against these new weapons. It didn't take them that long - they simply upgraded their fighters a bit, added some shields and extra weapons and called the new vessels frigates. Some extra crew was also needed at first, but then the Caldari obtained capsule technology from the Jovians some years later and could again reduce the crew to one on most frigates.

The climatic battle of the war was fought near the twin-system of Iyen-Oursta. Both sides - the Gallenteans with their drones and Caldari with their new frigates - were confident of victory and thus were willing to throw everything they had into the battle. The result was the largest space battle that had been fought in the world of EVE up to then, today it has only been surpassed by the Battle of Vak'Atioth during the Amarr-Jove War. The Battle of Iyen-Oursta raged for a whole day. During a lapse in the action after almost 15 hour constant fighting the Caldari withdrew in a stately fashion, leaving the battlefield to the Gallenteans. The Gallenteans claimed victory as the side retaining the battlefield, but the Caldari also claimed victory as they had inflicted considerably more losses and casualties on the Gallenteans than they'd received themselves. In any case, the battle gave neither side the decisive victory they'd sought and it was becoming obvious to everyone that such a victory would never be scored.

With frigates the Caldari managed the stem the tide of the advancing Federation and before long stalemate again ensued. Slowly, normal life returned for most people, the war became a distant thunderstorm that only occasionally rattled the populace as a whole. Neither side was willing to offer peace for fear of it being taken as a sign of weakness, but the new generation growing up on both sides was willing to sacrifice itself for such an uncertain cause, so the war slowly faded into small-scale border skirmishes and raids. The matter was finally settled when the Gallenteans came into contact with the Amarr Empire and soon perceived them to be a much greater threat than the Caldari. This propelled them to make a hasty peace. The Federation acknowledged the Caldari state as sovereign and both sides were to retain their original outposts and settlements, except for Caldari Prime, which remained under Federation control.

The Blood Raiders



'Every seat in the passenger cabin was occupied, the occupants sitting so peacefully one could believe they were napping, if it weren't for the fact that each and every one had been completely drained of their blood. The same fate had befallen the rest of the crew, even the captain in his capsule was now only a dry husk...' News like this can now be heard almost every week from some remote region near or within Amarr space. The perpetrators are commonly called the Blood Raiders, aptly named for their habit of draining their victims of blood and taking it with them.

The Blood Raiders are part of an ancient cultist faction called Sani Sabik, meaning Bloodfriends. The cult first appeared thousands of years ago on Amarr Prime, long before space travel came into being. The cult was based on schismatic sect of the Amarr state religion, which advocated that some people were born for greatness and other people only lived to feed and breed these geniuses. To this the cult added the obsession of the Amarr elite - the Holders - about eternal life so the result was a cult so pervasive and destructive that the Amarr authorities immediately stamped down on it. But the cult lived on in the shadows, every so often mutating itself anew. At one time in their history they started using blood in their gruesome rituals, until then they'd had only used blood in the initiation ritual, but now it became the focal point of their supposed search for eternal youth.

Today the cult exists in numerous more or less independent sects throughout the Amarr Empire, and some have even moved their business to other empires or neutral space. Each of the different sects of the Sani Sabik cult vary in their rituals and doctrine, some are inoffensive and almost inactive while a few have taken 'bleeding' - as they call the draining of blood from a body - to new heights. There are stories of

'blood farms', where people are kept against their will and blooded regularly; other stories tell of sects that engage in necrophilic and even cannibalistic activities. As little is known of the inner works of most of the sects it is difficult to say whether these stories are true or just urban legends.

The most notorious of the sects is the one under the leadership of Omir Sarikusa, an Amarrian with some Caldari ancestry. Before Omir took over, the sect was already infamous for killing children as they were considered to have 'purer' blood. Omir has abandoned that practice, but instead his sect has started targeting cloned people, as they believe blood from clones is better suited for their freakish blood rituals. In their search for cloned people, Omir's sect has taken to space and in few short years their frequent attacks on passenger ships and other space vessels have made them feared throughout Amarr space and far beyond.

The Tierijev Pocket



Tierijev system is controlled by the Caldari State, but it is completely encircled by the Gallente Federation. During the Gallente-Caldari War the system saw a number of battles, but the Gallenteans never managed to conquer it. But they did cut it off from the rest of the Caldari State by conquering a nearby system and building small military outposts in other unclaimed ones. In the years since the Gallentean systems have developed into fully fledged settlements and colonies, making the lone Caldari system a small beacon in a sea of Gallente systems. During this time Tierijev was a vast military complex, which could only be reached through a highway jumpgate linking it directly with Caldari space. For this reason it was often called the Tierijev Pocket. In recent years, as the relations of the two empires are steadily improving, the system is slowly becoming a major trade post.

It all started a decade ago when an agreement was made between the two empires to link Tierijev with some of the Gallentean systems surrounding it. Tierijev quickly became one of the most popular trade routes between Caldari space and Gallente space as it is much shorter than the traditional route through the Border Zone.

The increased trade, and hence traffic, through the Tierijev system has put enormous strain on the Caldari customs official responsible for supervising the trade. The main reason for this lies with the agreement for opening the Tierijev Pocket. The agreement stipulates that both sides must severely limit the number of armed empire ships they can operate in their respective space. This makes the work of the customs official much harder, as they're constantly plagued by manpower shortage. The Caldari have tried to remedy the situation by increasing customs checks in those Caldari systems the Tierijev highway gate leads to, but this has met with limited success.

Instead the Caldari customs authorities have recently started employing another way which seems much more promising. They sell temporary customs official licenses to

independent traders and mercenaries, thereby increasing the number of customs officials on duty, while bypassing the limits on military vessels set out by the agreement. The Caldari ensure that there is always ample supply of willing customs officials available by promising them a cut of the profit from fining smugglers. The Tierijev experiment has met with such a great success that it is currently being emulated extensively in every empire; they see this as a cheap, but efficient way, for stemming the ever-increasing tide of smugglers from the outer regions into civilized space.

Reaching for the stars



In recent decades space has become accessible like never before. The lasting, if fragile, peace between the empires has allowed them to concentrate their energies on opening up new space lanes and create the perfect environment for exploration and colonization. New jump gates open up almost every day, giving access to uncharted, unknown world waiting to be exploited.

Most of the empires are starting to encourage, even sponsor, privately owned companies to explore and settle recently reachable worlds, in order to speed up the expansion process and garner some revenue in the process. These companies then enter into a cooperation deal with their empire, which grants them several benefits regarding access, protection and information provided by the empire they're dealing with, but at the same time putting some responsibilities on the shoulders of the company and its members.

Already several privately owned companies are becoming prominent through their dealings with the empires and more locations, even whole systems, are getting their names from the company that is at the forefront in exploring and settling the system.

Sisters of EVE



Space outside the realms of the empires gives home to more than just brigands and pirates, it is also the home of those at the other end of the spectrum - those that dedicate their lives to aiding the needy. The Sisters of EVE is one of these organizations, perhaps the one best known. But the Sisters are about more than just aid relief. The foundation of the organization is firmly based in religion and science, a strange combination that has still gained much social ground in all the empires.

The Sisters were originally founded as a neutral aid organization during the Gallente-Caldari War. It later served the same purpose during the Amarr-Jove War and the Minmatar Rebellion and firmly established itself as the main humanitarian relief agency in the world of EVE. The Sisters have a number of bases scattered around, almost all of them are located near popular trade routes, yet outside empire borders.

But the Sisters do more than just come to the aid of those in need. They are also devoted practitioners of their religious beliefs, which center around the EVE-gate. The Sisters believe that this 'relic from god', as they call it, holds the key to the universe and are determined to unlock it, in order to bring 'everlasting peace under god's guidance and guardianship' to the world of EVE. The Sisters maintain that god resides at the other side of the gate and from his domain he guides the lives of those that believe in him and keeps them out of harms way. The Sisters have large followings in all the empires (even some Jovians) and the organization is mostly run on donations from those followers, as well as from some limited commercial enterprises and tariffs levied on those visiting their stations.

In recent years the Sisters have become more methodical in their approach to 'unlocking' the EVE-gate and have undertaken numerous scientific experiments on the matter. The instigator of these scientific approaches is the current high priestess of the Sisters, Harna Durado. She claims it is 'god's will' that the EVE-gate is studied

thoroughly, with the intent of determining once and for all what forces are at work in and around it. As of yet the research being performed by the Sisters has not uncovered any stunning revelations, but the millions of believers belonging to the Sisters's faith are fervently praying for a breakthrough in the near future.

The InterBus



One of the numerous operations jointly run and organized by the empires is the InterBus. The InterBus is a transportation organization responsible for ferrying people between space stations. The company was formed three decades ago with the intent to support and facilitate passenger transportation in space. At that time such a company was sorely needed, but the huge initial cost of entering the field made it hard for private companies to move into the field. Today, this has changed; there are now a number of independent companies engaged in ferrying people between space stations, the biggest of them is the Gallente-run OmniBus company.

But InterBus still enjoys the largest market share by a fair margin, something the private companies are not all that happy about; grumbling about unhealthy state-intrusion that makes competition very lopsided. The InterBus may be child of its time but it still serves a vital role - that is to link even the smallest and most remote stations into their vast network. As stated in InterBus' charter:

"...Interbus must offer service to all stations, placed in solar-systems that have a stargate leading to a solar-system that is a part of the program. Exempt to this rule are systems that exceed a graph distance of 13 jumps from the Interbus headquarters..."

In order to do this efficiently InterBus has had to tread a fine line between serving their governments faithfully while at the same time establishing trust with all the motley assortment of stations appearing all over the place. The board of the InterBus has successfully managed to stay clear of any quarrels and conflicts that regularly emerge between the empires or other factions. The result is that even if InterBus isn't exactly welcomed with open arms everywhere, they're still perceived as useful and neutral enough to be allowed to operate.

The InterBus system, spanning almost the whole of the known world, is both a cheap, reliable transportation method for those without access to other space ships and a safety net for all space travelers that get in trouble - many careless explorers or unlucky merchants would never have made it home if it weren't for the service of the InterBus.

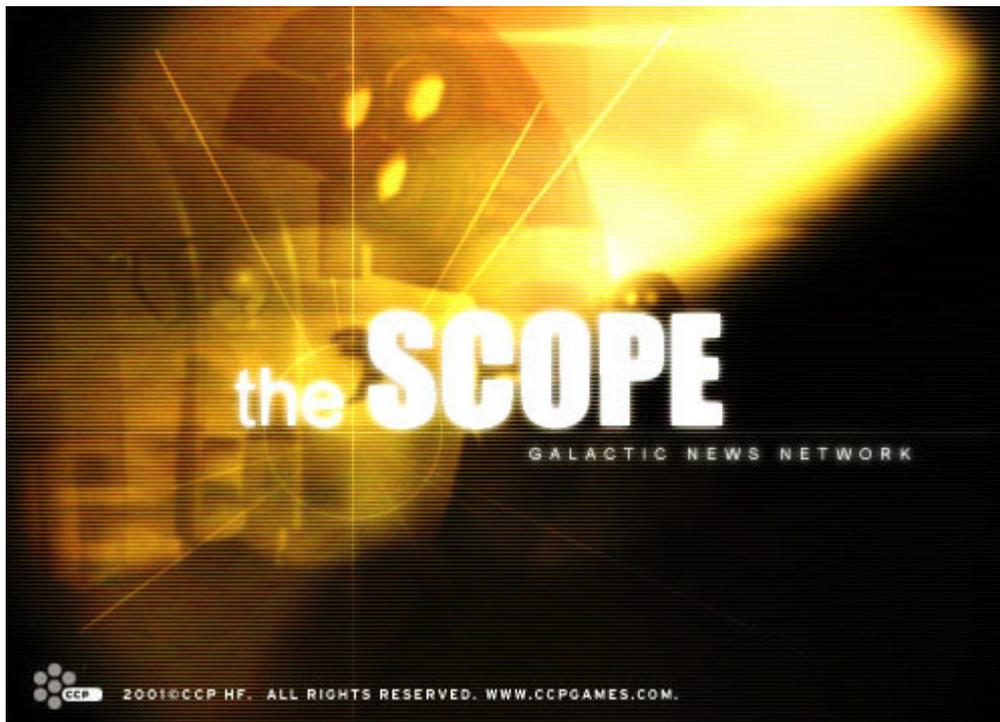
The Armageddon Project



Even if peace has reigned in the world of EVE for a number of years this does not mean that the empires are sitting at ease when it comes to military technology. Each one of them is spending huge sums of money on R&D every year, as well as supporting independent research facilities and scientists. All of them have the same dream of discovering the ultimate weapon, something that just the threat of using would make the rest of the empires fall in line. Such weapons have been discovered before and each time their existence gave a new dimension of the game of power politics, but counter-measures have always been discovered sooner or later, returning equilibrium once again.

Many have commented on how relieving it is that none of the empires has developed anything resembling a super-weapon that would surely upset the fragile peace existing between the empires. Even the Jovians with all their technological advances have never produced anything of the sort. But recent rumors might suggest otherwise. These rumors tell of a revolutionary new weapon developed in secret by the Jovians, a weapon capable of even destroying a whole planet. The Jovians are as elusive and tightlipped as always and have neither denied nor confirmed the rumors. Surveillance and covert operations made by other empires have not met with much success as the Jovians are masters of concealment. But the fragments of data that has been gathered have poured fuel on the fire of speculations and many fear that the Jovians are either waiting for the right opportunity for displaying the power of their new gadget, or they are secretly negotiating to sell it to the highest bidder.

The Scope



News travel quickly in the world of EVE, and none quicker than those provided by the Scope. The Scope is a Gallente-based media firm that is widely regarded as the most far-reaching, depth delving public news agency there is.

An eccentric but fabulously rich entrepreneur named Lous Chavol founded the Scope a century and a half ago. Chavol had made his fortune with one of the more successful communication companies that sprang up after FTL communications were discovered. Through his communication company Chavol had access to massive amount of information and it was a logical step for him to use this as a basis for a media company.

As most modern news agencies the Scope offers its service in many forms, such as through the traditional HoloVision, in order to cater to as many as possible. The most recent addition to this is to send news, even images, directly into the mind of the consumer through the use of headsets provided by Egonics Inc. This new service has already become very popular and the collaboration of the Scope and Egonics promises to be highly profitable for the two companies.

The Scope has always set its standard for a fast and reliable news service. It has never descended into tabloid status, but always set its stock in being as truthful as possible, and this is the image it has managed to cultivate in the minds of people since its foundation. However, its critics point out that even if the news are true this tells only half the story. Just as important as a reliable news coverage is how the news are presented, how much time and space are allocated to each piece of news, how it's presented and, most importantly, what news are omitted or played down. In this way, it is easy to influence and steer the public opinion because the perceived importance of events is more important than actual facts.

As a prime example of this the critics of Scope mention the case of the Caldari pharmaceuticals giants Zainou, owned by the Ishukone Corporation, and one of the largest sponsors and advertisers of the Scope. Some years ago they got into trouble when accused of bad business ethics involving deals within the Minmatar Republic. The Scope gave these news very little coverage, but all the more to a piece of news of a new wonder-drug that Zainou was working on. Although there is no clear indication that Zainou itself interfered in this matter, many believe that the editors of the Scope decided by themselves to help their important supporters in this way.

Konrakas



In the early days of space flight ages ago it served no other purpose than being the means of travel between two planets. But in the last decades space travel has become much more. Thousands of people now live most of their lives solely in space, calling some space station their home instead of a planet, or a country. Space stations have increased in size, having grown into full-fledged habitats with food production units and factories able to satisfy every need of the populace.

Naturally, these cities in space require huge amount of materials and minerals to sustain and support themselves. If they're lucky enough to orbit a populated planet they are seldom in want of anything, but others must fend for themselves. Planetary mining of uninhabited planets and moons is vitally important for any manufacturing station that wants to compete on equal footing. Although such stations do exist without the support of a mineral rich stellar body below it, such station must rely on minerals being transported to them, which is always more cumbersome and expensive. This has made uninhabited but mineral rich planets gold mines often in the literal sense for anyone aspiring to large-scale manufacturing.

One such mineral rich planet is Konrakas in the system of Shintaht. The system, originally surveyed and named by the Caldari, lies close to Amarr space and has been claimed by both the Caldari and the Amarrians, although neither has yet settled the system. Shintaht is one of those relatively rare binary systems where the two stars are fairly close to each other. Only the larger of the suns has a planetary system, but the smaller one is close enough to exert great influence on the planets orbiting the larger sun. In addition to this, Konrakas has two large moons, which add their gravitational influences to that of the suns.

The result is that Konrakas has extremely chaotic climate. The seasons vary greatly, ranging from icy cold to scorching heat. Ocean tides are dramatic and floods are very

common. Winds howl constantly over the landscape, frequently reaching hurricane speed. The gravitational forces also cause earthquakes regularly, as well as volcanic eruption. The planet is, not surprisingly, completely lifeless. The natural forces shaking the planet have also caused many rare and valuable minerals to shift close to the surface, making the planet a mineral heaven. But these same natural forces also make it extremely difficult to mine these minerals and neither the Caldari nor the Amarrians have yet found the willingness to make the heavy investment needed to start a planetary mining operation on Konrakas.

The Right Man, the Right Place



In the competitive space trader community the only thing that often stands between riches and bankruptcy is knowing the right people in the right places. On many stations only some basic trade goods are available unless the trader knows the right person on the station to deal with, in case some special goods would become available. If this person happens to have underworld connections these goods could be of illegal nature; if the person has connections with the military it might offer prototype equipment, and so on. There are even whole areas of space that are only accessible to those with the right contacts.

Like in any lone of business states and companies try their best to keep a close tab on space commerce in order to maintain what monopolies they may enjoy. The few windows this leaves for outsiders are thus highly coveted and fought over. For even if there's plenty of trade deals to be made on the free market it is only through contacts that traders can expect to gain access to the those rare and expensive items that pave the road to riches.

These contacts come in every shape and form, some are sought for the information and access to higher levels they present, others for their exotic or powerful items they proffer, and others still for some trade concessions or interesting missions they provide.

One of the big company employees who is known for his willingness to dabble a little on the side with freelancers is Pekki Matakken, a sector manager for the Kaalakiota Corporation. Residing in the Saatuban system, an economic nexus for the surrounding systems, he has established a reputation for offering fair and prosperous trade deals to those close with the KK. And those that find favor with the shrewd Caldari can expect to be offered a chance to link up with people even higher in the corps' hierarchy. But in the same vein, those who deal unfairly with him quickly lose his favor and find themselves out in the cold.

The Peralles incident



The theory and technology behind jump gates opened up a whole new era in the history of mankind and is readily accepted as being one of the most important discoveries of all times. Jump gates have now been in usage for centuries and new versions appear regularly that make them more sophisticated and safe. Even if the functions of jump gates are well known from a theoretical point of view, there still remain a lot of unanswered questions about the fundamentals of dimensional inter-connections. Naturally, many theories exist on the subject, but none are comprehensive enough to fully explain how the universe is divided into many dimensions and the connections between them, some also touch upon the subject of hyperspace, an alternative plain in another dimension. About the only statement these theories agree upon is that these issues are definitely not as simple as they seem on the surface.

Every now and then some unexplained events have occurred when a ship jumps through a jump gate, but these have been so few and far between that they've always been put down to accidents or faulty data. In recent months strange incidents in the barren and unpopulated systems near the hub of the known world have had people starting to question the reliability of jump gates and wonder whether humans opened Pandora's box when they started using them.

What finally caught the attention of the media and, hence, the public, was the disappearance of the Gallentean Senator Hubert Caisor along with his family and his fortune in the ship Peralles en route to a new post as ambassador to the Amarrians. The Peralles entered a jump gate in the Dom-Aphis system between Amarr and Gallente space. Its destination was the jump gate in the Iderion system close by, but it never re-appeared there. What makes this even more of a puzzle is that the control station at Iderion jump gate received notification that a ship was incoming, showing all the right signs, yet no ship exited the jump gate. What is more,

this notification is received at the exact same time every day, with the same result: no ship appearing even if all the signs indicate that a ship is about to come through the jump gate.

Since the Peralles incident stories of other similar incidents have surfaced, all within the same region. These stories, some no more than unsubstantiated rumors, all tell tales of disappearing ships, strange disturbances while jumping, ghostly echoes and images and unsettling time shifts in the vicinity of jump gates. The empires have started an inquiry into the matter, but still no rational explanation of the phenomenon has been offered.

The Encounter



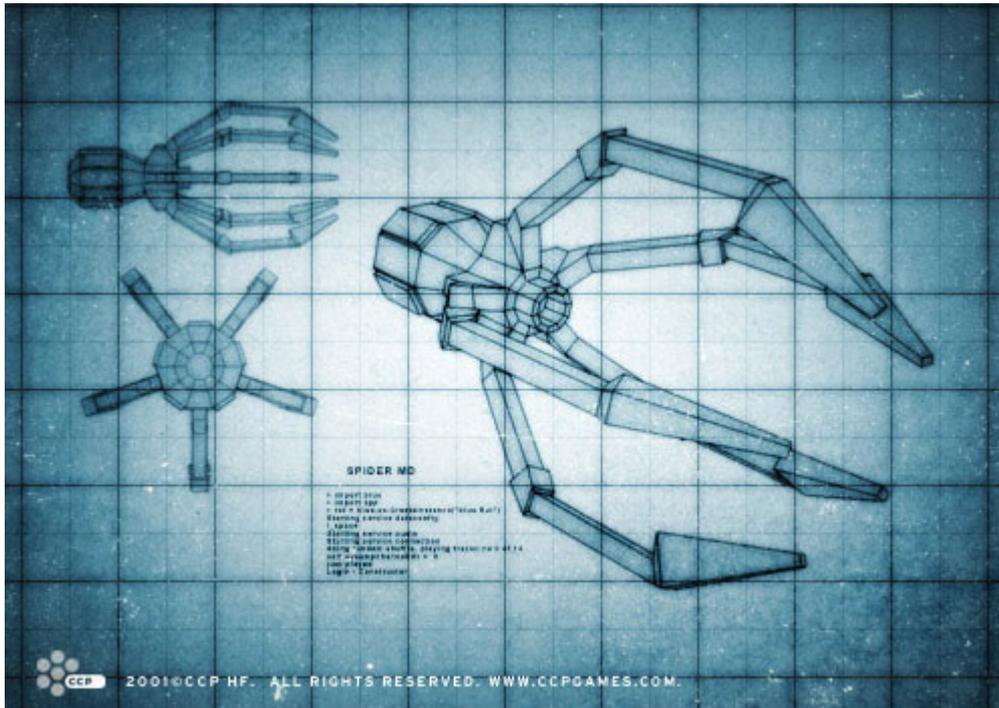
What a stroke of luck! Burki 'Tiny' Trom relaxed as his cruiser made the last maneuvers through the docking bay doors of the Minmatar station. He had been looking for a training kit for Entwined Shield Systems for a week now and had finally found it here in this half-ass market zone deep within the Republic. If it weren't for his acquaintance in the Republic's ministry of trade he would have never thought of looking in this obscure service station in the Nifflung system. But once again this only proved that if you wanted to get your hands on those rare and precious items you had to be prepared to look in unorthodox places.

Tiny had already made the necessary preparations, last week he finished training Advanced Ocular ECM, the pre-requisite for ESS, and he had stocked up on stims specially designed to boost his memory faculties for faster training. Pity to have to come all this way just for an item stored in computer form. He had asked them to upload it to him as was the norm, but no, these primitive peasants demanded he came in person to collect it. Oh well, at least he was here now. Besides, Tiny knew of a rich mineral seam in a nearby asteroid field. Wasn't it ideal to spend the idle time while expanding his knowledge to search for the mother load of all mother loads?

Tiny didn't spend any more time on the station than absolutely necessary, so few minutes later he was back in space. And what do you know? It seemed three space cowboys were laying in wait for him, a cruiser and a couple of menacing frigates. Great. Tiny's communication device sputtered into action: 'OK, fella. We've got you covered. Now be a smart boy and jettison whatever you have in your cargo hold and no harm will come to your precious cruiser.' Tiny ran some profile scans on the three ships closing in on him. As he thought, pirate scum! Well, this wasn't their lucky day. Tiny sent a reply: 'Sorry, guys. No can do. I suggest you turn and leave before I become inclined to inflict some serious unpleasanties on your sorry asses.' Tiny

imagined the sneers his reply was getting from the gung-ho gangsters and smiled when his radar registered what he knew all along was out there. Three small dots blinked into existence, cordoned around the cowboys. All cruisers. With cloaking devices. It didn't take long until the only sign left of the pirates' presence was the residue from their warp drives as they fled. Before they'd warped Tiny sent them one final farewell message: 'Heavily armed amigos, never to leave home without them!' Then he laughed and paged his comrades: 'Lets go!'

The Spider Miner



The Spider Miner drone is the most common mining drone in use today. It is manufactured by the Caldari industry giant Ishukone and is readily available throughout the world of EVE. It is not the best mining drone out there, but it is cheap and reliable, which explains its success. The Spider Miner uses cheap laser technology to accomplish its task. The laser beam fulfills three essential tasks: extraction, transport and classification of minerals. First of all it vaporizes the minerals on the surface of the asteroids where they form a charged plasma gas. Secondly, the laser beam itself is shaped as a cylindrical beam. By pulsating the laser amplitude, a rotating magnetic field is induced on the cylindrical surface. This acts as a 'screw' shaped magnet on the plasma particles, that get sucked up inside the cylindrical laser tube. Due to the different mass/charge ration of the atoms, the particle beam is diffused, like a ray of light through a prism. This enables the drone to sort and accumulate the different minerals. Obviously, a lot of the vaporized minerals actually fall outside the beam and are thus wasted, but the benefits and ease of use of the drone outweighs this waste for most practical purposes.

The spider miner is agile and has a good range, allowing the controller to travel up to a few kilometers (depending on the density of the asteroid field) and still recall it. Experienced miners frequently use two or more mining drone teams at once, allowing them to leapfrog from one asteroid to the next, constantly scanning for suitable asteroids to mine while his teams are busy carving up another one somewhere else.

The Ammatars



The Ammatars are descendants of Minmatars that collaborated with the Amarrians during the latter occupation of the Minmatar worlds. When the Amarrians were thrown out during the Minmatar Rebellion their collaborators fled with them. The Amarrians helped their Minmatar allies to settle in a few systems not far from the newly formed Minmatar Republic. The Ammatars regard themselves as the true rulers of the Minmatars, mainly based around the fact that a fair proportion of the old Minmatar aristocracy, or tribal leaders, were among them. In this vein they named their domain San Matar, meaning 'true home'.

The term Ammatar was first used by the Gallenteans to distinguish between the two groups. Out of convenience even the Ammatars themselves started using it, stating that, with the help of the Amarrians, they've progressed beyond the old social structure of the Minmatar tribes. Indeed, the Ammatars have very deliberately abolished many age-old traditions of the Minmatar tribal society and embraced some Amarrian ones instead.

The Ammatar domain, San Matar, is semi-autonomous. The Ammatar rulers have full domestic control, but their foreign policies must have the consent of the Amarrians and their military forces are, nominally, under the authority of the Amarrians. The relationship of the two has been remarkably smooth in the past, with no serious quarrels.

The San Matar government is structured the same way as any other province of the Amarr Empire, with a governor at the head and district officials beneath him prescribing over the various departments of state. These head of states are always Ammatars, although the governor traditionally has an Amarrian advisor, which also acts as the representative of the Amarr Empire itself. As is to be expected not all Ammatars are eager for constant warfare with the Minmatar Republic. Those who are

the most belligerent of them often feel that the Ammatar state is doing too little so they have formed a group of their own to fight the Minmatars. In a sense this group is a direct response to the independent rebel groups the Minmatar have and the guerilla tactics employed by either side are similar.

Since its inauguration San Matar has been in a constant struggle with the Minmatar Republic. Both states have expanded considerably in the last decades and now they border on each other in numerous places. The Republic, backed by the Gallente Federation, had the upper hand for awhile, forcing the Amarr Empire to repeatedly come to the aid of their allies, but in recent years the tables have been turning and the Ammatars have managed to set up military installations and space stations right under the nose of the Republic. Many have speculated from where the Ammatars are getting support for these conquests, as the Amarr Empire has traditionally only been willing to aid the Ammatars when they're under direct threat. Something that started out as a wild speculation seems to be turning into a fact: that the Caldari State, or at least one of its Corporations is funding the Ammatars in their effort. As the region separating the two feuding Minmatar states is very rich in minerals, the Caldari seem willing to go to any length in order to secure some of these resources for themselves. In fact, recently surfaced documents show that the Caldari were negotiating with the Amarr Empire for mineral rights within Minmatar space at the time the Minmatars rebelled. Furthermore, sources within the Republic say that the Caldari have repeatedly approached them wishing to buy mineral rights, something the Republic has always refused because they dream of exploiting them themselves. These tidbits seem to indicate that the Caldari, in a desperate bid to get their hand on the rich mineral deposits, have resorted to secret support of one side in exchange for mineral rights in the areas conquered or claimed. The Caldari vehemently deny these speculations, but the matter seems on the brink of escalating into a major confrontation between the Minmatar Republic and the Gallente Federation on the one hand, and the Ammatars and the Caldari on the other.

Sansha's Nation



Anyone who travels for a while around the world of EVE will sooner rather than later run into strange-looking ships that more likely than not will prove hostile. These ships with their aggressive spikes and multi-toned metal shine are the not-so-old relics of a mad scheme hatched to conquer the world. Today, this once glorious fleet is left to guard the ruins of a dynamic empire, the marvel of the world a century ago. Hailed as the perfect Utopian state it wasn't until the gruesome tales of its ethical transgressions surfaced that it was brought down through a joint effort by all the major empires.

It is the norm whenever breakthroughs occur in the technological or geographical knowledge that some people manage through luck or foresight to make a fortune on the new knowledge. This is exactly what happened in the heady days of space exploration and colonization in the first few decades after first contact, when anyone with the means and the motives could set himself up as a space baron in a pocket of space somewhere outside empire territory.

One of these early tycoons was Sansha Kuvakei, a wealthy industrial mogul of Caldari origin. His family had made its fortune in armament manufacturing during the war with the Gallente Federation. Sansha soon showed himself to be an eccentric megalomaniac that dreamt of world conquest, no less. He saw the free-for-all colonizing of space that the empires advocated at the time as an ideal vehicle for his schemes and set out to carve himself a sizeable chunk of the systems available to the public. Sansha saw himself as a visionary for the new order soon to come and he attracted thousands of followers, attracted by his charm and promises for a better future for everyone. Soon Sansha had built himself a sizeable domain extending over several systems, with smaller pockets scattered around the known world. This foundation allowed Sansha to start his own armaments program, independent of all

the other empires. For this he used the extensive knowledge his family had garnered throughout the years.

For years Sansha's build-up program continued, gaining ever more momentum as his fame and fortune increased. Being on the forefront of space mining and trading his realm prospered and soon people were talking about Sansha's Nation (as it was most commonly known as) as the new major player in galactic politics. Sansha used these resources ingeniously to create an image of himself as a new messiah and his domain as the Promised Land. But when Sansha himself started believing the hype heaped on him his already fragile mind conjured ever-stranger notions and plans.

One of these projects was to develop a method to amalgamate the recently introduced Jovian capsule technology with existing brain implants, most of them illegal, to create men with the thoroughness of a computer and the ingenuity of humans. People that would be completely loyal and dedicated, yet creative enough to handle complex and delicate situations. These inhuman researches naturally required test subjects, Sansha acquired these from the Amarr Empire in the form of Minmatar slaves. The Amarrians were eager to learn of any new techniques to be used to control their large slave population and gave Sansha whatever support he required. There has always been strong suspicion that Sansha received substantial support from others too, but if and who these shadowy allies were has never become public knowledge.

Sansha's dream was that these zombie-like creatures could be used as soldiers and guards, thus freeing humans to pursue more peaceful and productive lifestyles. He also experimented with ship crews and captains, as he regarded space ships to be both boring and dangerous, and thus ideally suited for his creatures. Soon, all armed forces and space ship personnel employed by Sansha's Nation had been replaced by an easily controlled armada of True Slaves, as those that had been implanted with Sansha's technology became known as. In his warped mind Sansha believed his acts to be of the good for mankind.

It was only a matter of time before the truth of this new technology was revealed to the public. The reactions were immediate and intense. One by one the empires condemned Sansha, the Amarr Empire among them, as they didn't want to be ostracized by the other empires. But Sansha refused to see the error of his ways, declaring that the other empires were too narrow-minded and primitive to fathom what a great genius he was. Sansha continued to put his mind-curbing devices into people unabated and even started some even more outrageous projects in the same vein. In the end, the other empires, with the Gallente Federation at the forefront, decided not to stand idly by any longer and attacked Sansha's Nation.

Since the revelation of Sansha's twisted experiments came out into the open, the Nation had lost most of its inhabitants. Only the fanatics and the True Slaves remained. They managed to hold out for some months, but in the end Sansha's little empire crumbled. His forces were scattered to the wind and all his factories and space installations destroyed. Sansha himself was killed during the final assault on his stronghold. But even if the majority of his fleet had been defeated, many of them managed to slip away during the chaos and hide. These are the ships that still today attack unwary travelers in the vicinity of the old realm of Sansha's Nation. Steered by True Slaves they have never given up the fight that Sansha sent them out for, a disturbing tribute to their late master.

After Sansha was defeated the empires debated what to do with the systems he controlled. Finally, they were distributed between the empires, but it's attesting to the

lasting effects of Sansha that almost none of them have been settled in the decades since his collapse.

As a final note, there are those that claim that Sansha is still alive and well. These conspiracy theorists say that before he died Sansha hid a number of clones of himself in secret locations the empires never discovered, and after he was killed he was resurrected in one of them. The same rumors also state that Sansha is still up to his old tricks creating True Slaves and building ships, hidden amongst the rubble in some remote corner of his old domain. They argue that the number of True Slave ships destroyed in recent years is far greater than the number of ships that remained at the time Sansha's empire collapsed. As with most good conspiracy theories, it is hard to prove or disprove any of these claims.

Time & the Astrologer



One of the many tasks facing the empires once they had established contact with each other was to set a universal time. Each of the empires naturally had their own calendar and clock, based more or less on the length of the day and year on their respective home planets. This made up for some serious confusion and it soon became apparent that some sort of a synchronized time keeping was needed so inter-racial communications could run smoothly.

Of course, basing this universal time on the calendar of one of the empires was out of the question, the other would never agree to it. So a new one had to be devised. The debates on the new calendar and clock soon boiled down to arguments between three main groups, the Arithmetics, the Traditionalists and the 25ers. The debate was initially conducted between scholars, which then put forth proposals for the politicians and the public to consider. The three main groups each drew their support from different fields of science and academics. The Arithmetics were mainly physicists and engineers, the Traditionalists were mostly historians and archeologists and the 25ers group consisted of biologists and sociologists.

The Arithmetics wanted the new calendar and clock to have nothing whatsoever to do with old planetary-based calendars, instead they wanted to base it entirely on mathematics. They claimed that the physics-oriented nature of the modern world demanded this. The Traditionalists said the only way to go was to base the new calendar as much as possible on the ancient Earth-calendar. All the races, especially the Jovians and the Amarrians, had some data on the old calendar and by combining the data it could be remade more or less in its original form. Finally, the 25ers claimed that the only measurement worth considering in a space-faring age was that of the human body. The internal body clock of humans is close to 25 of the old Earth-hours, thus they wanted to base the new clock on that measurement.

During the long and arduous discussions numerous factions rose, declaring themselves champions of one cause or another. One of them, identifying themselves with the 25ers, was a small Gallentean grass-root organization led by an energetic young man by the name of Cerb Rausolle, although he preferred the pseudonym the Astrologer. Through the efforts of the Astrologer the 25ers gained great public support, spurred on by the surprisingly big network put into place by the Astrologer.

Instead of going the public way as the 25ers the Traditionalists had focused on the politicians, correctly as it turned out to be as it was they that had the final saying. When the final decision was made aboard the Jovian cruiser Yoiul the Traditionalists won comfortably. A day would be divided into 24 hours and the year 365 days with an additional day every 4 years, the same as with the old Earth-calendar. The date was set as 0 EST. EST stands for Earth Standard Time, but as the populace commonly calls the known world the world of EVE, many refer to it as EVE Standard Time. The Yoiul conference was held 105 years ago, so the current year is 105 EST.

The Astrologer was not to let his large organization network go to waste and soon found a new cause worthy of his attention. At that time space ship owners were required to pay huge amounts of money each year for their ship license. This was something that all the empires enforced as it provided a good deal of income for them, plus it meant that only the cream of the society could afford to be in space business. But this of course also hampered space trade and made it difficult for the average Joe to get into the business. The Astrologer and his organization (still called the 25ers) started lobbying for a change in the legislation. At first they mainly targeted the Gallente Federation, but once CONCORD became responsible for issuing ship licenses and collecting the license fees, it became the target of the demonstrations organized by the 25ers.

At first CONCORD ignored the protests, but as they became more serious it began taking notice. As it had been recently formed, CONCORD was concerned about the image it was projecting to the public and a committee was formed to handle the matter. As is often the case, things dragged on for months. All the while the Astrologer was planning more and more outrageous acts of protests, even getting so far as organizing general strikes on some planets. The icing on the cake came during the first New Year celebration, celebrating 1 EST, at the headquarters of CONCORD. The Astrologer then managed to infiltrate the station's defense perimeter with a lone, unmanned cargo ship filled with explosives, which he then promptly detonated outside the station in plain view of many of the most prominent people in the world of EVE. The Astrologer was careful not to blow the ship up so close as to injure any of the guests, but his message was heard loud and clear. Two months later a new CONCORD legislation was passed by all the member states that abolished the license fees.

The Astrologer, now a fugitive after his stunt, quickly became a living legend. The 25ers organization was dismantled and the Astrologer lost his status as the champion of the people. But his name is not forgotten, nor that of the 25ers, and every now and then a new group is formed somewhere in the world of EVE, proclaiming itself as the successor of the old 25ers, dreaming of reliving the times when the little men defeated the big guns.

Payday



The neural implant in Tiny's brain registered increased stress signals. He was running out of time. What should have been a run-of-the-mill mission was turning into a fiasco. How many times had he shuttled Tonic-12 to his buddy Karlo? At least a dozen times. And never a hitch. But now he was running late, very late. All because of those bloody cops for raiding his usual pick-up place. He had to go all the way into the Great Wildlands to fetch the precious substance and his delivery window was only half an hour away. Not to mention, he was without his escort buddies. The bloody fools had gone on a mercenary mission in the outer regions somewhere. Being all by himself made Tiny nervous, adding even more to his already high tension.

Tiny cursed silently as he maneuvered his ship towards the stargate. He waited impatiently while the control station processed his jump request. He contemplated taking his chance of going through the Du Annes system to make up some lost time, but decided against it. It was too risky. The Decon-Sharuveil route was a detour, but more or less safe from any prying eyes. Finally, his jump permission came through and he fired up the thrusters on his cruiser to align the ship for the jump sequence.

Once in the Decon system Tiny started by scanning nearby space to see if anyone was lying in wait to ambush him. Nothing. Then he started the trek towards the Decon star gate. En route he calculated how much he stood to lose if he didn't get the stuff to Karlo on time. Maybe 50 thousand. Not to mention that Karlo would get miffed, to say the least, and Karlo was his only agent within empire space that traded in smart drugs. It was a big loss, but he could cope. He would make it up to Karlo somehow and maybe he could find another buyer for the Tonic-12, though it was dangerous to cruise around with illegal stuff for a long period. Maybe he should stash it somewhere...

Deep in thought, Tiny performed the necessary navigational adjustments to keep his ship on the move. He made the last warp to the star gate; next destination: Sharuveil system and then just one more jump. It took Tiny a few seconds to notice the radar signal - a ship on the edge of his radar range. It was also moving towards the star gate, from the opposite direction. Tiny ran a ship scan once in range, in case it was a stray custom official or a DED snoop.

Mother of all creation! It was Adira Habi, the Amarrian scumbag that pod-killed him a few weeks back! Tiny shook with glee; he'd been looking for Habi ever since that incident, how fortunate to find him here, all by himself. Suddenly, Habi's cruiser veered off course, obviously he had spotted Tiny. 'What a coward,' Tiny thought. Habi set the course for Decon IV and warped away before Tiny was in warp scrambler range. Tiny was about to warp after Habi when he remembered his Tonic-12 cargo and Karlo. 'Ah, bugger that!' he thought, turning away from the stargate to Sharuveil and prepared for a warp to Decon IV.

Secure Commerce Commission



The world of EVE is moving ever closer to a fully integrated market economy, where the thousands of inhabited planets, moons, asteroids and their accompanying space stations are able to do business on a galactic scale. Today the world is divided into numerous market regions, most spanning several constellations. Wares being sold or sought after within the market region are accessible for trade anywhere within the region. The cornerstone of the market economy is the inter-stellar communication method coupled with a reliable and efficient way for striking a deal over long distance.

Before instantaneous communication from one star to another came into being, trading over long distances (between solar systems) was hazardous and time-consuming. Frauds and swindlers were in abundance, making trades with strangers highly risky. The time it took to find out what stations in nearby solar systems had on offer or demanded, plus the time it then took to strike a deal and ship the products to and fro, stifled space commerce so much that it was almost non-existent. Only the adventures were willing to risk their assets and even their lives by pursuing space trading, but the potential riches involved urged people on and made them yearn for a quicker, easier way to do business between the stars. Thus, once inter-stellar communication devices arrived they spread out like an epidemic and inter-stellar commerce quickly followed in their wake.

At first, inter-stellar commerce was conducted in a haphazard sort of way, giving the frauds ample opportunities to cash in on the optimistic and naive traders. It quickly became clear that instant communication between solar systems alone could not keep commerce clean. Every empire responded on their own, setting trade regulations, hiring special commerce inspectors and setting up secure trade houses. These efforts managed to create a fairly safe trade environment.

But once constellations and other regions started to set up a regional market network, where traders were able to view everything for sale anywhere in the region and put their own items up for sale, there arose the need for a centralized agency responsible for inter-stellar commerce. This is where the SCC - Secure Commerce Committee - came into being. As a division within the CONCORD the SCC is jointly run by the empires and thus ensures a safe and universally regulated trade environment. A joint initiative of the Minmatar Republic and the Jovian Empire have also ensured that the SCC, although under the control of the empires through the CONCORD, acts under the strictest neutrality codes, the same as the InterBus and other empire-run institutions. This is to ensure that all dealings are not only secure, but also secret, with no chance of governmental interference. The unfortunate by-product of this is that those acting on the wrong side of the law can just as easily do business with each other as anyone else.

Prey Miner



Captain Ieris Hvik steered her small frigate into another loop, patiently waiting for the miner to disembark from Ethernity II station, a small blip on the edge of her radar. This particular miner promised some good yield, judging by his track record. It was so good in fact, that Hvik had lavishly decorated the miner with her very best tracking devices. Not only could she easily detect him miles away in the midst of an asteroid field, but she could also tell what kind of minerals he was mining at any given moment. Hvik prayed that the miner wouldn't have the presence of mind to scan his ship for bugs before he undocked - it wasn't particularly hard to attach the little devils to another ship, but it was even easier to flush them out. Hvik had lost many preys in the past due to an untimely bug scan.

At last the bronze colored Navitas-class frigate slid out of the station. The miner adjusted the course of his set, aligning it towards the asteroid belt between Ethernity II and Ethernity III. Few seconds later his warp drive kicked in and in a heartbeat he had disappeared in a bluish flash. Hvik counted to 30 before activating her own warp drive - no need to get the miner paranoid by getting too close on his tail.

Once in the asteroid belt Hvik quickly assessed the situation. She picked up the signal emanating from the tracking bug on the miner a few hundred kilometers off and adjusted her course accordingly. Once within scanning range she matched her speed to that of the miner. The miner was already scanning asteroids, but hadn't yet deployed his mining drones. This, and the fact that he was still heading full speed deeper into the asteroid belt, indicated that he was looking for some specific minerals, undoubtedly some rare ones. Hvik chuckled to herself, pleased with her selection. Now, all she had to do was wait and let the miner do her work for her.

Hvik had started out as a miner, but quickly found that she didn't have the patience for it. But before she quit she'd established some pretty good contacts in the mining industry and was able to off-load minerals at good prices. So it was natural that instead of becoming a mercenary for hire or a pirate chasing freighters, she would focus on miners - preying on them in isolated areas and loot their minerals. It didn't take all that much combat skills as long as one refrained from attacking groups of miners, so she had instead invested in the skills necessary for operating tracking bugs. And there were always a lot of lone miners in the outer regions, dreaming of striking gold with no one to share with. Hvik was happy to oblige, the miners didn't have to share with her - she'd take it all.

Hvik's console beeped, dragging her from her reverie. The miner was deploying his drones. Hvik stretched in her cocoon, setting the ship on stand-by, preparing it to haul in the load of the day.

Loser



Victor Sistré idly watched the traffic around Manatirid station on his radar. Most of the cargo freighters were Gallentean ones, but the police vessels were from the Amarr Empire. Manatirid station was located in one of the few Amarrian systems close to Gallente space, and as such acted as a trade post between the two empires. Victor was on a mission for his corporation, searching for rare minerals to use in the corporation's shields production.

A ship undocked from Manatirid station and Victor immediately noticed the radar signal depicting the newcomer as hostile. It was a ship from Jaasinen Inc., a rival company of Victor's Canout corporation. The two corporations were at war, their dispute revolving around a system far from Victor's current location. Even if the Amarrian system was a lawful place the fact that the two corporations were officially in a state of war meant that Victor was a free target for the Jaasinen frigate fast approaching.

Victor quickly activated his warp drive, having no intention of fighting the Caldari frigate on his lightly armed ship. But before he could finish selecting a destination for his warp he noticed that the Caldari had scrambled him, preventing him from entering warp. Victor veered his ship away from the Caldari vessel, the range still a good 10 kilometers. His ship computer registered a couple of missiles being launched, but their e.t.a. was still some seconds off. In the meantime Victor activated his anti-scrambling unit - due to the strength of the Caldari scrambler it would take a full minute to de-scramble the warp drive. Ruefully reflecting on frail defenses, Victor longed for his heavily battle-equipped Incursus frigate.

Just before the two Caldari missiles slammed into Victor's ship he launched a couple of salvos of his best counter-measures in response, hoping to foil the missiles. One of the missiles was fooled into exploding its warhead some way from the hull, but the

other stayed its course and smacked into Victor's ship. The shield managed to absorb a fair deal of the damage, but to Victor's dismay the powerful missile had still managed to breach the armored hull.

Two more missiles were launched from the Caldari ship and Victor wondered how many the Caldari captain had. He himself had already spent his best counter-measures and he had no anti-missile missiles or point-defense weapons to deal with the approaching menace. Victor resolved to dig deeply into his power reserves by boosting his shield a couple of times, hoping it could sustain the damage from the missiles. While waiting for the impact Victor zoomed his camera onto the missiles and noticed their brand - each of these missiles was almost as expensive as the whole of Victor's ship. It was obvious that the Caldari was out to destroy him for a bigger reason than just to loot his cargo hold.

The missiles crashed into Victor's ship, jolting it around. Victor could feel the impact in his own bones, a sure sign that the ship had received major damage. A quick survey of his ship computer revealed several hull breaches and some structural damage. The hydraulic system was out-of-order and his oxygen level was dropping fast, indicating a hole in an oxygen tank.

The Caldari ship, being considerably faster than Victor's ship after having activated its afterburner, was now close enough to open fire with its short-range lasers. The last missile impact had severely reduced the strength of Victor's shields and his power level was low. The anti-scrambler still needed 20 seconds to complete the de-scrambling and it was eating into Victor's remaining power supply. Victor forlornly realized that the Caldari had expended almost no power so far - only on the warp scrambler and a small amount on the afterburner. Only now was he using energy weapons against Victor.

As Victor's capsule was ejected from his disintegrating ship, Victor wondered whether skipping the anti-scrambling and burning for the station might have been a wiser choice in the situation.

The Titans



In the Amarr tongue, their name is Imud Hubrau, or "Beast of Heaven". To the Gallente, they are known as Soltueurs, or "Sun Slayers". The collective name for these behemoths is Titans, the largest spacefaring vessels ever constructed. The sheer cost in resources, manpower and time, as well as the necessary technological knowledge, makes construction of a Titan-class vessel a venture only empires can usually fathom. Some of these mammoth vessels have taken decades to assemble. Many are over a century old themselves, and the three mammoth Jovian motherships, the first Titans, have origins pre-dating modern space travel. They are maintained with constant upgrades, and at any given time, one of the three is out of commission while undergoing retrofits.

Their value is indescribable. Functioning for those who own them as a mobile base of operations as well as a flagship, Titans turn the tides of war with their mere presence. Aside from their blistering armament and many-metres-thick armour, they boast the ability to transport entire fleets within their hulks across entire star systems. Their mind-boggling mass can cause small ships to become trapped in the gravity bow-wave before them. A few of these vessels are massive enough that their presence affects planetary tidal patterns. One notable incident occurred on the small agricultural world of Goral, where a Gallente Titan moving into orbit caused an abrupt shift in tides, which flooded crop fields and farmland. The decrease in food production meant that the entire system, which depended on Goral for food stock, had to be supplied by merchants or face starvation. Since then, Titan navigation systems have been programmed with fail-safes to prevent them from approaching a planet so closely.

The construction of a Titan has, in recent years, become an option available to more than just the richest of empires. With the advent of exploration, new resource-rich

worlds have been discovered. For the construction of an Amarr corporation's newest fleet addition, a lush, tropical moon was decided as a prime source for resource extraction. After decades of aggressive strip-mining, the moon's surface had been mostly torn away. At the cost of tens of thousands of Minmatar slave lives, the Titan was complete, leaving the moon a devastated, tectonically unstable hell.

Camera Drones



After the Jovians introduced capsule technology to the empires several methods have been tried out regarding the visual presentation of the surroundings to the captain enclosed in his capsule. The first method tried, and the one the Jovians first used (and sometimes still do), was to use the data from wide range of scanners to paint a realistic view of the ship's surroundings in the mind of the captain. But after intensive experimentations it was discovered that this caused severe nausea and disorientation for most captains not of Jove origin. Other high-tech methods also had to be discarded for the same or similar reasons. In the end, the empires discovered that simple cameras directly connected to small screens inside the captain's helmet were the best solution. At first these cameras were mounted on the hull of the ship, but with the advent of electrical energy weapons these cameras became too vulnerable to damage from electrical charges.

The Gallenteans were the first to experiment with cameras mounted on drones hovering around the ship. They first developed this method when researching more efficient point-defense weapons. This hovering method later caught on with the other races and is now common practice, with all the empires manufacturing their own types of camera drones, all based on the same principle. At first only one camera drone was used, but today they are two, for stereoscopic vision. The camera drones are suspended some distance from the ship. They attach to the ship by using a combination of an attractive magnetic force and repulsive electromechanical force, this also allows them to orbit the ship at any desired position. This means that the drones never need replenishing or refueling.

The camera drone can be commanded through the captain's neural link. This gives the captain tremendous ability to get a clear view of his environment in a quick and comprehensive manner. By stationing the camera drone some distance from the ship

the drone is not as susceptible to weapon outbursts hitting the ship's hull. The drone can still be destroyed, either by accident, such as passing debris or stray shot, or on purpose. All ships have abundant supplies of spare camera drones stored away for such occasions and the captain has to be fairly clueless to run out of camera drones. The fact that the drones are stationed outside the ship's shield makes it impractical to try to protect them. Simply storing lots and lots of them is much easier, as they're very cheap.

When the ship uses a stargate the camera drone needs to move back into the ship when jumping. It re-emerges as soon as the ship exits the jump. This does not apply to warping, when the ship travels between planets within a solar system.

Although the camera drone serves as the main visual tool of the captain cameras have been used in more ways. Some missiles sport a camera in their nose, allowing the captain to see directly where the missile lands. The Gallenteans also often use special camera-fitted scout drones, which they send far in front of them as reconnaissance.

Timeout



The four ships registered as red dots on Maya Arikinnen's radar, but that didn't deter her from activating her cargo scanner on one of them. The four frigates were manned by outlaws - characters with a track record of crimes and misdemeanors. But Maya recognized their kind by their ships and style. They were not killers, but smugglers. This didn't make them harmless, but they were less likely to start some reckless action here in a medium secure system. At least Maya hoped so.

Torrinos system lay on the outskirts of Caldari space. Beyond there were increasingly less secure areas until one reached the Amarran border zones some seven jumps distance. Although this route was not an official linkage point between the two empires it was still a popular path for smugglers or those wishing to travel outside the main routes. This was the reason why Maya had positioned herself here sporting her newly acquired cargo scanner, courtesy of the Custom license she'd bought from the Caldari state. Many of her friends had done this before her and all agreed that Torrinos system offered some good pickings. All she had to do was to sniff out some illegal or contraband goods and report her findings - she would then receive a part of the fine imposed on the offender by the authorities.

The cargo scanner aligned itself with the nearest of the four frigates and started its scanning process. But before it could finish it sputtered to a halt and reported a failed scan. At first Maya was sure she'd done something incorrectly, before realizing that the target ship had used an anti-scanning device on her to counter her scanning efforts. The four frigates suddenly veered off their course and now headed directly towards her. The menacing advance of the smugglers gave Maya the urge to panic and do something reckless, but she managed to get her emotions under control. The smugglers had not opened fire on her yet. Maybe they were just trying to scare her off. The leading smuggler, the one that thwarted her scanning attempt, established a com-link to her, automatically creating a new channel for them to communicate over:

“Whaddya think yur doin’?” the uncouth voice of the smuggler crackled. “Try one more time to scan us and we’ll fry your ass!” the smuggler continued. Maya ran some background checks on him. Nori Yirikai. A member of a renowned criminal organization. He had an unimpressive track record of smuggling felonies, which maybe explained his current usage of a hi-tech anti-scanning device. ‘Obviously a man that learns from experience.’ Maya thought sardonically. It was also obvious that Yirikai and his cronies were only trying to scare her away, being sensible enough not to be willing to reduce their already sorry security standings by engaging in combat here. Yet they must be carrying illegal cargo, or they wouldn’t be so concerned about being scanned.

Just to be on the safe side Maya asked two of her friends in the custom business that she knew were close by to come and join her. She then turned her ship away from the smugglers and made as to leave.

“There’s a good girl,” came the voice of Yirikai. Maya noticed he was trying to sound scornful, but it sounded more like he was relieved. She began wondering what it was they were carrying that they were so anxious to keep a secret. It was tempting to provoke them by trying to scan them again once her friends got here, one of them might get through. As soon as she released that thought her friends had arrived. They quickly aligned themselves beside Maya’s ship, which she had promptly turned around.

The smugglers seemed to hesitate for a second. They were probably discussing this new turn of events among themselves. Maya and her friends formed a group, so they could retaliate in case one of them was attacked. The smugglers started aligning themselves in a combat formation. Maya began sweating. She had fervently hoped it wouldn’t have to come to this, but it was clear that the smugglers were willing to attack them to keep the identity of their cargo hidden. She began preparing her ship for the onslaught. But just as the two sides were about to let loose their weaponry a new ship appeared on the radar. A big ship. A DED ship. Maya sighed in relief.

The sudden appearance of the DED battleship quickly ended any thoughts of battle. Both sides disengaged and starting preparing to leave, all under the watchful eye of the DED ship. The channel-link with Yirikai came to live:

“You just watch it, custom officer Arikinnen. Next time, I won’t hesitate to kill you.” Yirikai said vengefully. ‘Yeah,’ Maya thought as she warped out, ‘and I would very much like to find out what you are carrying in your cargo hold.’

The Sarpati family



Once upon a time every nation had high hopes regarding the future of the neural boosters. Many believed they were the next natural step for humankind in improving itself. Each of the empires started their own booster research, dreaming of creating a wonder brew that would propel their subjects to greatness. These dreams came crashing down one day when it was discovered that neural boosters had some very unfortunate side-effects that turned them in a heartbeat into public health hazards.

One of the less well-known booster research firms was that owned and run by Igil Sarpati, a competent Gallente scientist. Sarpati's firm, simply named Sarpatis, was contracted by the Gallente Federation to lead booster research. When the Federation banned boosters following the discovery of the fatal side-effects the rug was pulled from beneath the company's feet and it quickly went under, sharing the fate of almost all other companies that built their operation on boosters. Few years after the company closure Igil Sarpati died. The Sarpati family passed into obscurity, seemingly destined to go down in history, alongside thousands of others, as failures.

Igil's eldest child, Virge Salvador Sarpati, became the head of the family after his father's death. He grew up in the shadow of his father's failure and this experience marked him for life. In time he founded his own company and called it Serpentis, an older form of the family name and a tribute to his late father's company. The only assets of Sarpati junior were the old booster formulas of his father, but as boosters were banned the formulas were worthless. So instead of going into the pharmaceutical business like his father V. Salvador Sarpati (as he likes to be called) instead focused on hi-tech R&D. Slowly, but surely, the company gained strength. Although it was nominally a Gallente-based company it had from early on a very cosmopolitan character and considers itself unattached to any government.

Three decades ago Sarpati bought a system in the Phoenix constellation and named it Serpentiis. He built himself a magnificent space station orbiting Serpentiis Prime and runs his company from there. As his power and wealth grew he has expanded the territory he owns and now runs a dozen space installations around the world of EVE. Although all the Serpentiis stations are officially termed research stations they have in time grown into notorious pirate havens. Sarpati himself encouraged such development, hinting at a more sinister long-term strategy than offered by his innocent-looking company. Indeed, it has been rumored that once Sarpati had set himself up he dusted off his father's old formulas and turned his research facilities on them.

Opening one's stations to pirates and outlaws can easily become a double-edged sword, but Sarpati was smart enough to get himself a protection. He made a deal with the Angel cartel that it would provide protection for all Serpentiis stations. In return the Angels would get a cut of all trade on these stations and access to any research breakthroughs the Serpentiis corporation makes. This deal has been so lucrative for both parties that the Angels have devoted their entire Guardian Angels division to protecting Serpentiis space and the Sarpati family lives in unprecedented luxury. The DED is not wholly unaware of the situation and has made numerous attempts to close some of Sarpati's establishments, but to no avail.

V. Salvador Sarpati has gathered a small retinue to dwell at his side in the Serpentiis system. There they spend their days in idle games and frolics without a worry in the world. Sarpati himself is an active participant, although his boundless energy and ambition allows him to break out of it every once in a while to take care of his small empire. The more frivolous of Sarpati's relatives live with him, while the more headstrong are scattered around the other Serpentiis stations running things. Only one member of Sarpati's immediate family, his sister Santimona, has rejected both the indolent life at Serpentiis Prime as well as Sarpati's close links to the underworld. She is now a member of the Sisters of EVE order and mocks her brother and his lifestyle at every opportunity, calling him King Serpent and Serpentiis Prime his royal court.

Doppelganger



Warm, white, comfortable, nothing. This was all it knew. The concept of self did not yet exist for the thing floating in maturation tube 30316, nor did the concept of what was about to happen.

A flash, blinding and intense. Something new. Stimulus.

A flood of stimulus. Pain? It didn't know the meaning of pain yet. This was different from before. The sensation intensified. He felt it emanating from the back of his head, and wondered what a head was. Then it came to him, a vague idea of his form. He opened his mouth, and it filled with... something... that he inhaled. Something he shouldn't have inhaled. He felt himself choking, his mind flooded with things that weren't there before.

He reached out, and his hands touched glass. He pressed against it, and struggled, but his movements were dampened by something thick, gelatinous. He was in a liquid. Was he drowning? No, he was all right, and his name was Galen. How did he know this, he wondered. Where did this fact come from? His eyes opened for the first time, and he glanced about. The wet thing he was in stung his eyes slightly, but through it he could see, in blinding detail. A room... with someone in it, standing before him... behind the glass. A doctor. What's a doctor, he wondered briefly, before the relevant data arrived in his brain through the neural jack at the base of his skull.

Minutes later, Galen Doradoux knew who he was, and what was going on. His consciousness fully integrated, he floated patiently in the gelatinous biomimetic suspension. Obviously, the Vaarkota deal had fallen through with catastrophic consequences, he thought. The jelly began to recede as it drained down through the bottom of the maturation capsule. The glass slid upwards, and he staggered out,

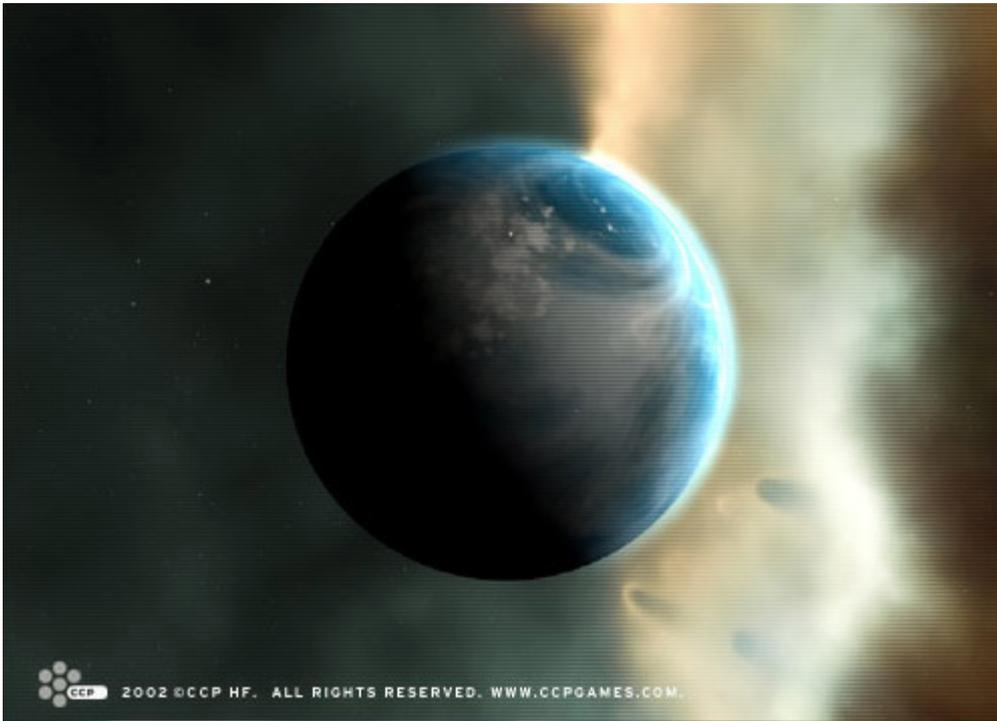
disoriented, falling to his knees and vomiting a large quantity of the jelly he swallowed minutes earlier. The doctor helpfully put a robe over him and handed him a few towels. He gathered himself.

"Mr. Doradoux, as part of your replica contract, it is my solemn duty to inform you that your previous self was lost in a fire in the Xygia system. The perpetrator, a member of the Vaarkota cartel, has been arrested, and there are numerous papers for you to sign regarding the incident", recited the doctor, and Galen nodded. This wasn't the first time, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. His line of work ensured that. He didn't mind the dying so much as the paperwork.

The doctor continued. "You'll be glad to know that the integration process went very well, and only slight synaptic degradation was encountered. We hope you will continue using the services of the Vivant Clone Repositories." Galen concentrated, and sighed with relief as he managed to quickly recollect the facts he absorbed after picking up the cruiser class pilot training pack a week before. The doctor thrust a data-pad in front of him, and Galen took it, placing his signature on the contract that ensured another clone to be ready for him when he next needed it.

He wrapped the bathrobe tightly around himself. "I know my way to the showers, doctor. Thank you for your assistance."

A Visit Worthwhile



The ship's sensors kicked in one by one once the ship exited the jump wormhole. Reigou Kiriyki scanned his surroundings with interest, this being his first visit to the Bersyrim system. In fact, none of Kiriyki's acquaintances had visited this system. Not that it was deserted, far from it: the Bersyrim system lies deep within Amarr space and has two large habitable planets, both teeming with life. No, Bersyrim, as most systems in the Shi-Karid sector, is a restricted area. A visa is needed to enter those systems and acquiring a visa is easier said than done. Kiriyki got his from a contact he knew within the huge Nurtura company and then only because his contact sorely needed someone to ferry vital agricultural machinery to Bersyrim III. As other large Amarrian companies, Nurtura had to depend on foreign traders for much of its trade, even within the Amarr Empire itself. Despite being the largest of the empires their trade fleet was not up to par and Caldari and Gallentean traders poured into the Amarr Empire in growing numbers, in spite of the many trade restrictions. Kiriyki set his course for Bersyrim III.

Bersyrim III, like the other inhabited planet Odra, was among the largest exporters of agricultural products in the whole Amarr Empire and Kiriyki was excited to get the change to do business there. Getting the visa not only presented additional business opportunities, but also gave his career in Jaasinen Inc. a big boost, now that he alone of all the corporation's members was able to travel to this restricted part of the Amarr Empire. Kiriyki had also been instrumental in getting Nurtura to buy the Caldari-made agricultural machinery in the first place, the very same machinery he was now carrying in his cargo hold to its final destination on Bersyrim III. Kiriyki dreamed of being made head of the Amarr trading branch. He had spent years gaining the trust of the Amarrians and building up a network of contacts and felt the time had come for some recognition for his efforts.

Kiryki forced himself to start thinking about his current assignment, the future would take care of his endorsements. Right now the priority was to get the cargo safe and sound to Bersyrim III, collect the reward for a mission accomplished and then maybe he would engage in some trading on his own. Certainly, agricultural products were definitely cheaper here at their source than almost anywhere else and as long as he was willing to carry them around for awhile Kiriyki could make a killer deal here. No wonder the visas leading to the Amarr agricultural planets were regarded as gateways to fabulous riches.

While traveling here Kiriyki had made an effort to get as much information as he could on the Bersyrim system. He prided himself in being very thorough when it came to places and people connected to his business.

Bersyrim was an old system, colonized more than 500 years ago. It lay in the fief of the Kador-family and was the gem of the sector. Bersyrim III landmass was mainly vast plains, making it ideal for large-scale food production. The planet exported huge amounts of agricultural products each year, but only a handful of its inhabitants had any extra-terrestrial connections; most of the populace lived and bred and died totally oblivious to anything else but their own surroundings. Kiriyki knew that this wasn't a unique case - it applied to most planetary populations everywhere. After all, the space economy was only a fraction of the planetary economy.

Most of the urban settlements, which were not many, had developed around huge Holder citadels, the cornerstone of imperial control on the planet. The towns were a mish-mash of large stone buildings, tottering wooden huts and raggedy tent-houses, with every nook and cranny chock full of people. Most of the citizens were Ni-Kunni craftsmen, sprinkled with true Amarrian artisans and freed Minmatar slaves. Out on the plains the land was divided between a handful of Amarr Holders, each ruling over a vast estate of up to 100,000 acres or more. The land was worked by slaves, mostly of Minmatar origin, who lived in small villages surrounded in all directions by an ocean of cornfields. All settlements, both the towns and the villages, were heavily fortified to keep the marauding Chikra nomads out. The Chikra people were descendants of a group of the first settlers on the planet that cut themselves off from the other settlers and headed out into the wilderness. They developed a nomadic lifestyle and still roam the planet in small packs, to the annoyance of the Amarrian authorities.

Yet even if Kiriyki, with his extensive experience and deep knowledge of the areas he did business in, he would be the first to admit that he knew only a tiny fraction of the history of the world of EVE. Sure, now he knew plenty about Bersyrim III, but it was only one world of many thousands, each with its own unique history, customs, stories and people.

While browsing the local news channel on Bersyrim III station as his ship was being loaded with newly-purchased products Kiriyki came across a small report about a discovery of a cache of cyber implants floating in space near Odra station but station workers, no doubt the remnants of a stubborn freighter unwilling to yield to pursuing pirates. When Kiriyki read the name of the cyber implants: Double-Edged Hydra Compartmentalizer, his heart missed a beat. No wonder the freighter had been stubborn, these implants were among the rarest and most sought after Amarrian artifacts in the Caldari State. Kiriyki fervently hoped the news was true: a horde of super-rare cyber implants for sale! While he waited impatiently for the loading procedure to finish he noticed his hands shaking. Odra station was just one warp away...

Ametat and Avetat



- 1 Now it came to pass in the third day of the first month of the tenth year of the rule of emperor Amash-Akura that the midday deliberations were abruptly brought to a halt when the day darkened in the sky.
- 2 And the sun went black as night and birds fell from the sky and flowers shriveled in the field and people fell sick in the streets and in the houses.
- 3 And in this moment of terrible distress the skies opened with a loud shriek and angels, bright as the sun was black, descended down to earth and their beauty soothed all the people and the animals alike.
- 4 And when the angels touched the ground with their feet the earth shook violently and fire engulfed those daring too near the divinities. Their power being mighty and their presence potent the people were wise not to look too closely upon them.
- 5 The emperor came from his high seat with his retinue to meet with the angels outside the city walls. And lo and behold! The moment the emperor passed below the city gates the sun cleared and shone as brightly as ever before, all in the glory of the emperor and the heavenly angels that called upon him.
- 6 The angels spoke the language of God and called themselves sefrim: those

that guard the high seats of heaven. God ordered them here to protect the emperor against all evils that ever beset him.

- 7 The sefrim offered unto the emperor a present from God as one brother to another: Ametat the Scepter and Avetat the Crown, showing the great pleasure God had in the earthly work of the emperor.
- 8 And thus the sefrim came to serve the illustrious Amash-Akura, to stay by his side during the day and guard his sleep during the night. A great house of white stone and marble was built for the sefrim to reside in and were tended by the best servants the empire had to offer.
- 9 For a hundred years while the sefrim watched over the empire no wars or epidemics or famines ruined the lands and the people were content and joyous.
- 10 From Isthia in the north and Melekel in the south and Edras in the east and from Iphria in the west people came to pray before the holy sefrim and receive a blessing to take home to their families.
- 11 The sefrim stood tall and beautiful, clad in their white and amber robes, with masks of gold and silver to protect people from being struck dead by their angelic beauty.
- 12 And all this time the emperor Amash-Akura did not age one day and was as healthy and strong as the day he came of age. The Scepter gave him vigor and the Crown gave him acumen and his rule was wise and fair.
- 13 Then Molok the Deceiver sundered the lands and the people suffered floods and plagues conjured by him. Molok turned the people against the sefrim and people who once sang their praise now abhorred them.
- 14 The emperor saw that all was not good and summoned the sefrim and said unto them, The people are in great distress, what remedies doest thee have?
- 15 And the sefrim answered, My Lord, the land has split against thou, thou must make war upon thy enemies to reclaim what is justly thine.
- 16 And the emperor asked, Will thee aid us in this perilous endeavor?
- 17 But the sefrim answered, No my Lord, we are here only to guide and guard, it is forbidden to us to aggress upon any man.
- 18 Then be gone! The emperor said in anger, for his foes were formidable.

- 19 And the sefrim, not longer in the emperor's favor returned to from whence they came that very day. And the moment they left the sun went black and people cried in anguish for this was an evil omen.

- 20 And that night God spake unto emperor Amash-Akura in his sleep, Thy folly is great, Amash-Akura, thou hast rejected those I sent to thee in thine hour of need. Thou must redeem thyself to me by thy own merits.

- 21 And next day Amash-Akura had aged all his days and his hair was white and his skin wrinkled. But his spirit was high and his will resolute. God had charged him to take back his empire.

- 22 For five years Amash-Akura battled his enemies, wielding the Scepter and the Crown, and triumphed in the end. The day after Molok the Deceiver was brought before him in chains and sacrificed on the altar of God; the emperor died in his bedchamber, his task fulfilled.

- 23 And that night the sky turned red and the people were again happy that God was content with them and the new emperor.

- Chapter I of the Epitoth
in the Book of Scriptures

The above text found in the holy book of the Amarrians the Book of Scriptures (actually several volumes). It dates more than 6000 years back, when the Amarrians were still a fledgling nation on the island of Amarr on the planet Athra (later renamed Amarr Prime once the Amarrians had conquered it completely). The story of the sefrim and Ametat and Avetat has fascinated scholars for ages. The first chapter of the Epitoth is the oldest text containing information about the sefrim and is also in many ways the most detailed. It describes their arrival and departure, as well as their appearance. In later texts the sefrim are only mentioned as mythical creatures and servants of the Amarr God and emperor.

But there are in existence fragments of texts from various sources that speak of the gifts the sefrim (singular form: sef), the Ametat and the Avetat, or the Scepter and the Crown. These fragments not only support the truth of the story (at least up to a point), but they also contain information regarding what happened to the items. The Scepter and the Crown, described as made of incredibly light-weight metal, yet also very strong. No surviving manuscripts give any exact info about their function other than they allowed the user to 'wield the power of God' and 'harvest the knowledge of creation'.

There are more facts that support the story. Astronomical data shows that two solar eclipses occurred in the space of 101 years in the same time period as the text was (accurately established) written in. Both of these eclipses were caused by the large planet Zorast, the next planet between Amarr Prime and the sun (none of the Amarr Prime moons are large enough to create anything more than hardly noticeable solar eclipses). The first of the Zorast solar eclipses created full umbra on Amarr Island,

while in the latter the island was only in the penumbra of the eclipse. What is more, five years after the latter eclipse a huge asteroid hit the gaseous Zorast while the planet was well aligned with Amarr Prime, an event that was undoubtedly spotted on Amarr Island.

Going back to Ametat and Avetat, the two items remained in the emperor's family for four centuries, when they inexplicitly disappeared. In one of the last texts to mention it, a report made by the Amarr Court Chamberlain, it is stated that despite their age not one blemish or rust-spot is to be found on them. Despite numerous red herrings and fabrications through the ages, as well as many methodical searches, the real Scepter and the Crown have never been recovered.

Old Man Star



Those traveling within the Gallente Federation from the Peccanouette Circle to the Patrie Perimeter can make a shortcut midway through by traversing Ouperia - a cold and uninhabited white dwarf system. Few now remember the name Ouperia - most people only know it by what it is commonly called, Old Man Star.

The inter-stellar warp drive technology is fairly new. Until it came along the only way for the empires to expand their territory was to send a ship to a solar system to build a stargate. The latest versions of these construction ships managed a speed of ca. 30% of the speed of light. At this speed a system 10 light-years away could be reached in 33 years, or there about. The crew of the construction ships was put into cryogenic stasis for the duration of the trip, only to be revived once the destination was neared.

A century ago to the date, before capsules and collision avoidance systems, a Gallentean construction ship set out for the desolate system then known as Ouperia. A stargate there would not only serve as a link between the Peccanouette Circle and the Patrie Perimeter, but would also give access to the rich asteroid fields in the system. The construction ship departed from Villore system, some 12 light years distant. Estimated travel time was 40 years. The crew consisted of five people, a huge reduction from the old days when dozens of crewmen were needed - swarms of drones and robots were now responsible for most of the actual construction, the crew only acting as operators and technicians.

Five years after the construction ship set out disaster befell it. A large asteroid hit the ship full force in deep space. The cryogenic chamber was damaged, killing four of the five. The fifth survived, luckily for him he was revived before the cryogenic equipment

gave out entirely. His name was Ceul Darieux and he was the drone operator on the ship.

Darieux immediate problem was how to feed himself - to save space and weight no food was carried on the ship, the crew was supposed to deploy small greenhouse bulbs once they'd been revived and grow edible plants there. But this required the proximity of a sun to provide the essential light and heat - in short, the greenhouse bulbs and the plant seeds were useless in deep space. Water was an equally pressing problem, as was the shortage of oxygen. The state of the ship did not make things any easier - the stray asteroid had ripped a huge gash into the side of the ship and destroyed many of the ship's vital systems. The cargo hold was hit especially hard - debris of destroyed equipment and pieces of the asteroid cluttered the small space.

Darieux put his engineering skills to good use to solve these problems. He began by tampering with the fuel tanks. The fuel tanks, filled with liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen, served the propulsion system once the ship had to be slowed down once near the destination system. Fiddling with the fuel tanks was extremely dangerous, as the ingredients were highly flammable, but with patience and caution Darieux managed to get a controlled reaction out of the fuel, which gave him both water and oxygen. Then he welded together every piece of glass and metal plate he could muster in the ship to gather and store what little light he could from distant stars. This was sufficient for him to start food production in one greenhouse bulb - by linking the bulb into the ship's septic tank fertilizers for the plants were secured. The result was enough food for one man and later enough oxygen production as well. In other words, Darieux managed to create his own little ecology system.

Once Darieux had stabilized the conditions on the ship and provided for himself he next had to adjust the course of the ship. The impact had slightly altered the ship's course and in the vastness of space it meant the ship would bypass the Ouperia system by billions of kilometers. The propulsion system had been damaged beyond repair - the ship was out of control and heading into deep space for eternity. The more time spent on a solution the further adrift the ship would be, so a quick resolution was required. Instead of spending valuable time trying to build a new propulsion system Darieux opted for a more ingenious solution: The ship was equipped with a token force of combat missiles. Darieux fired the missiles and turned them around to explode against the strongest points of the ship's armor. By carefully calculating the impact points and controlling the size of the explosion Darieux managed to correctly align the ship to its original course. Darieux briefly contemplated trying to turn the ship completely around, but quickly realized that he neither had enough missiles for this, nor would the hull withstand such a brute way of turning around even if he had them.

Now the dullest part of the journey began, as the ship was still decades from Ouperia system. Darieux spent the time creating fantastic robots and designs using the scrap heap in the cargo hold. He discovered that the asteroid that hit the ship had been very rich with the super rare mineral megacyte - which has unique qualities that make it extremely valuable in advanced robotics and drone manufacturing. Having to live and work in zero gravity year in, year out gave Darieux a distinctive insight into hi-tech assembly and despite the limited resources and tools at his disposal, what he created during those long long years has never since been surpassed in originality or brilliance.

At long last the ship entered the Ouperia system, 10 years behind schedule due to the decreased speed caused by the impact and subsequent missile explosions. Over the years Darieux had invented several techniques for slowing the ship down, just for

this occasion. His main method was to use the stellar bodies in the system to help him slow down. Even if the propulsion system itself was still out of order Darieux managed to get some of the directional thrusters to work, feeding them with the last drops of fuel. Now he began to zigzag between the system's planets, using the gravity to his advantage to stop the ship and even going so far as to enter the atmosphere at one point (protecting the ship with a handcrafted shield). Through these unorthodox methods Darieux managed to stop the ship from shooting out into deep space again.

By this time Darieux was an old man, his gaunt body in a bad state due to too much time in zero gravity. Yet his spirit was still strong and he was unwilling to give up now that he'd managed to reach his destination. Satisfying though it was to be in the Ouperia system his situation was still dire as the prospects for any kind of rescue were absolutely none at all. His fate lay entirely in his own hands and the only option was to try to construct the stargate all by himself.

All the equipment needed to construct the stargate was long since destroyed or altered beyond recognition. Darieux was forced to start from scratch devising and building innovative drones and robot factories. He centered his activity around a large asteroid that was conveniently close to the resonance point between the white main star and its tiny brown companion. There, on that asteroid, Darieux constructed a small assembly factory as well as his home and for five years he labored along with his robot friends to complete, single-handedly, a stargate. A feat that maybe a handful in the whole world of EVE could pull through, Darieux did at the age of 80 - white haired, wrinkled face, shaky hands and all.

Imagine the surprise of the stargate controllers in the Villore system when a patched up construction ship limped through their stargate - the triumphant remains of a mission long since considered dead and lost. Darieux reveled in the media limelight for a while before launching his own company, CreoDron, centered on the blueprints created in an incredible voyage lasting more than half a century. He died few years later, his frail body and failing internal organs too badly damaged for cloning. But his legacy remains strong to this day - CreoDron is the biggest drone manufacturing company in the world of EVE and the innovations of its founder still drive the drone industry. Renaming the Ouperia system the Old Man Star is the least an appreciative world can do.

The vicious cycle



And then it was all over. The capsule cracked open. The naked skin, exposed to direct sunlight, flared up. The body swelled, convulsing uncontrollably. Just as consciousness faded the saliva boiled on the tongue. Death came quickly thereafter. The body mingled with the debris of the former frigate. In the background police ships chased down the killer.

It all began so innocently. Two Gallentean frigates cruising along in Federation space. Chatting amiably. One a wide-eyed rookie; the other one acting the veteran part. Disaster: a war of words, followed by threats and insults. Then chat stopped and weapons talked. The rookie never stood a chance. But wait! Police ships approach. Too late to save the rookie. So they punish the offender. Justice is swift - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The veteran's body joins the rookie in its graceful dance around the sun.

Yet both live. This very moment they wake to life in their brand new bodies. Maybe they will get a chance to dance again some other time - maybe then the rookie will have learned some new tricks.

This is not the end. The cycle of life saved the fallen two from oblivion. So too their cadavers are returned to the eternal circle one more time. Their frozen dance interrupted as soon as the horizon swallows the police ships. A non-descript ship sidles up. A couple of salvage drones fleetingly deployed. The lifeless bodies snatched up and hurriedly returned to the ship. Getting caught body mining by the Gallente police means serious, serious trouble. Then the ship warps away, wanting out of Federation space quickly with its very hot cargo. Searching for a cloning facility that doesn't mind a bit of ill-gotten A-grade biomass on the side. Life goes on, citizen. Nothing more for you here.

Silphy



Five hundred years ago the Intaki people lived a simple life on their home planet. For them the sky was a mystery they were only slowly unfolding with their pre-industrial technology. Then the Gallenteans arrived and swept them into the modern age in one swift stroke. The Intakis, initially overwhelmed, adapted quickly and within a century they had seasoned space travelers and active members of the Gallente governing body. They soon established their reputation as fair-minded humanists that excelled as deft negotiators and clever businessmen, fitting perfectly into the Gallentean way of life.

The social uproar following the Caldari departure from the Federation touched the Intakis deeply and many of them sympathized and even supported the Caldari - the yoke of the cumbersome Federation bureaucracy lay as heavily on the Intakis as the Caldari. Understandably the Gallenteans were forced to deal harshly with these elements to prevent a complete fragmentation of the young Federation.

Apart from a few minor uprisings the Federation quickly subdued the Intakis. Those deemed the biggest threat to the stability of the regime were arrested and exiled. Some of these went over to the Caldari side, but the majority of the exiles, some five thousand in total, went out into the great unknown at the outskirts of Federation space. There they built themselves new homes in the form of sprawling space stations - the Federation barring them from colonizing any planets or moons.

In time as the exiles became more organized and their power increased through asteroid mining and black market trading they formed a loosely connected organization and termed it the Intaki syndicate. The syndicate is not political in any sense - each member station enjoys complete autonomy - but they share economical information and help each other in security matters.

The territories of the Intaki syndicate are open to everyone, no matter their race, political creed or legal stature. The syndicate is not vastly wealthy or powerful, but they serve an important function on the fringe of empire space - acting as the safe havens for anyone and everyone where everything can be bought and sold, no questions asked. While the Federation was still the Promised Land the syndicate territories received the residual immigrants that weren't allowed into the Federation for one reason or another, thus slowly growing in size and importance.

Each syndicate station has its own governor who has complete authority over their station and its surroundings. These governors are those that were instrumental in constructing the station all those years ago, or their descendants. The unofficial leader of the syndicate in years past was the governor of Poitot station, Dorn en Diabel. A charismatic and passionate leader he installed order in the chaos that reigned after the exile and set the foundation of the syndicate. Like so many prominent Intakis en Diabel was an albino, which lent his authority the strength needed to push his will through.

A decade ago en Diabel died in a freak accident, meaning his mind couldn't be transferred to his clone. His eldest son inherited his father's position as station manager of Poitot station. But trouble was brewing on the horizon. Syndicate rivals of the en Diabel family were gathering strength for a coup. Not possessing his father's shrewd political mind young Gare en Diabel was clearly out of his league and his equally weak siblings on Poitot were incapable of lending the kind of assistance needed.

But one child of Dorn en Diabel was not on Poitot, nor had been for more than five years. Silphy en Diabel, his youngest, had been sent off to the Sisters of EVE after one heated row too many with her father. Alone among Dorn en Diabel's offspring Silphy had inherited her father's wits and passion, as well as her mother's fiery temper. Her stay with the Sisters, initially intended as a punishment, grew into enthusiasm for Silphy - for the first time she was free of her father's iron will and free to live as she liked. She struck a friendship with Santimona Sarpati - an influential Sister that also happened to be sister to the notorious V. Salvador Sarpati, head of the Serpents Corporation. But just as Silphy's career with the Sisters seemed poised for rapid take off, she decided to heed the desperate calls of her family and head back home to Poitot.

Once there Silphy quickly assessed the situation and then in one swift stroke as cunning and brutal as any her father had deceived, she seized the initiative. First, she altered the station charter so that from now on the populace would elect the governor for life, this went unopposed as the family's enemies thought this a sign of weakness - their view confirmed a week later when one of their own was elected governor. But then Silphy put the next step of her plan into motion: she secretly arranged for attacks on all inbound food supply ships, thus slowly putting Poitot station in a state of starvation. Naturally, the enraged populace blamed the new governor. Silphy, using her Sisters of EVE influence, then had emergency food supplies brought in on vessels of the en Diabel family (which were of course left alone). Thus Silphy made herself champion of the people and when the governor was driven out of office Silphy won the next elections by a landslide. Having shattered the reputation of her enemies she started systematically ruining them financially until she was the undisputed leader of Poitot station. At the same time Silphy strengthened her position as the head of the en Diabel family - she sent her brothers abroad and kept a strict control of their monetary allowance to keep them dependant on her. She has also slowly asserted herself as supreme leader on Poitot station, the brief influence of the populace soon to fade to nothing.

In the years since Silphy en Diabel became governess she has regained her fathers prominence as the unofficial leader of the leaderless Intaki syndicate. Her power has never been seriously tested, although she lost her connections with the Sisters of EVE once it was discovered that she'd collaborated with the Serpentis Corporation in her bid for black market dominance in and around the Federation. Santimona Sarpati, once her good and trusted friend and ally, has turned her back on her and just as she calls her brother King Sarpati she now mockingly calls Silphy Queen Silphy of the syndicate, stating that they compliment each other perfectly in their exploitation and contempt of their fellow humans.

Malaetu Shakor



One would be forgiven for assuming that with the countless billions of inhabitants in the world of EVE the acts of an individual count for little. Yet there are equally countless tales of individuals that through skill, perseverance or luck shaped the world around them and made their mark on history. Maybe most of these tales are only fables, kept alive with forlorn hope by the insignificant many. One of these tales is that of Malaetu Shakor.

Born a son of a Brutor Defiant, Shakor soon showed the signs of the eye disease that plague so many descendants of Defiants. The eye disease, a result of the harsh treatment the Defiants received at the hands of the Amarrians, is similar to glaucoma and invariably results in a complete loss of sight before the age of five. Unlike when under the yoke of the Amarrian occupation the Minmatars today have access to cures for the disease, but many decide against a cure as the white eyes associated with the disease have become a sign of respect amongst the Brutor clan. Shakor decided as a teenager not to undergo an operation to regain his sight. He did this not to gain respect from his fellow Brutors, but out of personal deference to those Defiants that lost their health and even their life as human guinea pigs in the gruesome Human Endurance Program of the Amarrians.

The Minmatar Rebellion was long over when Shakor came of age, but still he decided to take up the fight against the Amarrians. Joining a raggedy band of fighters (rebels in the eyes of the Amarrians), Shakor soon proved himself as an outstanding ship captain. Within a few months he had taken control of the rebel band and organized them into an expert combat squad. It was at this time that Shakor devised his infamous battle formation that bears his name: Shakor's Spiral - a daring close counter assault tactic that only the most skilled pilots can pull off.

Shakor's squadron operated on the borders of Minmatar and Amarr (actually Ammatar) space, like other rebel squads. Its notoriety grew in leaps and bounds, prompting the Amarrians to start targeting the squad with their elite forces. Pressure from other rebel leaders (who were taking a licking from the Amarrians) forced Shakor to leave the border regions with his squadron and set up his base of operation away from Minmatar space. Far from deterred, Shakor continued fighting the Amarrians from his isolated station hidden deep within the Great Wildlands. It was there that the strangest incident of his eventful life occurred.

Returning one day from the hunt, Shakor and his men were ambushed by the Amarr Royal Guard - universally regarded as the best fighting unit around. A fierce battle ensued. Shakor's men quickly formed a Spiral, the Royal Guard responded by forming an Arrow formation, designed to counter the Spiral. Despite their experience, Shakor's men panicked once their casualties began mounting and tried to retreat. They were hunted down and slaughtered to the last man by the Royal Guard. The Guardsmen wanted to make sure there were no survivors and systematically began destroying the defenseless capsules floating around. But when they locked their weapons on Shakor's capsule a Jovian vessel uncloaked itself next to the capsule. Jamming the Amarr vessels with ease, the Jovian ship leisurely moved Shakor's capsule into its cargo hold before disappearing again. The Amarrians tried to track it down, but found no trace of it.

For two years nothing was heard of Malaetu Shakor. The Amarrians, initially vexed over the Jovian interference, assumed he was dead. Thus his return to the Minmatar Republic came as a total surprise. Where Shakor had once been fierce, driven and highly agitated he now seemed unusually calm and collected. Fearing some foul Jovian plot Shakor's family insisted on DNA tests; they confirmed his identity. Shakor himself has remained silent about his time with the Jovians. He assumed a political position with the Republic and soon resumed his fight for freeing Minmatars still enslaved by the Amarrians, with the difference that his arsenal now consists of sharp words and political machinations instead of a fleet of space ships. Just as his ancestors defied the Amarr rule all those years ago Malaetu Shakor continues to this day defying the Amarrians at every opportunity in the halls of diplomacy all over the world of EVE.

Rogue drones



The huge asteroid tumbled majestically through the void, dwarfing his asteroid brethren close by, some of which themselves measured hundreds of meters in diameter. Gabri Cichan had been working his way towards the behemoth for the better part of an hour now. He had even given the huge asteroid a girl's name, as was his want with asteroids he hoped would make his dreams come true and fill his pockets with cash - this one he called Theriese. His cargo hold was half-full of minerals by now, Cichan hoped to fill it completely by mining Theriese, preferably with some rarities. Approaching it was not easy - lesser asteroids seemed to swarm around it in great clusters, making it tricky to navigate through the maze of rock. Cichan kept his mining drones occupied on nearby asteroids while maneuvering closer to the big one. As soon as he was in range he sent some of them up ahead to start digging into Theriese. Getting closer Cichan noticed other drones mingling with his own. Thinking another miner was in the vicinity he started scanning his radar, but detected no ships - just those few extra drones and the asteroids rolling around his ship. Continuing his approach unabated Cichan squeezed between a couple of asteroids that formed a sort of a gateway to his objective. Finally entering the empty space around Theriese, Cichan was quickly unnerved by the sight that greeted him in the asylum beneath Theriese's shadow.

Clinging to the inner sides of the two gateway asteroids were sprawling rogue drone lairs - hundred of meters of dark metallic and menacing abode buried deep into the rock and housing hundreds of wild drones. Cichan had heard of these monstrosities, but never one so big as the one he was viewing now. The lair was not only cleverly hidden in every direction from prying eyes - it was also superbly located close to the mammoth asteroid that was sure to attract miners from miles away. As a prove to that point Cichan noticed the remains of several ships perched by the drone lairs, being systematically taken apart by worker drones and incorporated into the ever-

expanding drone complex. Fast approaching combat drones made Cichan fear his ship would share the same fate all-to-soon.

In a desperate attempt to escape the attacking drones Cichan slammed his ship into evasive maneuvers while trying to kick-start the warp drive at the same time. His only chance was to outmaneuver the drones long enough until his warp drive would activate.

The bulky combat drones were sluggish in their pursuit of the fleeing vessel, but more nimble assault drones surged ahead and quickly caught up. The assault drones were equipped with energy leech equipment and once in range they set out to disrupt the energy flow in Cichan's ship. The ship's power core could have coped with two or three of these little buggers, but the ship was soon swamped by them and the power supply drained rapidly. By the time the warp drive was online it was too late - Cichan no longer had the energy available to activate it. Then the combat drones arrived.

When Cichan was some minutes later being whisked away in his capsule he thought himself lucky to escape alive. His ship and everything in it was lost - it was now serving as fodder for the growing drone lairs of Theriese. Well, he thought, at least he had an interesting story to tell his friends.

Rogue drones and wild drones are the terms used over advanced drones that mutated out of control. A few years ago some ingenious Gallentean inventor had the idea of creating super-advanced drones that could think and act on their own - in essence acting in every sense like a regular space ship except being unmanned and computer controlled. First prototypes were encouraging, but then disaster struck. The drones became unruly, then unmanageable. Some of these were huge - the largest drones ever constructed, these drones were even equipped with warp drives and equipped with the latest advancements in artificial intelligence. These mother drones, as they were called, along with several lesser drones soon managed to spread out, not only within the same system as the research facility that birthed them, but also to other systems. Only later men discovered exactly how - the drones attacked and took over space ships, then used them to jump to other systems, the drones themselves safely hidden within the ship. Needless to say the super-drone research was soon abandoned by the Gallenteans.

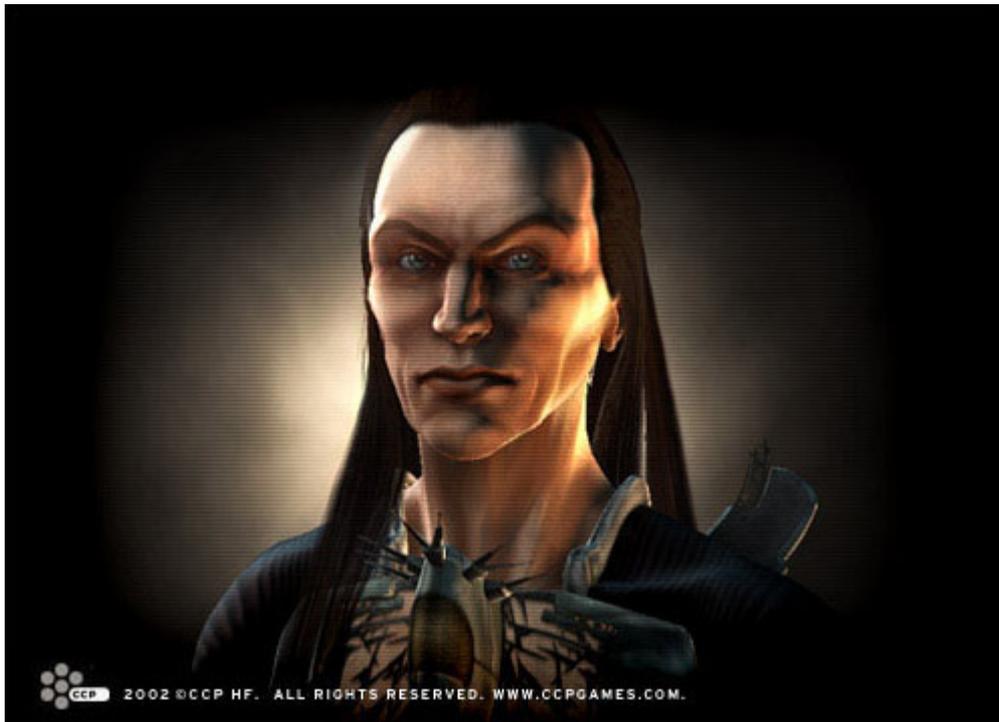
The rogue drones soon started behaving very much like other living beings. They constructed a home for themselves, usually deep in some remote asteroid field, and began plans for reproduction. This involved both the mining of asteroids and attacks on unsuspecting mining vessels - all with the intent of gathering the materials needed to expand their homes and to build their own drones. As the months passed drone lairs popped up in dozen different places and today they can be found in almost every corner of the world, harassing and killing space farers of every sort. As each drone lair is started by a separate mother drone they often evolve in quite different ways. Each new generation of rogue drones shows some new mutations, creating a huge diversity in the shape, size and power for rogue drones.

Recently a new type of drone lairs have appeared, commonly called hulk lairs. It seems that when rogue drones manage to capture suitably large vessels, like large cargo freighters or cruisers, they don't dismantle the ship completely, but instead start to incorporate the lair into the ship's hull. Eventually these hulks break free from the drone lair that captured them and start drifting out of the asteroid field, sometimes even under their own accord; the propulsion system still being intact. Hulks like these have been found drifting in deep space, far from human settlements, but occasionally they drift close by settled planets or through space routes. This can cause severe

problems for the populace and space farers, often requiring heavy military involvement to get rid off.

In areas where rogue drones are numerous and seen as deterrents to normal mining and trade operations the local authorities have taken it up by themselves to employ armed forces to destroy rogue drone lairs, or at least keeping them from spreading too heavily. A favored tactic among those hunting rogue drones is re-programming their AI circuits, effectively taking control of them. However, this tactic is hard to pull off, not to say very dangerous. Discussions have been held between the empires and within the CONCORD about possible ways for a joint effort to rid the world of rogue drones, but these discussions have not led to any concrete deals being made and thus it is still in the hands of local authorities to deal with the drones as they see fit.

Power politics



When Souro Foiritan began his five year tenure as the President of the Gallente Federation, the first thing he did was to expel his main competitors from the Progressive Party; veto laws on food grants to the poor and needy; and then go on a two-day pleasure space cruise in the Rainbow zone, stating he needed a holiday after a hard-fought election campaign. This bizarre Presidential behavior has in the past three years become even more colorful, prompting scorn and contempt from Foiritan's political enemies and foreign ambassadors alike. Even more bizarrely, Souro Foiritan is the most popular President in the history of the Federation. Time and time again, after Foiritan's latest folly, public polls on his popularity show little or no effects on his immense popularity (85% of the latest poll). The reason for this is simple: for all his buffoonery President Foiritan is a shrewd and intelligent politician. He is charismatic, easy-going and honest, but at the same time he's a strict disciplinarian that drives himself and his staff hard to better the lives of Gallenteans and further the cause of the Federation. Whatever his political enemies may think of him they grudgingly admit that President Foiritan is infuriatingly good at his job.

Unlike so many Presidents before him Foiritan is very much his own man - although he was elected as the candidate of the Progressive Party (and is thus a Progressor) he has deliberately distanced himself from the party in recent years. Ousting his main rivals from the party on the very first day of his presidency was a clear sign that he was not going to be a puppet dancing on strings controlled by the party leaders and his latter conduct towards the lobby factions has made it very clear that Foiritan is the one in control. Despite all this Foiritan is very much aware that being the leader of a democratic state, especially one as volatile as the Federation with all its ethnic, religious and economic differences, is a position built on quicksand. Take one wrong step and you are up to your ears in trouble.

The democracy exercised by the Gallenteans is a very open one - it is common for major issues to go to a public vote instead of being solely decided by the senate or the President. This is something that the lobby factions pushed through a long time ago as a way to utilize public opinion (which can be much easier to sway by master propagandists than the mind of the President) for important matters. President Foiritan has been able, due to his ongoing popularity, to use this forum several times in the past to push through tough issues despite senate opposition. Foiritan knows his people very well. He knows that even if Gallente society can be called a capitalistic one, the capitalism followed by the Gallenteans is fundamentally different than the one found in the Caldari State. For Gallenteans, the accumulation of wealth is something that is done on an individual level and personal wealth only matters in comparison to the wealth of other individuals. For the Caldari the economic wheels of the state are controlled by huge corporations and for corporations competition, efficiency and market share is more important than accumulation of wealth (although the latter is often a happy by-product of the former) - business for the good of the individual rather than the good of the many is something totally alien to the Caldari. This Foiritan understands very well and he knows that greasing the palm of a few individuals will appeal more to the Gallenteans than some blanket solutions that really does not help anyone all that much. In these matters Foiritan is at odds with the Sociocrats, the second largest political bloc in the Federation. Their leader, Mentas Blaque, is a sworn enemy of Foiritan and uses every opportunity to mock him and his government. The Sociocrats (the name of the party is Social Democrats, Sociocrats is what they are usually called) advocate social equality on all levels and that the federal government should make it its highest priority to aid those in the lower strata of society. Mentas Blaque loathes the individualistic approach of President Foiritan and considers it to be vile favoritism and simply unjust.

The latest dispute is that regarding the legal ownership of planets in unpopulated systems. The President and the Progressors want to hand out ownership on an individual basis, while the Sociocrats consider the planets to be the property of the Federation (as it was federal scout ships that discovered them and federal construction crews that built stargates linking the systems to the Federation) and the Federation should control colonization and development of the planets and allow the whole Federation to reap the rewards. The President is counting on the support of the Unionists (where Minmatar immigrants are very strong), while Mentas Blaque and the Sociocrats are counting on the potentially explosive pressure of the lower classes. The issue is currently being hotly debated in the governmental halls and many believe that sooner or later either party will call for a public vote on the matter. Many also believe that this issue, which is also hotly debated on every street corner of the Federation, could shatter the popularity of the President once and for all.

Mordu's Legion



The Caldari State, with its mega-corporations and millions of smaller companies forming the fabric of society, hasn't always posed as a united front as it does today. Several times in its history since the State was birthed following its break from the Gallente Federation, rival factions and companies have clashed, often with deadly intent. Most of the time, the cause of conflict is of an economical nature, but every now and then ideology or political differences are the cause.

One of these incidents was the Waschi Uprising, which took place a few decades ago in the Kamokor system. Then, a few radical Caldari attacked settlements of Intakis in the system and proclaimed that the Caldari State was solely for people of Caldari origin. The Caldari authority, as ever fearful that their finely woven social tapestry of corporatism would be torn asunder, sent in their best military units to quell the uprising before it could spread any further.

The Waschi Uprising did not leave any permanent marks on Caldari society. Still, it did leave one legacy that has carried on to this very day and that is Mordu's Legion.

When the Caldari broke from the Gallente Federation many Intakis that sympathized with their cause were exiled from the Federation. The most militant of those went over to the Caldari and asked to join them in their fight against the Federation. These were all experienced military personnel and thus very valuable in the early stages of the war when veterans were few and far between. The Intakis were all put into a separate squadron, with a Caldari officer. His name was Muryia Mordu. Mordu was a brilliant young officer and one of the more open-minded Caldari, who generally are extremely xenophobic. He immediately took to the Intakis and they to him and together they formed one of the more revered fighting units in the Caldari Navy during the war with the Federation.

After the war ended the Intakis were offered cheap land and accommodations in Waschi City on the planet of Kamokor IV. For awhile the Intakis lived peacefully,

slowly becoming part of the Waschi community. Yet the presence of the Intakis caused tension in the city and slowly radicals, feeding on the xenophobic tendencies of the Caldari, gained strength. In the end the radicals gained majority in the city and began seriously harassing the Intakis. When Caldari authorities tried to put an end to this the uprising started in earnest, with the radicals and their supporters demanding the exportation of all foreigners and the closure of the borders. The Intakis were driven out and, in desperation, they called on their old commander Mordu to help them defend themselves and get back what was rightfully theirs. Mordu, now retired, agreed to assist. The catch was that Mordu and the Intakis were no longer part of the Caldari Navy. Not deterred by this small fact, the group formed an independent mercenary corps to fight the radicals. This was the inception of Mordu's Legion.

The Legion, mostly consisting of old veterans from the war with the Federation and young hotheads eager for action, helped the Caldari Navy to tear the radicals' forces to pieces under the skillful direction of Mordu. The Caldari authorities were impressed by the fighting spirit of the Legion and offered to merge it with the Caldari Navy. Mordu and the other leaders of the Legion declined, deciding rather to focus on the mercenary nature of the Legion.

In the years since the uprising Mordu's Legion has grown in stature. Today it is the largest and most famous mercenary corps in the world of EVE. The Legion has always had close ties with the Caldari State and the two assist each other on many issues. At first the Legion accepted only citizens of the Caldari State, but today they accept members from any race, as long as they are not known enemies of the Caldari State. Still, the majority of the members are of Caldari origin and the leaders are all Caldari. The Legion does not train its members, so they are expected to be experienced fighters before they apply for membership in the Legion. Members of the Legion get access to high-tech Caldari military equipment, even prototype weapons to test out, and are guaranteed plenty of employment if they so wish. Non-Caldari that have served in the Legion for a long time are offered Caldari citizenship on their retirement.

The Legion is often employed by governments to settle issues that are not directly under anyone's jurisdiction, especially when fast deployment and swift results are needed. Their reputation as combat experts as well as fair and honest warriors has never been tarnished.

Repair Man



The wreckage was still smoking; isolated fires still nurtured contently in hidden corners, flowing unnaturally in the zero gravity. Case Omnicron scrutinized the debris, focusing briefly on a promising crate or box before moving on. The assailants of the large cargo vessel hadn't left a lot behind. Normally, Case wouldn't stoop so low as to scavenge destroyed ships for scraps, but he made an exception this time as the cargo vessel was essentially a fresh carcass. Case had witnessed from afar the fierce battle between the cargo ship and the two frigates attacking it. The cargo ship put up a surprising amount of resistance, maiming one of the heavily armed frigates before going down itself, hinting at lucrative cargo on-board. Case had waited for the remaining frigate to finish rummaging through the wreckage, as the capsules of the destroyed vessels made their way to the nearest station. The reunion of the downed pirate with the crew of the cargo vessel on the station would undoubtedly be quite colorful.

Fifteen minutes later Case set his course away from the wreckage, his azure-colored ship streaking away from the smatter of asteroids that encircled the battle scene; he didn't want to spend too much time snooping around in case the pirates or the cargo vessel crew returned to the scene. Besides, he had just snatched a cargo container full of valuable trade goods and had no intention of getting caught with it. Case considered himself a lucky man. Ever since he first set out as the sole captain of a small space frigate some six months earlier, it seemed like fortune had smiled upon him. It was like he had an uncanny sense of being at the right place at the right time, without ever being able to explain this 'gift'. Yet he always had a nagging feeling that he was somehow wasting his time; that he was meant to be doing something far greater and nobler, but was never able to grasp what this elusive thing was. As Case aligned his ship towards the nearest stargate, this feeling of loss; of being the missing link in some grand inter-stellar puzzle devised by an unseen but all-knowing

being haunted his thoughts once again. As he was about to activate the warp drive, his mind went blank; his unconscious body slumped inside the ship's capsule.

The two tiny ships approached Case's blue vessel at a leisurely pace. Their hulls, if they'd been visible, were a multi-colored swirl, like an oil spill. The ships glided silently to either side of the larger frigate, complex arrays of sensors prying apart every detail about the man and the machine they were focusing on. A quiet conversation between the two captains ensued. 'Is this the man we want?' said one. 'This is him,' the other replied. 'I will start my work.'

The one stood guard, while the other worked in silence. His mind subtly instructed the sensors, sending data directly into the mind of the comatose captain within the blue ship. It only took a few minutes. 'Is it done?' one said. 'It is,' the other said. 'I will awake him now.'

The two captains watched as the slightly bewildered Case Omnicron, oblivious to those watching him, finally made his way to the stargate. 'Has the behavioral pattern been aligned correctly?' asked one. 'Yes, he will do much better now,' the other answered with pride. Then, the hunter and the repair man, activated their own warp drives and started their journey home.

New horizons



Sometimes Runia Tamarik felt that all she did was travel. Constantly touring from one place to another, with as little time as possible spent at each destination before dashing to the next. Not that she could complain too much about her vocation - she was relatively well off and had an easy job. Her years as an inter-stellar trader had given her contacts and information that elevated her way above the basic traders. She was especially proud of her connections with the Caldari, as they were very lucrative for her personally and also for her nation, the Khanid Kingdom. The routes from the Kingdom to the State might prove long and hazardous, but the profits more than made up for that.

Today, Runia was especially excited as she was about to meet a Caldari trader she'd never met before. The man was supposed to have good connections to some top-level people in the Caldari corporate structure. If true, this meant Runia might be in for some big bucks. Yet she felt a little trepidation, not because of the high-level contacts the man had, but because he was Deteis. This was the first time she had done business with one. Until now her only contacts within the Caldari State were Civire - she was used to their mode of thinking; straightforward, above-board dealings where everything was planned and perfected. She never had any troubles with timetables or broken assurances. Deteis were supposed to be different - more cunning, more underhanded. These, at least were the rumors she had heard. But usually they came from people - Dark Amarrians - that had no first-hand knowledge of the Caldari. Other traders she knew said that although the Deteis were in many ways different they still shared all the basic Caldari traits with the Civire - duty, discipline and sincerity.

Runia didn't know much about the history of the Caldari; she knew that Caldari Prime - the old home of the Caldari - had several continents and that the different Caldari

bloodlines came from different continents. Back in the days when the Caldari still occupied Caldari Prime the difference between the bloodlines was profound, not only in physical appearance, but also culturally. Runia suspected that the beliefs that the Caldari bloodlines were very different from each other stemmed from these facts. But when the Caldari had to leave their home planet and the long and arduous war with the Gallente Federation erupted the Caldari race as a whole was uprooted and thrown into a melting pot where fighting for their survival was all that mattered. The frantic decades that followed altered the Caldari psyche forever. Traits such as discipline and loyalty came to the forefront and shaped - and continue to shape - Caldari society into something completely new. The corporate state came into being, an all-engulfing machine that both nurtured and dominated its citizens. All the different bloodlines, Deteis and Civire the two largest, were affected by these deep-rooted changes and molded to the norm.

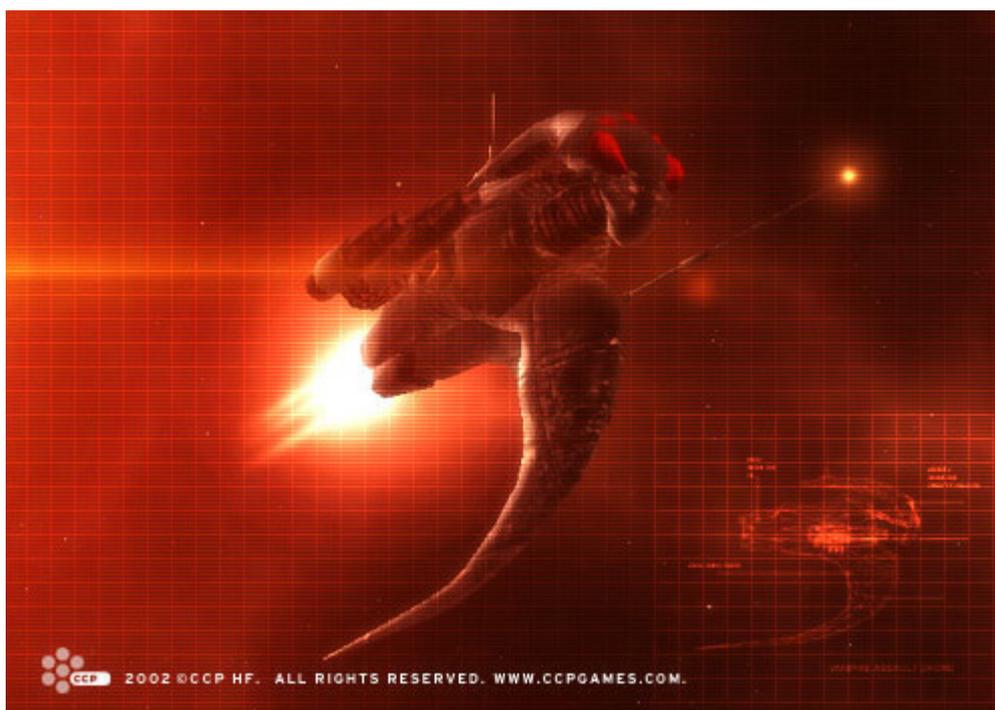
The effect was that the Caldari thought of themselves as Caldari first, their corporation came second, with the bloodline they belonged to a distant third. None of the mega-corporations were structured around the bloodlines and they intermingled freely on every social level. Although the bloodlines were proud of their heritage they didn't feel it was an important aspect of their life. Inter-marriages are not common, but this has more to do with physical differences than anything else.

Runia was about to dock at her destination station - an industrial station belonging to the Wyrkomi Corporation deep in Caldari space. She waited patiently while the docking sequence finished. As soon as she was able she contacted her new agent. There was no need to wait - she had already prepared herself many times over on the voyage over.

One hour later Runia undocked. Her new Deteis agent for the Wyrkomi Corporation had been polite and to the point and shown no indication of being sly or untrustworthy. In essence, he was pretty much like every other Caldari she had ever met. Yet there were slight differences, for instance he had inquired about her home back in the Kingdom and shown genuine interest in all things Dark Amarrian. An inquisitive mind was not something she was accustomed to with the Civire, who were usually dull conversationalists. This feel of more personal interest pleasantly surprised her.

Formalities aside, her new agent quickly established their working relationship. And he gave her a task to complete. A very unusual task from her usual trade-related ones. She was to track down a ship belonging to another Dark Amarrian and report her findings. Runia wondered again why the Caldari were so anxious to track down this ship. She'd been tempted to ask, but refrained from it - it was none of her business and the Caldari would have told her if it was important for her to know. The enormous reward further underlined the urgency. 'Now, how to find this bastard?' she mused. 'I better have a chat with my buddies in the royal navy.' As the chat link connection was being established she idly wondered how she could get them to help her without giving up too much of her reward.

The Vampire



Worlds, moons and asteroids slashed by at a terrifying velocity as the bulky Gallente cargo frigate hurtled across the Murethand system, its anxious pilot pushing every last bit of energy into the drives. Every muscle in Uragan Zelp's body tensed in apprehension. The unwieldy Maulus began to rattle violently as it made the transition from smooth warp-flight to sub-light speed. He realigned his cam-drones to peer behind his ship, panning frantically to-and-fro, wondering just how far behind him his pursuers were.

Nothing.

He had some breathing room at least, thought Uragan. Spending the last two hours playing cat-and-mouse around Murethand's many moons and belts meant the three Caldari raiders waiting for him at the entry point were likely still searching. He pulled up a comm-link to the home base. The face of Director Nestor Makhno appeared on a screen in his mind, painted with annoyance. "You're an hour behind schedule, Zelp, and we've been trying to contact you for twice that. The client is waiting," Nestor half-whispered while tilting his own screen slightly.

"There's been a little problem," spat Uragan, the exasperation in his voice speaking volumes of his emotional state. "I picked up three tails, I think we both know what they're after. I'm making for the Melmaniel gate now, but I need to be met - I can't outrun them forever." The Director's expression changed to one of fear and worry, and Uragan spoke up again, almost shouting. "Whose idiot idea was it to ship the Vampire without escort? Damn it, Nestor! You don't pay me well enough to buy the good clones!"

Nestor had just opened his mouth to protest, when the telltale snap of ships emerging from warp-transit caused Uragan's blood to ice over in his veins. He abruptly cut off the comm, and again panned around his ship. There they were... three Condors, fifteen clicks aft of him and closing fast. Even at that distance he

could make out the rabbit-skull motif stenciled upon their gunmetal hulls: The Guristas.

By now, Uragan was within activation range of the gate. He clenched his teeth as the fat frigate sank into the gate's periphery, and braced himself against the pod's inner wall, ready for a rough ride. The terrorists would be right behind him, and he knew what they wanted all too well; a blueprint for the Vampire, an assault drone the likes of which the universe could only dream of - and one fully functioning prototype. It cost more money than most fully loaded attack cruisers, and the manufacture process was a closely guarded secret. Some whispered that the drone used a biochemical CPU not unlike a living, artificially nourished brain. Uragan only wished he could unwrap it and set it loose on his attackers.

His stomach heaved upward in his abdominal cavity as the Maulus was belched forth from its wormhole. Uragan raced to find an escape route, scanning the planets and stations for an easy way out. He was about to start up the drive, when a soft impact caused the ship to lurch, and the electric crackle of energy, barely audible as it danced on its hull, made Uragan's heart sink in despair. The Guristas had used a warp-scrambler. He was at their mercy.

The mercurial terrorist's unshaven face swelled into view. He spoke in heavily accented Gallentean. "I think you know the drill, son. Eject the goods in a cargo container immediately or we erase you." Uragan's thoughts raced, and he stammered a reply. "It's not worth that much to me, I'll eject it! Just give me time, it's strapped down in the cargo hold!"

The Caldari thought for a moment. "You have five minutes, little man. After that, we'll peel you open and get the drone ourselves."

Panicking, he switched views to the frigate's cargo hold and brought the auto-loader crane online. Pistons wheezing, it swung to life, groping around like a blind man's arm in the dimly lit bay. After seconds that seemed to stretch into eternity, Uragan spotted it among the various containers: the drone, its bright red casing gleaming against the soft cargo bay lights, was lying unpacked on a grav-trolley. Beside it stood a metal briefcase containing its blueprint. Uragan considered letting the Guristas have it, but his attention drifted to the adjacent drone bay's loading ramp. He smiled inwardly. "Like I said... it's not worth that much to me."

The tiny red drone drifted serenely from the Maulus' bay. Uragan could hear the Guristas' curses and threats. The Maulus rocked briefly as their cannons smashed into its hull, but soon the firing stopped - they had much more to worry about.

The Vampire stirred, its arachnid eyes gleaming to crimson life. It bolted sideways, avoiding a salvo from the lead Condor. Dancing and pirouetting around streams of fire, it responded with its own. In less time than it takes to blink, one of the Condors was torn asunder, another peppered by the blood-red fusillade of the Vampire's pulse guns. Trailed by a crimson contrail, it engaged the last remaining Condor and stabbed at it as the terrorist turned to flee. The warp tunnel was beginning to form around it, and the Vampire's cannons fell silent, unable to maintain a lock. Instead it steered itself into the fleeing Condor, exploding in a hateful red fireball - the terrorist soon joining the tiny red drone in oblivion.

He took stock of the battlefield - debris strewn about his vicinity was a testament to the Vampire's effectiveness. Already, he could see the Director's ship approaching rapidly in the distance; no doubt he would soon get an ear full. He'd probably lose his

courier job, he thought, but there would be more of those. For now, Uragan Zelp was glad to be alive.

Fait accompli



Bix Arramida scrutinized the ship that lay motionless – lifeless – few kilometers away. It was a luxury yacht, made by the Viziam company. An old version; popular half a century ago. The numerous pockmarks on the hull and general metal wear indicated this ship had been floating here for as long. It was also immediately apparent that the yacht had not stopped here to allow the passengers to marvel at the view; deep scars not born by erosion crisscrossed the hull and the view here in deep space was far from spectacular. In fact, so far was the ship from any settlements or stellar objects that locating it without knowing its exact coordinates would be like searching for a grain of sand at the bottom of a worldwide ocean. But Arramida had the exact coordinates. His benefactor had given them to him.

Not knowing who his benefactor was still irked Arramida to no end. He only knew his first name, Norid, and that he was an Amarrian like himself. Other than that, nothing. A few months earlier Norid had approached him through underground channels. The job offer was simple – travel to certain coordinates in the Rethan system and retrieve all bodies from a derelict ship there. Then he was to take the bodies to a specific cloning facility on Rethan V and dump them there. That was all. No explanations. But for the amount of hard cash Norid offered, explanations became trivial.

Arramida's sensors indicated life-signs aboard the ship. Further scans revealed a total of 15 people – still lost in cryo-sleep after all this time. Arramida had to wonder who had attacked the ship all this time ago and why this same attacker hadn't bothered to finish the job once started. Arramida didn't have any equipment to enter the ship and fetch the bodies, but a few careful slashes with laser cannon carved the ship up nicely. Then it was just a matter of sending in a couple of salvage drones to pick up the cryo-caskets. The crude operation naturally killed the sleepers, but the job didn't require him to bring back any survivors, so it didn't worry him all too much.

Arramida quickly scooped all the caskets into his own ship, taking care not to spoil any of the bodies. Norid had been very specific that none of the remains should be damaged. As an afterthought, Arramida scooped up some cargo containers floating out of the wreckage – nothing wrong with earning something a little extra on the side, he thought. Once finished, he set his course to Rethan V to turn in the bodies and collect his reward.

The moment Arramida had undocked from the clone station he sent a message to Norid, telling him the job was done. Then, chuckling over the fortune he's made for such an easy job, he made his way to the nearest leisure station.

Norid re-read the message from Arramida with glee. At last, the final part of his revenge was in motion! The sweet taste of it, after all these years of plotting and planning, shook his frail old body. Of course Norid wasn't his real name. He would never reveal that to an oaf like Arramida. But Norid was a good name, maybe he would continue to use it once it was over. Yes, that was a good idea, he decided. It nicely underlined the new beginning he would make after the deed was done, when he could finally throw off his shackles and rise like a Phoenix to his former glory.

Norid sent a quick message to the clone station, giving them the necessary DNA information to pinpoint the body he wanted sent to him. The rest they could use themselves as a form of payment for the services. The body he wanted should arrive within the next two days. Just as he finished sending the message, his master rang him. It was time for the master's tea.

Norid was a slave. He had been slave for almost a century. He was getting old, but the implants he had from the time when he was a Holder were still ticking along nicely. Norid certainly didn't feel two centuries old. Occasionally his implants needed a little bit of maintenance, but his master was kind enough to allow them. If only he knew that by doing so he was aiding Norid in executing his revenge on him.

Norid scuttled along the corridor with the tea tray and entered the study. The master could have used service robots or android automatons, but like all Amarr Holders he wanted the respectability of having a slave serve upon him. Norid didn't blame him – soon he would have slaves of his own.

Norid scrutinized the master. He was old, even older than Norid, and once the two of them had been bitter rivals in Ardishapur's court. Even after all this time, Norid could still feel the hatred coursing through his veins – hatred towards this man for what he had done to him and his family. Crushed like little pegs in political machinations, they had been stripped of their titles, their wealth and their ancestry, then sold like common slaves. His wife and son hadn't survived long in the forced-labor camp. But he had survived, kept alive by his hatred for the man that was responsible for ruining him and killing the two people he loved.

For years Norid had nurtured his hatred, using it to drive him onwards – towards revenge. Slowly, but surely, he had inched closer to his nemesis, until he had entered his service as an attendant slave. The master didn't recognize Norid for who he was – he only knew he was a former Holder. Having a former Holder as his personal slave sustained the vanity of the master.

In the decades since Norid had plotted his master's downfall. Death wasn't good enough. Something more elaborate was needed – a poetic justice. And now, the plan was finally bearing fruit. The body of the master's son was on his way – rescued from the ship Norid had sabotaged long ago, waiting in his cold grave for the time when he became useful to Norid's plans.

Now that time had come. For years Norid had lurked in the shadows, gnawing at the political and financial strength of the master. All that was needed now was a slight push to crush the master's prestige once and for all, ruining him as completely as he had once ruined Norid. But that wasn't enough. Norid smiled at the thought of what was to come.

His master, sipping his tea, noticed it.

"Why are you smiling like a fool?" he asked sternly. Norid bowed his head slightly. "Because I'm happy to report that I found a suitable replacement for your clone that was accidentally destroyed last week," he answered. "It will be ready in two days." 'Yes,' he thought. 'And then I will kill you and you will be cloned in your son's body, and then I will ruin you and take your place.' Norid started smiling again and served his master another cup of tea.

Kiss of the Soul



The fifteen members of the Privy Council filed into the large room in the appropriate order of rank, the emperor leading them to an oval table in the middle of the lavishly decorated room. As duty required of him the court chamberlain presided over the meeting and read aloud the agenda. The council members listened, some intently, others indifferently. The emperor himself sat sunken in his seat, his frail head lying on his chest. It was difficult to say whether he was awake or not.

In theory, every member of the council apart from the chamberlain and the emperor himself was supposed to be a neutral aristocrat or civil servant whose only duty was serve the empire, but in reality each member had strong ties to some strong political group. This was generally accepted as long as no one group got too much influence in the council. In time, tradition had bound certain seats to a specific group, which nominated a new candidate at a time of vacancy. Even if this meant a fairly even distribution of power amongst the many political groups within the empire, actual power still fluctuated greatly depending on how persuasive a member was at the council table.

The first hour of the meeting was dedicated to the usual affairs of state. The chamberlain read out status reports from all over the empire and from embassies, then there was a discussion about foreign deals and agreements, fiscal matters and

social issues. Once the formalities were over the talks turned to individual matters of concern. Predictably the most influential members dictated the discussions; the loud and dynamic Afrid Sarkon, cousin of the empress; the sly Sin Callor, from the Ministry of Internal Order; the assertive High Deacon Moritok of the Theology Council and the sharp and quick-witted Zach Dormondan, deputy of the Imperial Chancellor.

One of the items being discussed was a report from a governor in the Semou constellation regarding increased Blood Raider activity in the area. The governor feared Semou would share the fate of the small settlements in the Bleak Lands and be taken over or be destroyed and wanted permission to recruit a space fighting force to deal with the crisis. The majority of the council agreed to allow him to take these extraordinary measures to deal with a difficult situation, but when Chamberlain Karsoth was closing the matter the emperor stunned all present by suddenly arousing himself from his reverie.

“This will not do.” The emperor said, his voice still strong despite his frail body. “I will not permit any military forces in space to be built or operated by anyone but the imperial navy. Allowing provincial governors to establish their own armed forces sets a very dangerous precedence that can only lead to future troubles.”

The council members sat uncomfortably for a moment, not knowing how to react. It was almost unheard of for the emperor to interfere in such a way. That he had the authority to do so was unquestionable, but the council members, used to being able to run the day-to-day matters of state on their own, were more concerned about the precedent this sudden intrusion by the emperor might have on future meetings. For decades the emperor had slumped more and more into his own world and the council members had been more than willing to fill the power gap. The question now on everyone’s mind was whether the power they had started to take for granted was now to be revoked by a revived emperor.

Finally, Chamberlain Karsoth, ventured a comment:

“But most exalted one, the situation in Semou is dire. Unless we take this drastic action thousands of people will suffer at the hands of the evil Blood Raiders.”

“The governors can have their ground forces, but I will not let them into space. The Amarr Navy will deal with this matter in due time. Need I remind you that the good of the whole empire comes before the individual lives of its inhabitants? Maybe I should make an example of one of you to refresh your memory.” He finished, letting the threat hang in the air. Chamberlain Karsoth blanched and stammered some excuse too low to hear.

The rest of the council exchanged furtive glances. The certainty that the emperor was back amongst the living was sinking in and the dread on their faces was there for all to see. On all but one face, actually. Sin Callor hid a smile behind his hand, his eyes fixed on the emperor. For a split second their eyes met and Callor then knew without doubt that the whispers were true. Despite himself, he shivered.

Serpent's Coil



The world of EVE has had its share of turmoil and grief in its long history. For centuries space travel has been the norm and in every nook and cranny extraordinary things can be found, each with its own rich background story for the whys and when it came into existence. One only has to know where to look to find them. The long treks through dark and empty space may seem lonely, but the oasis of life at the end of the line more than make up for it. Every city visited in this vast world, every country, every planet has its own unique customs and fables from some long lost past. And some from a more recent, violent one.

If you visit the Vilinnon system in the Gallente Federation you may hear about the Serpent's Coil. The Coil is not something the locals are proud of and the Federation would rather know nothing of it. For in the Serpent's Coil agents of the notorious Serpentis Corporation have made themselves welcome. Once the Coil was known by a much simpler name - Lookout Post 7-0Z. Built during the Gallente-Caldari war it acted as a military outpost against marauding Caldari ships. When the war ended the purpose for manning the base ended, too. A token force was kept there for a few years, before the station was abandoned completely. At that time local authorities had hopes of turning the system into a mining haven, but those hopes were quickly dashed when the Serpentis Corporation occupied the now derelict military base. The move was a stunning effrontery to the Federation, but Serpentis had timed their move well. A new federal administration was coming into power and it took them several months to sort themselves out. By that time Serpentis was firmly entrenched and when a few half-hearted attempts to dislodge them failed, the Federation adopted a policy of ignoring the problem - the Vilinnon system was too under-developed and insignificant in their eyes to warrant a large military operation. The Serpent's Coil was there to stay.

The location of the Coil is of great interest to astrophysicists. The military base is located close to some very peculiar rock formations floating in space. Rumors abound about their origin, equally divided between natural explanations for the phenomenon and the more intriguing ones - that the huge rock boulders are the result of some strange experiment now long forgotten. The truth about the strange

rock formation may always remain on the rumor level while the Coil remains in the hands of the Serpentis Corporation, which uses the old military station as a distribution base for its illegal merchandise. Naturally, it is not very fond of scientists, sightseers or other space tourists. Some say it is because Serpentis discovered the secrets of the Coil and want to keep them for itself. Nothing strange about that. Trespassers beware.

City of god



Two thousand years ago, not long after the Amarrians ventured out into space, an emperor whose name now is known to few came into power. His legacy still reverberates throughout the Amarr Empire, a legacy born with his death, a legacy far different that the one he intended for himself. He was called Zaragram II and since his death his name has been a curse word for the Amarrians, for none more than the Ardishapur family that spawned him.

At that time, the status of the Amarr Emperor, though undoubtedly the head of state, was still subtly different. He was the leader of the Apostles, the first among equals, and his authority was channeled through the Apostle Council. But Zaragram hungered for more direct power; he wished to elevate himself above the common clergy into godhood itself. He regarded himself as the worldly manifestation of divinity. As soon as he came into power Zaragram started issuing decrees, most of them religious in nature. Many of these decrees directly usurped the Scriptures and many of the most sacred traditions of Amarr society were uprooted and eradicated.

Then Zaragram set out for his most ambitious project. He wanted to 'get in touch' with his supernatural self and to accomplish this he set out to construct the city of god - a place worthy of divine residence. The city was to be constructed in space, not bound to any earthly place, and was to be the eternal legacy of Zaragram's II greatness. Zaragram named his city Mezagorm, meaning Vision of god, though it was commonly known as City of god.

Things came about differently than Zaragram wished. Just when the construction of his glorious city, located in the system of Shastal, was completed emperor Zaragram was assassinated. Having accumulated so many enemies by then, any one of dozens of groups could have been responsible. After his death the Apostle Council became all-powerful for a short while and they did their utmost to bury his memory.

His decrees were reversed, all icons and pictures of him where either destroyed or his face and name scraped out, and his city was laid to waste. In a few generations his name was all but forgotten. Instead of the glorious legacy Zaragram envisioned for himself, his rule contributed to the power of the Apostles and the Moral Reform it brought about some 500 years later.

Deep space is a gentle resting place and the ruins of Zaragram's city are still there to be seen. The city was a sprawling place and its scattered remains are visible for miles around. Some say that Zaragram's spirit still haunts the place, gliding between the rubble of his city, but others say it's only the looters having a field day.

Heideran gets the Aidonis



In a stunning announcement the Aidonis Foundation has revealed the recipient of this year's Aidonis Statue, the symbol of inter-stellar peace and harmony. Presented to individuals prominent in promoting galactic peace and co-operation, the nomination of Heideran VII, the Amarr Emperor, has taken many people by surprise.

The Aidonis Foundation is named after it's founder, the former president of the Gallente Federation Aidonis Elabon. To many, Aidonis is the greatest president the Federation has ever known. In his time the young and energetic president took the lead in bringing the empires together when to many it seemed the world was destined for bitter warfare for the foreseeable future. Under Aidonis' leadership the empires met at the historic Yoiful conference and he set in motion the peace talks between the Gallenteans and Caldari to end their long war, though the final peace was only signed some years later, after Aidonis' death. Upon his death his will called for a Foundation to be set up in his name, which was responsible for rewarding those persons that most upheld Aidonis vision for peace and prosperity in the world of EVE. In the spirit of friendship advocated by the former president, the committee that handles the nomination is populated by people from every race and culture, equally taking the views of everyone into account.

Heideran VII is the first Amarr Emperor to receive the award and the decision has turned out to be controversial. There is no denying the fact that under Heideran's leadership the Amarr Empire has become much more amiable in it's relations to the other empires. Relations between the empires have never been better and seem only poised to get even better in the near future and many contribute this fact directly to Heideran VII. In fact, those that have expressed outrage over the decision have grudgingly admitted that Heideran is a great leader that is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the tranquil world we now live in. Their only gripe is with the

Amarrian society itself, such as practices of slavery and other breaches of human rights.

These issues, while unquestionably important to any philanthropist, cannot deter from the overall picture: that if it wasn't for Heideran's personal interest in seeking compromises every time a potential political powder keg threatened to explode in the face of the world community we would now be living in a world of constant strife and warfare, with untold suffering that would encompass. Indeed, the praises and thanks that have rained in from every corner of the world of EVE since the announcement was made far outnumber the few critics. Heideran VII is the symbol of the peace and prosperity we have all come to love and cherish.

Past the Future Curbs

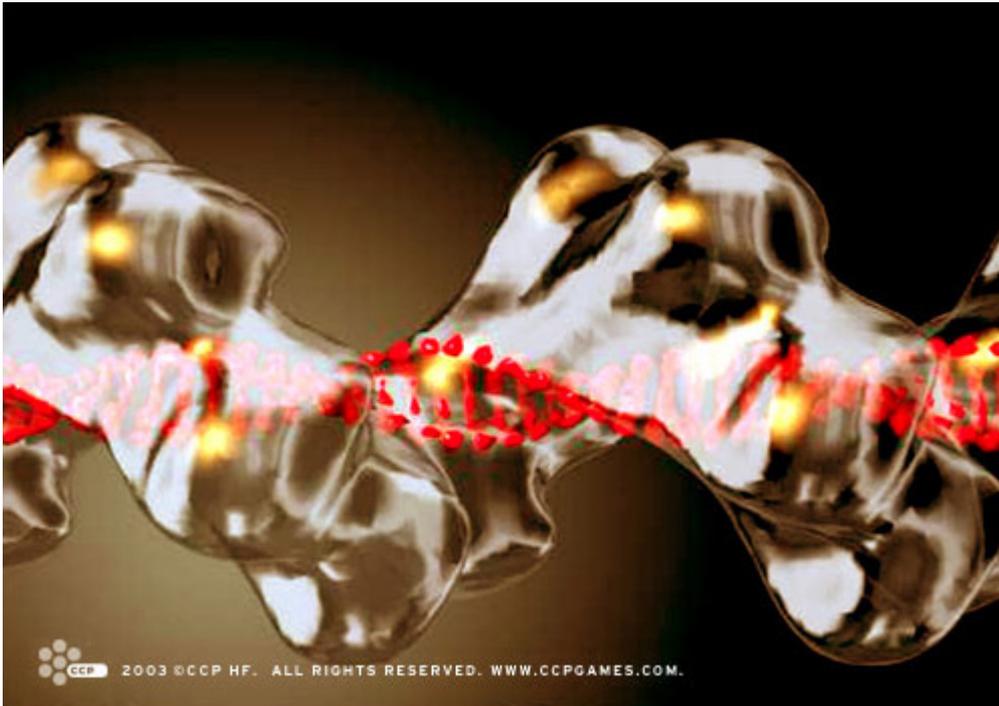


To the neutral observer the Minmatar Rebellion ended a century ago with the expulsion of Amarrians from Minmatar space and the creation of the Minmatar Republic. But to many Minmatars that was only the first step and in the mind of this people the rebellion is still alive and ongoing. Its current guise may not be an all-out war between the two empires, but until final victory - that of freeing every single Minmatar slave - is achieved thousands of rebels risk their lives every day in the name of freedom for their Minmatar brethren.

The official stance between the two empires may be that of a cordial peace, and to enforce that stance regular trade and traffic is allowed to flow through their border zones in the hope that increased contact will improve relations in the long run. Naturally, this free-flowing space traffic has the undesired side effects of making it neigh on impossible to stop the movement of secret agents, saboteurs and raiders entering (what they consider) enemy space.

The recent announcement that the Amarr Emperor had received the most coveted peace-prize in New Eden did not go down too well with the Minmatars and in the past week raids and terrorist attacks inside Amarr (or Ammatar) space have multiplied to reach epic proportions. The Minmatar government has already released statements denying involvement in recent attacks and state they will hunt and prosecute those responsible. The Amarrians are skeptical about this and are considering retaliatory actions on their own. CONCORD has yet to step in, but many expect it must do so soon before the situation escalates out of control.

One man too many



Pier Ancru slowly came to, relishing in the feeling of energy returning to his previously limp body. He flexed a few of his muscles, they felt familiar, yet he knew this was the first time they were under his direct control. Regaining his senses he took in the sterile environment of his surroundings - a small whitewashed, windowless room with the med-table he was lying on the only furniture. A somber looking servant waited on him. The room was located in his quarters on the Pend Insurance station in the Jolia system. Being the chairman and main stockholder of Pend Insurance gave him apartments in all their main stations, not to mention wealth and resources few men enjoyed.

A man in his position had easy access to the newest technology and, as the servant helped him put on a robe, he yet again marveled at this new mind-transfer technology. In the few short weeks since he started using it, it had transformed his life in more ways than he could imagine. No more tedious space travel, no more time wasting on idle journeys through volatile regions. All he had to do was set up clones of himself in places he frequented, hook them into the mind-transfer machine, and he could whiz halfway through the known world in a heartbeat. He could spend the morning in a dour board meeting on Alenia V, the afternoon sun-surfing in Maseera and the evening dining at Giraldi's on Archavoinet II. 'Ah, yes. Life is wonderful.' Ancru mused.

Entering his living quarters, Ancru had just finished dressing when his servant appeared, announcing the arrival of one Jilaine Garat, the Police Commissioner for the station. Ancru had met the middle-aged woman before and knew her to be a committed and capable officer. Ancru put the last touches to his appearance before heading for the anteroom.

"I'm sorry to bother you, sir," Garat started hesitantly after their formal greetings. "I rushed over here as soon as I heard you had... arrived," she finished, still a bit unsure about this new travel method that few understood or even knew about. "A

grave matter has come up that needs your immediate attention. But first, can you answer me where you came from, sir?"

"From Sizamod system, I spent the night there," Ancru answered truthfully. "What is this all about?"

"Last night senator Papadour was assassinated in Palmon and it seems... it seems that it was you that killed him."

"Me?" Ancru laughed incredulously. "That's impossible! Why do you think that?"

"Well, the assassination took place at a banquet. We have hundreds of witnesses testifying that you were there, with the senator. Can someone confirm you being in Sizamod last evening?"

"No," Ancru said slowly. He was no stranger to smear-campaigns in business or politics, but this went way beyond anything he had experienced before. "No, I was alone last night. Tell me what happened at the banquet. How was the senator killed?"

"DNA poisoning no doubt. The killer - you - coated his hand in poison that only a right DNA combination could activate. Senator Papadour's DNA, in this case. It's a common MO these days. I have here a holoreel from the banquet, if you care to see it." Ancru nodded his agreement.

The holoreel showed a large, glamorous hall, with at least 300 persons seated in their finest livery eating a lush dinner. The picture zoomed in on one of the tables, where senator Papadour and a man that looked identical to Ancru were seated, amongst others. The people at the table talked and laughed, everything looking perfectly normal. Then suddenly the senator grabbed his throat with both hands, his face turning red, before he collapsed face-forward onto the table, his body raked by a few spasms before becoming totally still and lifeless. Commotion ensued, then Garat switched the holoreel off.

"Did you notice anything out of the ordinary?" Commissioner Garat asked. "That was undoubtedly you, right?" Ancru didn't answer immediately, he was deep in thought.

"It would seem so," he finally said. "But there was something... Something not quite right. I just can't put my finger on it. Can I see the reel again?"

The second viewing didn't jolt his mind and Ancru saw that Garat was becoming impatient, watching him intently. Then suddenly it dawned on him.

"I've got it! The man - me - was eating left-handed. I'm left-handed, but I still eat right-handed." Garat smiled at Ancru's words, seemingly pleased.

"That's correct. Your... file states this little fact and we noticed it. There were other small peculiarities regarding speech pattern, hand movements and facial expressions. Taken together, we can only surmise this was a clone impostor. Very professionally done, but not quite good enough."

"You knew this was an impostor before you came here?" Ancru asked.

"Of course, but I wanted to gauge your reactions before revealing that fact. If we thought it really had been you my... entry would have been more swift and violent. Now let me ask you, do you have any information about who's behind this? Any idea who wanted senator Papadour dead and you in deep trouble?"

Ancru sat down, rubbing his temples, thinking hard. He and Papadour had not been close, but they had rubbed shoulders on that deal with the State... He let his mind wander. The stakes were getting higher. Now, if the rumors were true, then...

"I have no idea who did this, Commissioner," he replied at last. "But it will be fun finding out." He allowed a small smile to touch his lips before summoning his servant to see the Commissioner out. "Oh, yes. It will be fun finding out."

State factionalism



To the outsider and the uninformed, the Caldari State seems a solid, unified entity. This has been true for brief periods of their history. The latest of those is now coming to an end. The eight Caldari mega corporations, like all great cynics, know the price of everything but the value of nothing and this is now tearing them apart.

Three blocks have formed around different ideologies, mainly in regard to foreign policies. While the forming of these blocks does not threaten the fabric of Caldari society it may very well move the Caldari State in a radical new direction in regards to their relations with the other empires.

Historians have pointed out parallels between the current situations and those found shortly after the Gallente-Caldari War started. Then, the mega corporations split into two groups, one that wanted to pursue peace negotiations with the Gallenteans and another that wanted all out war. The matter was solved during the Morning of Reasoning, when during a morning meeting of the Chief Executive Panel the warmonger corporations forced the CEOs of the other corporations to perform the Tea Maker Ceremony. The CEOs had to drink poisoned tea; if the Maker looked favorably upon them they would be saved, otherwise their crimes would be confirmed by their deaths. They all died and the warmonger corporations (the current mega corporations) split the assets of the fallen corporations between them and escalated to total war. Although the Caldari State is not currently at war, the political situation is similar in a number of ways and many fear that drastic events may be on the horizon, with the corporations busily drawing the battle lines.

The three factions that are becoming evermore apparent are each led by one of the large mega corporations with other mega corporations, as well as lesser corporations, closing the ranks behind them. At this early stage it is impossible to tell which faction has the most strength as they seem equally poised.

Heading the self-proclaimed “practicals” faction is the huge Sukuuvestaa Corporation. The SuVee, as it is commonly known, is one of the oldest Caldari corporations, matched only by the Kaalakiota Corporation in size. The exploiters, which also include the CBD Corporation and NOH (Nugoeihuvi) Corporation, have practiced unethical business tactics for a long time, as well as being frequently associated with organized crime elements. The practicals see the other empires merely as naïve markets ready to be exploited by unrestricted and ruthless trade where everything goes. The recent Protein Delicacy episode serves as a good example of what kind of business these companies want. They care little about who is a friend with whom and even less about what long-term political ramifications their unscrupulous business practices can have. They are mercantilist in their views on trade, believing that profit for one always means loss for another.

The second faction is the liberals, whose views are completely the opposite of the practicals in regards to interstellar trade. The liberals believe in fostering improved relations with all the other empires, creating a world where there are no trade barriers and free-flow of goods. They believe in trade deals that mutually benefit the participants and the empires can come together in a peaceful, prosperous future world only through cooperation. The liberals are led by the Ishukone Corporation and also include the Hyasyoda mega corporation. Their strong position within CONCORD is accentuated by their belief that it is their main vehicle in promoting universal peace and stability so that trade can flow freely and cultures mingle peacefully.

The third faction is not all that concerned about trade, but more about the place the Caldari State enjoys versus the other empires in both military and economical sense. These are the patriots and they are led by the Kaalakiota Corporation, but also include Lai Dai and Wiyrkomi. The patriots cultivate the Caldari heritage, reminisce about the great Raata Empire of old and weep for their lost home world, Caldari Prime. The most fanatical of them cry for a renewal of the war with the Federation, but they are a minority. The majority sees economical dominance in the world only as a tool to promote military power. The patriots are willing to negotiate alternative ways to acquire Caldari Prime other than through war, but they know that they can only see their dream come true by convincing the Federation of the economical and, most importantly, militaristic superiority of the Caldari State. This is what they strive for.

The Science of Never Again



The explosions were so powerful that the boy could feel them resonate in his chest. All around him people ran, some screaming, others offering assistance to those struck down as they tried to flee. Encircling him was the burning debris of shattered buildings as the skies continued to rain down fire and destruction. No matter how hard he willed himself to run faster, his legs became more and more sluggish, as if running neck-deep in water. Every single step forward seemed to take him several steps back. It was as if the universe was taunting him, diabolically laughing while conspiring against his will. His desperation reached a fevered pitch as he continued to struggle forward. The hell from above had claimed so many already; he had to reach his parents before the sky lashed out and took them as well.

The heat was searing, ruthless, yet onwards the boy ran, up the steps and into the home where all the memories of a truly happy childhood are, towards the center of every child's universe: His very own beloved parents. The child was so terrified, he had to warn them of the danger, to tell them they had to leave, that death was everywhere and coming for them, but the words wouldn't come out of his mouth. There they stood, the two of them, reaching out cheerfully as they always did when he came home from school, as if completely blind to the terror around them, to the fire inside of their home, to the flames now licking at their feet.

He wanted to leap towards them but lacked the strength. His legs were suddenly incapable of any movement at all, unwilling to obey his desperation. And so this child watched his parents writhe in agony, screaming in pain as they burned, as everything else in his world had burned, and he opened his mouth to scream in horror.

“Monsieur...” A woman’s voice called to him through the fire, from somewhere above him, away from the blackened silhouettes engulfed in flames, the very image that had destroyed the innocence of this child forever. The instant he looked up, the inferno vanished, and he suddenly found himself beholding the planet Caldari Prime as though in orbit around her, that beautiful pearl resting in the crimson velvet backdrop of the Luminaire system. The boy was with the others who had survived, and they were taking flight from the barbarians who had done this to them, each taking one last look before leaving their home planet forever.

“Trevor, please wake up...” He was pulled violently away from the image, as Caldari Prime shrunk and vanished from view when the transport they were aboard warped away. Trevor awoke with a gasp, his bloodshot eyes bulging, breathing quickly and clearly disoriented.

“Mon dieu, how long have you been having these dreams?” asked Orsetta Lexmoreau, a research agent with the Gallente mega-corporation CreoDron. “This is the second time this week!”

Trevor had fallen asleep while seated in the research lab of the CreoDron factory in Atlulle III. Before arriving, he had gone more than 48 hours without rest. He ran his hand through his hair and down the back of his neck, sore from having been asleep in an awkward position.

He blinked his eyes a few times and took a deep breath before speaking. “How long have I been out for?” He never looked up at Orsetta, who was standing beside him. His eyes began darting back and forth between the dozens of data sheets and the screens on the lab desk in front of him.

“I first noticed you were asleep a little more than 40 minutes ago,” she answered. “I do not know how long before then.” She sat down beside him and placed her hand gently on his back. She could feel the muscles underneath his shirt tighten up instantly. “Trevor, what happened to you? You shout these terrible things in your sleep, and it frightens me! What pain is this that you suffer so much from?”

She thought she saw his eyes glaze over for just a moment, but then the scowl that she was most familiar with returned. He turned his head slightly to his right, just enough so that his eyes could see her attractive features at the edge of his vision. “Get back to work, Orsetta,” he growled. “Now.”

He turned away and focused once again on the data sheets scattered across the desk. Orsetta had paused for just a moment to glare at him before getting up and leaving his side without saying a word. Trevor followed the sound of her hurried footsteps as they made their way to the lab’s exit. When he heard the door slide close, he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk, rubbing the temples of his forehead and closing his eyes again. He knew he didn’t have to be so hard on her, but he had accepted long ago that it was better this way. He forbade himself from allowing any remorse or attachment towards the people he employed, least of all towards those responsible for the pain that Orsetta spoke of.

On paper, Trevor Kekkonen looked like the model CONCORD citizen. He appeared to be just one of countless others taking advantage of the economic opportunities that had emerged since the end of the Gallente-Caldari War. The two states were

eager to put the dark memories of those years behind them and forge ahead on the promise of peace and mutual prosperity. Trevor had graduated at the top of his class from the School of Applied Science in Todaki and demonstrated remarkable natural talent for research and science. He overcame the cerebral deficiencies required for effective starship command through the use of cyber implants and eventually qualified to captain both Caldari and Gallente cruiser-class ships. His outstanding combat record against the Gurista and Serpents pirate organizations earned him high marks with both the Caldari and Gallente governments. And most importantly, he had developed extensive connections with quality personnel from some of the most powerful corporations in both states, including Ishukone, Kaalakiota, CreoDron, and Duvolle Laboratories.

What isn't found on any of the dossiers written about Trevor Kekkonen is that he had witnessed firsthand the death of his parents during the Gallente surface bombardment of Caldari Prime. He was just 11 years old at the time. He had replayed those horrible moments over and over again in his young, hyper-analytical mind, searching in vain for the unanswerable question of "why". The transformation of grief to rage took him to the brink of madness. What prevented him—barely—from breaching that fine line was the pursuit of the question "how" instead. In this venture, the answers he was searching for became perfectly clear.

In Trevor's scarred mind, the notion that a failure of diplomacy had been the cause of the war and ultimately the death of his parents was completely unacceptable. The politics just shouldn't have mattered in the slightest. Instead, he concluded that the blame lay squarely on the lack of superior technology when it was needed most. Gallente warships had pummeled Caldari Prime cities from orbit uncontested for far too long; had planetary defense been in the forefront of the Caldari technological initiative at the time, things might have been different. Instead, the technology was reactive; it created a punch-for-punch battle of technological advances that could have been avoided. As evident by the fate of Trevor's parents and hundreds of thousands like them, the Caldari paid a terrible price for their lack of foresight. The Gallente had their orbital bombers; the Caldari answered with single-man fighters. The Gallente countered the fighters with drones; and if not for the Jovian gift of capsule technology, the Caldari might not have been able to muster an effective response at all.

As young Trevor watched the war and its technological innovations evolve into a stalemate, the rage within him grew steadily until the ultimate betrayal that hurled his soul into the abyss for good. The truce that left Caldari Prime—once the home world for millions of Caldari—legally in the hands of the Gallente Federation was the breaking point. Trevor felt that he was orphaned yet again, only this time a resurrection was possible—if only he could raise Caldari technology from the dead.

And so Trevor's life became a dichotomy of purpose; part missionary, part vigilante, laboring on behalf of the "good" of one race by planning the death of another. The path leading him to the vengeance he craved had two obstacles. First, a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both Caldari and Gallente technology—especially with their respective starship engineering methodologies—had to be accomplished. Second, it required bleeding-edge scientific breakthroughs that could ultimately be used to tilt the balance of power forever in favor of the Caldari State. On the first count, Trevor had already succeeded. But it wasn't until the famous Crielere Research Lab—yet another sickening example of how the Caldari couldn't push the technology envelope unassisted—had discovered the precious mineral morphite and its extraordinary chemical properties that the possibilities he sought finally began to emerge.

Trevor opened his eyes and scanned the progress of one of those possibilities. The datasheets contained the results of experiments and unfinished theoretical conjectures. He had fallen asleep while reading through some of them, exhausted after days without sleep. Orsetta was one of several research agents from corporations that Trevor had commissioned to assist him in finding the answers he needed. She, like the rest of the research agents under his employ, carried out the bulk of the experiments and research required to test his theories. They were dedicated in their work and brilliant scientists in their own right, but required his constant financial and logistical support to keep up with the workload he imposed on them. And although he realized that science was, by nature, a very methodical process that could never be rushed, his impositions were especially harsh on the Gallente agents under his employ.

He got up slowly to stretch out his legs. Walking over to the window opposite of the lab screens and holoprojectors, he leaned against the frame, watching the station approach warning beacons blink on...and off. There...and gone. Life...and death. Everywhere Trevor looked, the nightmare stared right back him. His only shelter from the demons was in the relentless pursuit of science. Once outside of it, his soul belonged to the ghosts of Caldari Prime.

Never again, he thought. To someday be able to speak those words to the defeated remnants of the Gallente nation that he despised so much was his life's ambition, and he believed that science would one day grant him his wish. It was all just a matter of time, and he could stand the sleepless nights for as long as it took to get there.

The intercom broke his fixation on the blinking lights outside. "Monsieur, have a look at this, quickly!" It was Orsetta's voice on the intercom, and there was a hint of excitement in her tone. Accustomed to being instantly agitated just from the sound of her voice, Trevor was about to say something rude when he noticed the lights in the room dim. When he turned away from the window frame, he saw that the holoprojector had been remotely switched on. There before him were a series of three-dimensional images floating over the lab desk, moving rapidly in successive sequence from mathematical equations to subatomic particle diagrams; from molecular compound models to exploded-view engineering drawings of mechanical components; and finally to the animation of those same components converging perfectly with each other to form schematics of the finished product. Performance and statistical information scrolled down along each side of the image. Trevor was shocked.

"This...this is the production compilation?" he asked.

Orsetta was so excited that she was nearly incoherent. "The containment issues were all solved, we've overcome the stability problems inherent with using morphite-based alloys and found a suitable quantum solution to the mesoscopic issues caused by placing nanosensors within the alloy shell to monitor..."

"Is..this..the..production..compilation?" Trevor interrupted, exaggerating the enunciation of his words. There was pause before the intercom speakers delivered her answer.

"Oui, monsieur."

"So what took so long? Move on to the next project I outlined already." Trevor walked through the floating image to the lab desk and switched off the holoprojector. A disc ejected from the lab table console containing the compiled blueprint information. He

slipped it inside the jacket he'd brought and started gathering the rest of his things. It was time to leave and check on the progress of his other research agents.

The lab door hissed open and Orsetta walked into the room. She stood with her arms folded and stared at Trevor with a concerned expression on her face. He continued his preparations without looking at her.

"You have more work that you should be attending to," he muttered.

"I cannot help but ask," she started carefully. "What do you plan to do with those blueprints?"

Trevor paused for just a moment before answering.

"You'll find out soon enough."

Three Pillars of Power



Since his election three years ago the President of the Gallente Federation, Souro Foiritan, has been embroiled in a silent war with the Senate of the Federation. At stake is the question where the ultimate power within the Federation lies. The third pillar of the Federal government, the Supreme Court, has also been dragged into this covert war, fought on a broad front. Foiritan's predecessors in the Presidency were weaklings and they were frequently brow-beaten by the Senate. In time, the Senate began to see itself as the true leader of the Federation, something that Foiritan is now furiously trying to overturn. In recent months many political events that would normally be considered quite insignificant have been blown out of all proportions as the feuding sides use them as a pretext to attack each other. Yet the battle lines have been slowly solidifying, revealing the underlying ideologies that the three sides really stand for.

While the Senate has become the champion of big bucks business and entrenched interests, Foiritan has masterfully maneuvered himself into becoming the people's man - using his boyish charms to ride the wave of popularity he enjoys throughout the Federation. The leaders of the Senate - such as the astute Jaq-Foix Netharin and Maridane Wilfort the extremist - have used the lobbyists and the moneymen to build themselves a formidable position, though many feel this fortress of special interests is becoming more and more like an ivory tower every day. In this tug-of-war where the very foundations of the Federation are at stake the arsenals of the adversaries are filled with deceit, sleaze and words of hatred and they fight each other with armies of lawyers, hordes of PR stunt men and the voice of the media. And yet for all their efforts the only casualties so far have been truth and reason. Yet even those have found a champion - the Supreme Court. In the political havoc the Supreme

Court has acted as a beacon of common sense - a solid rock for the hard pressed masses to lean on to weather the storm that threatens to engulf them. As is so often the case when a war for the fate of millions rages the survival of the weak is most at risk. It is here that the Supreme Court has found a cause worth fighting for and it is doing all in its power to uphold the principles of the Federation - brotherhood, fraternity and equal rights to all men.

Khuumak



The palace gleamed from a distance, radiating wealth and opulence. On closer inspection, it didn't hold up well in the tropical climate—moisture had caused small cracks all over the walls, and the smell of rotting vegetation permeated everything. Today, however, with three men cowering on their knees in the open courtyard, the rank smell of sweat and fear managed to override it temporarily.

Arkon Ardishapur, the royal heir of the Ardishapur family, sat uncomfortably in a chair on a raised platform before the three cowering figures and frowned in the heat. The insistent buzz of tropical insects made it hard to concentrate as he let his gaze travel among the Minmatar slaves before him. They were guilty of rebellious actions and would soon be executed, but Arkon sensed they held some dark, sinister information, and so hesitated in carrying out their sentence. Arkon glanced at his palace secretary, standing expressionless to one side. Drupar Maak was a Starkmanir, like the slaves waiting to be executed. He was also a slave, but like many slave children that showed remarkable talents, had received a proper education in an Amarrian school, which had trained him to become a loyal, obedient civil servant. Arkon sighed and turned his attention back to the condemned slaves. They would have to be broken.

It took all of Drupar's considerable willpower to keep his face impassive as he watched his secret associates being put through the wringer. Drupar could only admire the slow, deliberate technique of the royal heir as he questioned the slaves. Arkon had mastered the skill of breaking a person's will through only words and gestures. When Drupar had heard of the capture of the three slaves, he hoped for a quick trial and an even quicker execution. Now, cold dread gripped his bowels as he watched the old fool grilling the quivering slaves before him. "Old fool, yes," Drupar thought, "but devilishly cunning at times. Like a dog, he can sniff out conspiracies where no other man can." As much as he loathed and hated the man himself, Drupar had long since learned to respect his master's abilities.

Arkon absentmindedly fingered his golden scepter as he shifted his enormous bulk from one buttock to the other. He felt he was finally making headway with these miserable wretches. As he had suspected from the start, they were only cogs in a much larger organization; an organization aiming to topple Amarrian authority on the planet. Now, he had only to squeeze the names of the ringleaders out of them.

As the moment when he would be exposed as a treacherous rebel inexorably approached, Drupar felt his pulse quicken, adrenaline pumping through his veins, heightening his senses. Years of careful planning, hundreds of fellow slaves and rebels, all were in dire danger of being undone in one fell swoop. The questioning droned on until Drupar felt himself act—not deliberately, but as if driven by primeval instinct. Rushing towards his master and nemesis, he grabbed the golden scepter, yanking it out of the Heir's royal hands. For a split-second he allowed himself to enjoy the look of shock and disbelief on Arkon's face before driving the sharp, sun-flaring edge of the scepter's head into his master's neck. Blood sprayed everywhere. Chaos ensued.

Amazingly, the aged Heir, blood spattering from the gaping wound in his neck, managed to rise to his feet, his obese frame quivering in front of Drupar. A mechanical silver hand shot out of Arkon's robes and grabbed Drupar by the neck, and from the corner of his eye Drupar saw guards piling into the courtyard, arms raised. Using every last ounce of his strength he managed to slip from Arkon's grasp long enough to shout at the stunned slaves, still on their knees. "Get out of here! It has begun! Rise! Rise!" he screamed as he was sucked back into the crushing embrace of the dying heir. As daylight turned to darkness before Drupar's eyes, he saw the three youngsters escape in the confusion.

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Strong lights illuminated the courtyard, banishing the night. The unnatural light made the usually serene courtyard bleak and forbidding, but it fit the mood of the few people there perfectly. Idonis Ardishapur stared at the faint traces of blood on the cobblestones, musing on how bloodstains always managed to mesmerize people, making them conjure up all kinds of horrors in their mind's eye. He listened to one of his lieutenants drone on about how the uprising in the city was already spreading outside it, and rapidly becoming unmanageable. On his other side stood the captain of the royal guard, anxiously awaiting the opportunity to make some pitiful excuses about the death of Idonis' father. Idonis had already heard enough to know this was inexcusable.

Brusquely, he dismissed the two men, having no patience at the moment to deal with them. Instead, he walked over to where his friend Zoriac was standing, scrutinizing the golden scepter-turned-murder-weapon. Briefly, Idonis wondered about the symbolism of his father being killed by an item representing the Emperor's will. He would have to reflect upon that during the morning mass. But not now.

Zoriac gave a curt nod as Idonis came up beside him, but Idonis took no notice of it. He and Zoriac, being of the same age, had been brought up together, and Zoriac was as close a friend as a future Royal Heir could hope to have. Idonis again regarded the scepter with mixed feelings. On one hand, it was one of the most sacred symbols of Imperial and Divine authority; and on the other it was covered with his father's congealed blood. Idonis knew from reports that some of the rebels were already wielding shoddy replicas as weapons, calling them Khumaak in honor of his father's killer. Idonis' stomach soured at the thought.

Not for the first time this night he reflected on what might have been. He had agreed to accompany his father here to these savage lands, nurturing some naïve notions that maybe the Word of God could be brought to these barbarians. Idonis now knew that the Minmatars would never adopt The Scriptures as their own, and part of him was glad, fearing for the purity of The Word in the uncouth hands of the Minmatars. And yet, calling them barbarians was now only a figure of speech. Once familiar with their rich culture, Idonis could not mock their traditions as he and his friends had done frequently as youths back in the heart of the Empire.

Involuntary, his mind drifted to the little hiding place he had down in the city, to the lithe and winsome creature he whispered words of passion and affection to during lovemaking. His family and friends would be appalled if they knew of his dark-skinned Starkmanir girl, with her almond eyes and her smile that was coy and bold at the same time.

With sudden realization, Idonis knew that that part of his life was over. He was a Royal Heir, now. Already he felt the weight of a thousand generations of Ardishapurs on his shoulders; the burden of the millions of subjects now looking to him for support and guidance. The idyllic lifestyle he had enjoyed here on the outskirts of Empire was gone. Like great stones grinding, he could feel his priorities shift. He felt at once elevated and apprehensive. He straightened his back and narrowed his gaze. Zoriac, looking at his friend, took half a step back, and Idonis saw that he understood.

"The other heirs will judge you by your actions over the next few days," Zoriac said quietly. "A new heir must prove himself in the eyes of his subjects and his Empire."

Idonis only nodded.

"You must clean up this mess your father has left," Zorac continued. "You must send a message that you will be a strong leader, worthy to be called a Royal Heir."

"What are the choices?" Idonis replied, already knowing them full well, but wanting to hear them out loud.

"Stamp out this rebellion of course, with any force necessary."

"That will not suffice," Idonis answered, sickened by his own words but knowing they must be spoken. "As you said, I must send a message to the other Heirs. Suppressing rebellions is an everyday occurrence. Avenging the murder of a Royal Heir is not."

"What would you have me do?" Zoriac asked.

"Annihilate the Starkmanir tribe." Idonis paused for a moment and caught his breath, mentally crushing something deep within himself. "Inform the orbital fleet. Have our people out of the cities and in orbit within a rotation. This planet will burn as a beacon, to illuminate the galaxy with the strength of House Ardishapur, and the Divinity of our purpose. None shall be spared."

Idonis looked his friend in the eye as he spoke, seeing the regret there. He knew his own eyes showed the same. Regret about the life they were to leave, regret about what they had to become, but most of all, regret about what they were about to do. He allowed himself one more memory of his little hiding place, the long supple limbs of his Starkmanir lover, and the dreams he had harbored for the Minmatars. Then he let it go. Royal Heirs could not afford the luxury of dream.

“Time for mass,” he said, turned on his heel, and headed for the chapel.

Tides of Change



Shan stubbed his cigarette on the deck, despite the Kapitan's earlier admonitions about in-station regulations. The old bastard was soft after his years with those paper-pushing Fed Navy pod-wetters, soft as the blubber that hung from him. Besides, with the situation the way it was today, their high and mighty Legionnaire had better things to worry about than a smudge on the platform.

Climbing into the pod and fastening himself, Shan reflected on the current state of affairs. Ever since the Alliance had been born, the smattering of independent outfits morphing and mutating into the massive, brutal beast it was today, things just hadn't been the same in Curse. The Salvies had been the first to complain, of course – you couldn't fart in Curse space without the Salvies getting up in arms about it – but within a month it had become clear that this new coalition was nothing to be taken lightly. Squadron after squadron of Cartel fighters had fallen to Alliance battleships as their prized 'roid fields were slowly wrested from their grasp.

Today, every outpost not huddled like a petrified mouse in some gigantic moon's shadow had been taken over by the CA. Testing facilities, assembly plants and munitions dumps now all played host to the behemoth. The Salvies did what they can with the left-over minerals afforded by the Cartel's ninja miners, but many of the ships and facilities they had today were still in a sad state of disrepair.

The bay's speaker clicked on, sending sound ricocheting off the metal walls.

"Raider escort, clear for undocking," came the hollow, familiar sing-song.

As the diagnostic systems finished their run-through Shan panned his camera drone three-hundred and sixty degrees around his sharp-tusked interceptor, making a quick inspection of the craft's gleaming hull. All in order, it seemed. Ready for another patrol.

The docking bay's doors hissed open languidly, allowing the undiluted rays of the burning sun to wash into the chamber at an angle. Dust motes danced in the columns of light as Shan Arvonak, Angel Raider, slid out of the station's belly into the breathless void.

•••

It had been exactly one-hundred and thirty-eight minutes of soul-crushing boredom when the first hostiles showed up on system comms. The opening of the pores, the nearly imperceptible quickening of the pulse, the prickle along the back of his neck – Shan felt the warrior instincts flush his system. As had become his custom, using the meditation techniques he had culled from the dog-eared Adakul text he kept hidden away in his footlocker, the young Raider stilled himself.

“Saddle up, boys.” came the Kapitan's voice over the comm. “We've got two Black Omega.”

Shan's composure held, but a tiny tremor shot through him like an electric jolt. Black Omega was, by now, one of the Alliance corporations known to every Arch Angel operative in the Curse region and surrounding zones of operation. They had recently colonized the belts two systems over, and stories abounded of how their security wing had rampaged through the area, decimating everything the Cartel had thrown at them while barely sustaining losses themselves.

And now they were here.

“Line formation, fellas.” The Kapitan's voice was steady, but as Shan swiveled his camera drone to alight on the Legionnaire's massive bulk turning slowly planetward he fancied he saw the slightest tremor, a flicker in the burners maybe, an invisible apprehension bleeding through the night, staining their resolve. Maneuvering his agile frigate into formation between the other two Raiders, he awaited the word from Central.

Twenty, maybe thirty seconds passed before the Kapitan's voice came once more over the comm.

“Okay, we've got two unmonitored belts in-system, Planets II and VII. None of the patrolled belts have reported sightings yet, so we're going in for a look. Zeta Wing is en route to Planet VII. Align yourselves for gang warp, gentlemen. Planet II, Belt 1.”

As time and space coiled into a spiraling tunnel around them, Shan promised himself that should he ever become a Legionnaire, he'd stay away from those awful group names. “Gentlemen.” “Fellas.” “Boys.” So unprofessional. So unbecoming the discipline and rigour that had made the Angel Cartel what it was – or, rather, had been before the Alliance moved into Curse.

The thought flared up in his head, overriding the nagging trepidation that had been playing at the corners of his mind. The usurpers who had spread over their domain like a cancer would this day pay for their presumption. Muttering a curse under his breath, Shan emerged out of warp.

•••

As the warp engines died down and the fluid regulation system in his pod performed its deceleration compensation, that pleasing backwards flow of liquid over his body mingling with the ship's gentle vibration, he saw the great checkered curve of the

asteroid belt slide into view beneath him. Seconds later, his scanner picked up the hostiles.

There were two of them, both in Apocalypse-class battleships, eighty klicks away, twenty klicks from each other. Too far to get a lock. Simultaneously, the three Raiders began preemptory evasive maneuvers, waiting for the Kapitan's word.

The seconds ticked by heavily as the smaller vessels glid back and forth while the Kapitan and his Depredator wingman fumbled for a lock on the intruders. Suddenly a feral snarl came hissing through the comm.

"Damn! They've locked me. What kind of..."

The words were abruptly stopped as a twisted pillar of light blinked into existence between one of the Apocs and the Kapitan's ship. A great translucent globe came briefly into view around the craft, shimmering faintly before dissipating along with the enemy's beam. In perfect rhythm, another gout of laser fire emerged from the other battleship, bathing the Legionnaire once more in shield-wash. In a few seconds, a macabre staccato of laser fire had established itself, all of it centered on the Kapitan.

"Go! Go! Full attack!" shouted the fat man in the big ship, his calm veneer now fully evaporated under the intense enemy bombardment. His curses now reserved for his incompetent Legionnaire, Shan slammed on his afterburners and thrust, rigid with fear, towards the distant ships firing those terrible, beautiful beams.

Fifty klicks, then forty. An explosion sounded behind him as one of his Raider companions was ripped cleanly in two by a stray beam, sending a fiery shower of metal parts arcing into the black. Thirty klicks. *No time to back out now, Shan. Do your part. Trust the Cartel.*

At twenty-five klicks, just as the battleships were taking form before him, he heard it: that sound, dreaded by every pilot ever to take to the spacelanes, the *dreet-dreet-dreet-dreet* of his sensors informing the auto-targeting systems that his vessel had just been locked. Like staring down the barrel of a cannon, thought Shan just as a distant boom sounded behind him, marking the destruction of another comrade.

And as Shan Arvonak, Angel Raider, came into firing range and saw his Howitzers' bullets glance harmlessly off the ship he had targeted, saw the awesome bulk of the Apocalypse turn to face him like a giant gold-plated snake seconds before the light enveloped him, turning his ship into a golden ball of hell's fire, two sudden realizations smacked into his skull, staggering in their clarity.

He, not his enemy, would die this day. And Curse space was no longer what it used to be.

The Communication Relay Committee



*The services and routers, albeit owned and run by independent companies, are under constant scrutiny and regulations by a CONCORD sub-committee to enforce both security and privacy in the communications channels and to make sure the companies are correctly rendering the services they claim. The fierce competition on the telecommunication market makes it cheap, efficient and reliable to talk, transfer data and even conduct business for people light-years apart. – **Faster than Light Communication***

Millions of effulgent bands of light danced in front of his eyes. Every colour in the spectrum was there, outstanding against the pitch-black background. He willed one forward and ran his fingers through it, then reached out to another simultaneously. With a shock, he bent the threads into a single format, the colours turning a subtle yellow for a second at the disturbance.

From the corner of his eye, he detected a small, dark purple strand, and willed himself towards it. He inspected it, ran his fingers through the light and decided to detour it into a dead end. Immediately, three others lunged at him, a glaring red. He quickly bent them together into a single stream, shooting the communications signal

into the endless void with a slight wave of his hand. "Try to find that," he dared with defiant satisfaction.

Outside of the capsule, the hum of the fluid routers gently permeated the otherwise silent relay tower. Housing countless routers, the tower was one of the main backbones of the FTL-communications network owned by several providers and supervised by CONCORD. It was a dark, foreboding complex in the middle of nowhere, closer to Yulai than any other system - though that hardly mattered, considering the distance between them.

There were very few incidents that night. Things went rather smoothly compared to other nights that he had experienced. The specks of colour could literally leap to him. Fast thinking was required, but luckily the implants enhanced his processing speeds to extreme levels.

He was a part of the CRC. Fitted with implants much like the piloting implants used by new academy graduates to pilot their ships, his world was one of ever-changing hues. The devices inserted into his occipital lobe ensured each channel was represented as a spectrum of colours, shot through with tiny incandescent motes of information. The visualisations made it far easier for the brain to process the torrents coursing through the fluid routers. He mused to himself that he couldn't imagine what it was like to process all this information the old-fashioned way, then plucked a hair-thin strand of green and merged it into a larger existing strand.

When CONCORD assumed jurisdiction over the FTL-networks, they saw that something was needed to vastly improve methods to regulate the information and, thus, the Communication Relay Commission was called into existence. Methods were devised to allow them to survey large quantities of information. Perfection was found in the capsule technology the Jovians had introduced to the galaxy. Fitted with highly advanced augmentations, the CRC patrols the backbones of the fluid router relays, scanning the communications for breaches and keeping the official CONCORD channels clean and safe of disruptive influences.

The capsule slid open. The neural connectors retracted themselves and he made his way out. Already, someone was waiting with towels and hot Arkonian tea, both of which he gladly accepted. The darkness inside the relay tower seemed almost intentional and the hum was louder now he was outside of the pod. Shadows cast across the router complexes while a glaring blue light paled in contrast to the world that waited in the pod. Damn, he did love his job.

He couldn't wait to get back.

-Commander Orestes

Communications Relay Committee

Interstellar Services Department

**AURORA: Auxiliary Union for Rallying, Observation,
Recording, Analysis
A Division of CONCORD**



Lieutenant Bills abruptly stopped walking, and lowered the datapad. An odd scent wafted from an open door, instantly distracting him. He pushed open the door and edged inside, only to find himself in a poorly-lit storeroom. A small crate stood open, and he reached inside with trepidation. A moment later, he withdrew some of the contents - a darkly-colored cigar.

"Let me light that up for you..." the older man said, as he leaned forward out of a darkened corner, just a few feet away. A small tongue of fire snapped to life, making ominous shadows of crates and containers dance about the dimly lit chamber. The young officer jumped, dropping the datapad to the floor.

Nervously, his gaze worked its way across the cluttered room. "What is this?" He took a breath, and held up his cigar, letting the flame wash over the tip. "Where did these come from?"

"Serpentis. Or at least, somewhere near there." Tarainis leaned back against a crate of holoreels, and took a deep puff off of his own cigar. "Criminals, they may be... but they certainly know how to enjoy the finer things in life."

Bills stared at the old man for a moment, then looked back at his own cigar. "That would make these... well, contraband, wouldn't it? Won't we get in trouble if..."

The fellow gave a sly grin. "Don't let the lack of uniform fool you, egger. I outrank you, and almost everyone else at this station." He blew a smoke ring in Bill's direction. "Besides, none of this exists."

"Come again?"

"Some of your comrades caught a shipment of boosters coming out of Serp' Prime." He gestured with his cigar. "These were on board, as well. Not on the cargo manifest, though... they don't know where they came from, so AURORA got them. They don't care how we dispose of them, so long as they never see them again." He took a deep puff, and smiled. "So, we're incinerating them."

The lieutenant nodded slowly. "I've seen the name AURORA on memos, but never understood what it meant. What does it stand for?"

"Auxiliary Union for Rallying, Observation, Recording, Analysis."

"Ahh... alright." Bills looked around the room again, for a second, before continuing. "And what does that all mean?"

Tarainis smirked, and reached over to the nearby terminal. The screen flared to life, displaying one of the main thoroughfares of the station. CONCORD officials hurried about, each with their own agenda and purpose.

"We handle the jobs that they don't. The ones that fall between the cracks." He tapped a bit of ash from the end of his cigar. "We started out as information gatherers, making sure that the right information got to the right people. It was only natural that we become the historians, as well."

He gestured at a neatly-stacked tower of pressure crates. "See those? Data arrays, due to be shipped out to the archives. You would be amazed at what's in there... Video footage of that battle in Passari. Last night's Clash match scores. Minutes from the Sanitation Committee meeting".

The younger man coughed, and sat up more attentively. "Why do you need all that junk?"

"You never know what is going to be significant, or to whom. So, we collect it all."

"Doesn't sound that bad a job," the lieutenant mused. "At least you get to see all kinds of interesting stuff, right? Beats patrolling the inner systems for hours at a time..."

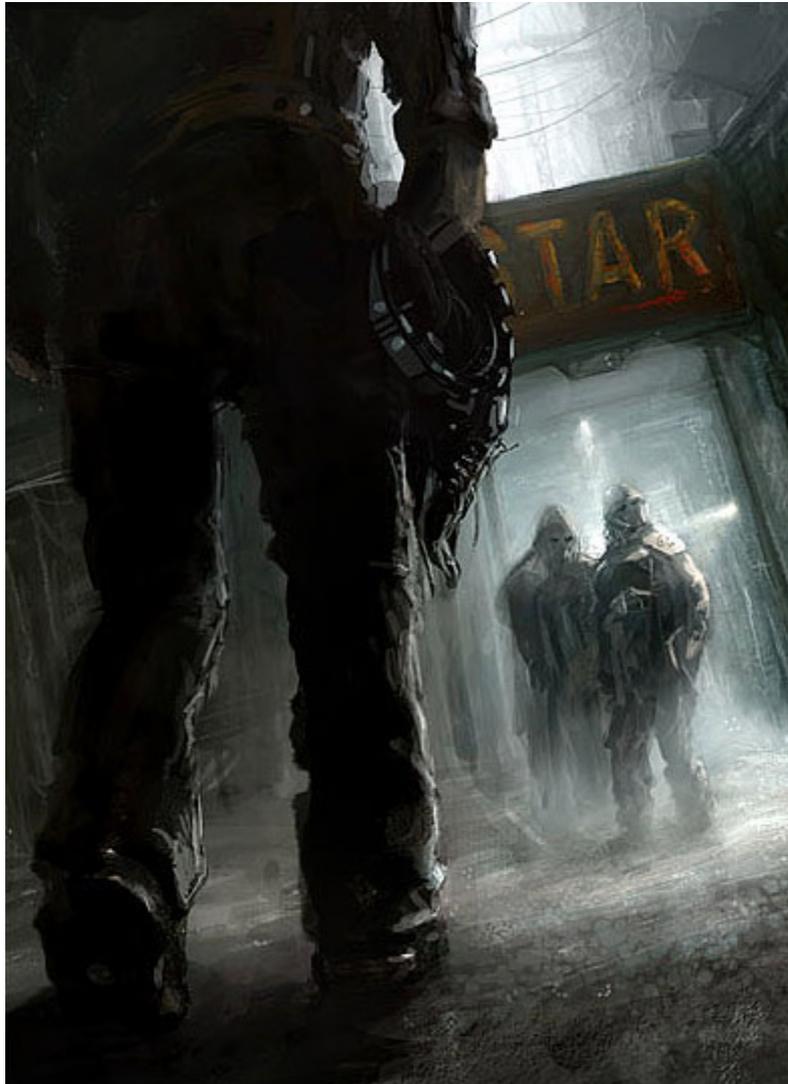
Tarainis shook his head. "That's what got us in trouble. We were just supposed to move information around, to whom it belonged." He gestured at the viewscreen. "Look at them. They all have a purpose, a job. Try to give them anything even an inch outside of their focus, and they don't want to know about it. It might as well not exist."

He flipped the viewscreen off, again. "That's why we got our commission. There can't be a department to cover everything, so our job is to take up the slack. And you are right... it is a great life. One day I may be following a smuggling trail, and the next officiating a wedding."

The lieutenant smiled and leaned back, taking another puff on his cigar. "I'm in the wrong line of work." He glimpsed at his datapad, and stood up again. "I'm due in Hanger 3. Thanks for the diversion, though."

Tarainis smiled softly, and leaned back into the shadows. "Don't worry... we'll be seeing each other again."

STAR: Support, Technology and Resources A Division of CONCORD



I floated inside my capsule drowsily listening to the artificial hum of space. My STAR frigate, the ISD Banana was floating just outside the docking perimeter the University of Caille station in Bourynes, and I was bored.

After a while I became aware of the small flashing light that signified a new pilot entering the system. *"Hmm,"* I pondered to myself *"could this be who I'm waiting for? Aha!"* I grinned triumphantly as the pilot's file appeared on my visual. *"Graduated this morning. Bingo!"* I then ordered my ship's CONCORD issue scanner to lock the pilots capsule signal, and then with a flip of a mental switch... space folded... and my frigate was floating in the University Training Grounds next to the Velator Frigate of a bemused looking young pilot whose image had just appeared on my visual.

"H..hi?" stammered the pilot, *"what do you want? How did you do that?"* I smiled at the image and vocalized my reply. *"Hi there! I'm Captain Rhaegar of CONCORD's Interstellar Services Department. My division, Support, Technology and Resources,*

or STAR as we generally refer to it, is tasked with greeting pilots who have just received their Pilots License and helping them out if they have any problems. How are you finding solo flight so far?" The young pilot looked relieved. *"I thought you might be a University official here to tell me I'd graduated by mistake,"* he grinned. *"I'm doing alright, but the training you get for the license doesn't cover half of what's really out here..."*

And so went my morning. I would sit outside the various Universities, Academies and Schools and wait for new Pilots to appear, and then offer to help them find their feet. It had become clear some months earlier that the basic pilot training offered by the four empires was not really sufficient to cover the complexities of a pilot's every day life in New Eden, and so CONCORD had decided to put to use one of its divisions, STAR, which had previously been a kind of Citizen's Advice service. Equipped with state-of-the-art ships, which used a prototype jump engine they were able to travel the galaxy extremely quickly, so whenever a new player graduated, they could be there.

During the afternoon I received an urgent transmission from STAR headquarters in the Polaris system. *"We're getting reports of a huge jump gate malfunction in the Yulai system"* reported a Lieutenant, *"Looks like its gone out of synch, and none of the ships are completing their jumps!"* I sighed. It seemed like every time we updated the jump gate software to be more efficient, more gates would malfunction, stranding the pilots in a kind of stasis. The only way to solve the problem, save completely re-starting the gate, was to go to each ship individually and re-program its navigation computer to be in synch with the gate. It could take hours. Thankfully as I arrived in Yulai so did four other members of the team, and we set to work "freeing" the dozens of immobile pilots.

By the time I returned to STAR headquarters I was exhausted, but I still made time to check up on the galactic news before heading to my bed. After all, I had to help the citizens of that same galaxy tomorrow.

ISD: Interstellar Services Department A Department of CONCORD



The Admiral closed the holo-conference connection and glanced out the window. Darkness had fallen and two of New Caldari's moons had risen.

"Continue personal journal," the Admiral said. A small flashing icon appeared in the bottom corner of the holographic display.

"The divisional leaders' meeting this evening was productive, not all good news, but productive. STAR is reporting an increase in new pilots coming out of the various academies and an increased workload. I wish the academies would give a bit more real-life training instead of simulations. Piloting a Mammoth in a system with a lower CONCORD presence is much different than racing a souped-up Burst between here and Matigu. STAR needs more personnel to give these new pilots the assistance they need."

"The Communications Relay Commission is reporting an increase in faster-than-light message traffic. Their fluid routers are handling the load fine, but a slight increase in funding and resources may need to be considered in the near future. Spurious and illegal traffic is declining due to their efforts and some activity has been turned over to the SCC for further action. There are going to be some very annoyed CEOs and CFOs enjoying some time in the penal colonies."

There was a knock at the door. The icon on the screen remained steady at the Admiral's "Pause recording" prompt. "Enter," the Admiral called out. An aide de camp walked into the room carrying a black striped folder.

"Sir, AURORA is reporting an increase in Angel Cartel activity in Curse." The aide passed the folder over to the Admiral to look through. Graphs of souls lost, ships and cargo destroyed, projected economic impact to trade in the region and other information was dispersed through dossiers of Cartel agents, activity reports and intelligence.

“Forward AURORA’s sanitized findings to DED for action. Make sure the intelligence is clean. We don’t want to lose another AURORA agent. Don’t make the same mistake your predecessor made.” The Admiral handed the folder back.

“No, Sir! The information will be clean with no possible ties to our sources.” The aide tucked the folder under his arm, saluted and left the room.

“Resume”

The record icon on the holo-screen started flashing again. “The boys in the Technology Division want a closer look at the Transcranial Microcontrollers and see if there are any manufacturing ties to the Sansha devices. I have to agree with the Bug Hunters, the Inner Circle made too quick a decision on their usage. The Bug Hunters are also working on some other issues, the notification after a successful jump installed in the last pod flightware upgrade caused some pilots migraines and they got that removed quick enough. They bust some major butt working on these things.”

The Admiral paused for a moment and rubbed his eyes. The record icon continued to flash next to the clock. “End personal journal, bookmark and close all files, shut down. Time to head home.” The holo-projectors blinked and went dark.

‘CHILDREN OF LIGHT’



To the Caldari merchants that shuttled between the core systems it was considered a good omen if, on approaching the Iyen-Oursta stargate, they might witness the hypnotic ballet of the Lutins. Some Gallente locals even took to worshipping these strange dancing lights, that would on rare occasions surround an approaching ship like a swarm of angels until the jump to Perimeter was made. The more belligerent of the Amarrian traders meanwhile saw them as mere baubles, strung up in space to calm the women, children and slaves before the warp drive's wrench pulled them briefly into timeless non-existence.

Rumours had spread across the Border Zone of vengeful ghost drones returning from the climactic battle at Iyen-Oursta, perhaps to enact a haunting toll for the Caldari secession a century previous. Conspiracy theorists, as is their way, held that the spectral phenomenon was evidence of Jove experiments. Ironically, it was the dismissive Amarrians who capitalised most -- on the widening belief among Minmatar slaves that if they witnessed the spectacle of lights, their firstborn son would be blessed with freedom.

Despite the fact that the detour sometimes doubled the length of their journey, slaver vessels would divert through the Gallente Border Zone in the hope that a sighting - staged or otherwise - would serve to quiet an obstreperous cargo. Some slavers lent the spreading belief further credence by freeing the Luti, the children subsequently born of 'blessed parents'. Others weren't as compassionate, taking instead to neutering their human cargo, often by furtively poisoning the ceremonial Kapli bread baked in honour of a Lutin blessing.

Whilst a few scientific studies were conducted on the phenomenon (or 'Iyen Pixies,' as they became colloquially known), efforts were half-hearted. Welcoming the income afforded by the increased traffic, the Amarr Empire exerted its pressure on the academic community. In the end, even the most inquisitive of academics were dissuaded from seeding their sensor arrays around the increasingly busy node.

Meanwhile, among pockets of forced-migrant Minmatar workers, the legend continues to flourish. Kapli bread is still baked by those hoping for release from captivity across plantations and farms everywhere, and in a quiet corner of San Matar, on the darkest day of the year, the Lutinlir, ('Festival of lights') attracts thousands of Luti families now living in the relative freedom of the Ammatar enclave.

Of the widespread theories put forward through the years to explain the fabled Lutins, the one most favoured by the scientific community is that of superheated plasma escaping through poor venting from the stargate itself. It is thought that if approached at the right speed, correct angle and proper warp drive frequency, the vented plasma is attracted away from the jumpgate's boson sphere and towards the approaching ship. According to the theory, the plasma's reaction to the ship's shields is what creates the brief, dazzling and harmless display of multispectral lights.

Over time, perhaps due to the advances jumpgate technology has seen over the years, the number of sightings has dropped considerably. Of the few reports that are made, most are dismissed as elaborate hoaxes. As a consequence, the Iyen-Oursta system has become something of a quiet bypass for traders as opposed to the highway it once was. Still, every once in a while, a hopeful soul may be seen roaming around the gate, wishing for a glimpse of that fabled beauty.

BH



Keying in the ignition sequence, Hammerhead softly whispered a quick prayer. For a few glorious seconds the Oscillator Capacitor Unit hummed to life.

It all went downhill from there.

Suddenly a groaning sound struck his eardrums. Sighing, he moved closer to the generator in search of the sound's origin.

"Damn this infernal machine!" he growled. Apparently the generator was producing the sound. Probably not getting enough power. Then, a high pitched whine followed by a grinding sound which came to a crescendo and stopped abruptly. With all these faults, he thought to himself, the Secure Commerce Commission will never approve of this as a trade commodity. The scene vanished as he turned off the simulation and reached for his pack of smokes.

Hammerhead gazed over at his ever-growing inbox while he sparked up. "Star gates offline in Pator, Faulty sentry gun code through Arida, Camera Drones flaking out... it never ends," he mused as the smoke from his cigarette drifted into the air.

Trying to get back on track, he brought up the simulation once more. As he was again running his investigation into why the component constantly broke down at 2500 GHz he thought to himself, "I wonder if I can fit one of these on my Heron... sure would make traveling in less scrupulous areas safer." Focusing on his diagnostic read-outs, he just couldn't understand why the component wasn't receiving enough power. All previous tests had looked promising.

He decided to call it a day on the analysis - after all, there were plenty of other projects to be getting on with. For one, he still had to finish the new neural connector user interface along with his colleague Tom.

Hammerhead dealt with many branches of CONCORD in his day-to-day duties. The Secure Commerce Commission, like many other CONCORD branches, was rife with red tape and bureaucracy, and extremely stringent when it came to authorizing new products as official trade commodities. With such restrictions on the way products were released, he had to stick to a strict timeline that told him when such products could be out on the street.

He opened a sub-space comms channel with Traveler and waited for the transmission to go through.

"What's the word, Hammer? Do we have a winner?" Traveler was a Research and Development agent at Ishukone who was doing work on various projects for pilots. Hammerhead liked working with the R&D agents. They always had new toys for him to play with and they were never in much of a hurry due to the fact they got paid by the hour.

"Sorry, Traveler. I've been running some more simulations and the results just aren't coming back like I hoped. I expect this project to take at least another three solar cycles. The parameters are just wrong and the power supplement is fluctuating continuously instead of streaming smoothly," Hammerhead replied with a sigh.

"While I've got you on the line, I think I've figured out a way to enhance Particle Accelerator efficiency by 20%, but I'm going to need your help getting the SCC to categorize them as marketable."

Hammer sighed to himself and lit another cigarette. It was Monday morning, the start of what looked to be another very long week.

The Cult of Tetrimon

In the present day, the Tetrimon are seen as a small fanatical religious cult, that have been responsible for a number of disturbing terrorist attacks against targets both amarr and foreigners.

The truth of the matter is something that the Amarr heirarchy would rather forget.



The roots of the cult lie in the year 21460, at the end of the reign of Zaragram Ardishapur II, also known as the "Mad Emperor." At that time the Amarr Emperor was the leader of the Apostles, the first among equals, and his authority was channeled through the Apostle Council. But as soon as he came into power Zaragram started issuing decrees, most of them religious in nature. Many of these decrees directly contradicted the Scriptures, uprooting and eradicating many of the most sacred traditions of Amarr society. Zaragram gave himself the status of a God-Emperor, and ruled the Empire according to his whims.

One nobleman of the Ardishapur family grew so ashamed of what his own grandfather had done to the traditions and religion of the Amarr that he entered the "City of God" in the Shastal system, and with his own hand killed the Emperor. Before the nobleman was cut down by the surrounding guards, he raised his bloody hand and cried "a manu dei e tet rimon " - I am the devoted hand of the divine god. ("Tetrimon" means "Divine Devotion")

The Council of Apostles, the rightful ruling agency of the Amarrians, took back their former power, and attempted to restore the Ammarian faith. The nobleman was beatified as Saint Tetrimon, and the Council of Apostles took heed of his actions, and created an Order to reverse the corrupting influence of the now deceased Emperor Zaragram II - The Order of St Tetrimon.

This Order was given the task of purifying the Amarr faith, of preserving the original scriptures, and of eradicating apocrypha and deuterocanonical chapters (i.e. removing those chapters of the scriptures which disagreed with the "canon" of the Amarr faith, or those chapters which had been added to the scriptures more recently.) The Order went on to ensure that the decrees of Zaragram were reversed. All icons and pictures of him were either destroyed or his face and name scraped out, and his city was laid to waste.

During the moral reforms which took place from 21875 to 21950, the Council of Apostles was stripped of its powers, which were transferred to the Emperor and the newly formed Privy Council. The Emperor was elevated to the status of the Empire's

spiritual and worldly leader. Many of the Apostles' supporters were strongly reminded of the Mad Emperor Zaragram II some 500 years earlier, but many of those voices were silenced, forever.

One of the nay-sayers was Tetrimon IV, the current grand master of the Order of St Tetrimon. Unlike many, he did not openly defy the Emperor, but instead hid the records and artifacts of the Apostles.

The new Emperor, still insecure in his newly elevated position, gathered those religious leaders supportive of him into a special assembly to create a new canon of scriptures that would increase the moral authority of the Emperor. This assembly became permanent and was named the Theology Council -- defenders of the new religious and political order. Their Inquisitors were much feared throughout the Empire. Under their ruling fist many aspects of the Amarr faith were purged and modified to fit the new political order of the Empire - with the Emperor as the supreme and infallible voice of God.

The Order of St Tetrimon survived in small groups, often finding themselves at odds with the Theology Council and the Privy Council, but still openly carrying out their work of preserving the original liturgical records of the Amarr faith. In 22762, with the breakup of the Empire and the forming of the Khanid Kingdom, the Emperor issued a decree suppressing the Order of St Tetrimon, asserting that he did so to maintain peace and tranquility within the Empire. Tetrimon houses and colleges everywhere were seized by the local authorities. Some Order members were imprisoned; some were driven into exile. The Grand Master of the Order, Lozera Riana, was declared a heretic and imprisoned in the holy city of Dam-Torsad, where he died two years later.

The Order remained active in the Khanid Kingdom where Khanid II, for his own political reasons, would not allow the Imperial decree to take full effect. There were also accusations laid against both the Sarum and Ardishapur families concerning secret support for the Order, but they retained enough power in the Privy Council to ignore these accusations. Over the following years, the Tetrimon were forced to learn to defend their beliefs, and eventually were strong and skilled enough to strike back against those who they felt were corrupting the hearts and minds of the Amarr people. During the slave uprising of 23216, the Tetrimon reappeared in the Amarr Empire in force, and an agreement was reached with Heideran VII, whereby the Order were allowed free passage through the Empire in return for assistance against Minmatar forces. Ships flying Tetrimon colours became much feared by the young Republic Fleet during this time for their fearless attacks and the suicidal fury shown by their pilots.

During the remaining reign of Heideran the Tetrimon were left untouched, on the understanding that they would not attempt to undermine the rule of Heideran. Quiet they remained, aside from a few actions taken against the Kor-Azor family -- specifically against the Heir Doriam, who flouted traditions with his releasing of slaves and liberal views.

Big Fish, Little Fish



His upper lip was sweating again.

Throughout the academy years, through his stint with the Legion, through every shady encounter and back-handed double-deal, Monk Dubois had been haunted by the vagaries of his nervous system. He could wrest all the conviction in the world out of his voice, jump into whatever role was required with chameleon-like aplomb, talk his way into the record books and hatch plots with a winner's smile, but always his body screamed chemical murder, tendrils of bridled conscience playing havoc with his processes. Many a time had a rogue twitch or a freak stutter come perilously close to destroying a sweet deal, and more than once they'd sent him scrambling for his life. Fate had seen him through so far, though, and as long as he had fate on his side, he figured, this damnably honest body of his wouldn't get the best of him yet.

Wiping the sheen off his lip, he waited patiently for the lift to reach Hangar Ingress 3C wherein, suspended in this battered station complex in the middle of nowhere, waited the love of his life, her capacitor humming. Bad Ike's Rumour – the fastest frigate in this backwater region and then some. He'd held on to her longer than any other ship, and with a little help from old fate they'd seen each other through a lot of tough spots.

Chiming its arrival, the lift opened into the ingress. As he got his first glimpse of the corridor beyond, a twinge of fear-laced anticipation took hold of Monk's gut. Suppressing thoughts of the enormity of what he was about to do, and the hatred it would inspire in the people he was about to do it to, he steeled himself and marched into the hallway. An Intaki maintenance tech passed him on his way to the Rumour, shuffling along in brooding silence. As they met there was brief and swiftly-averted eye contact, and in the instant it happened Monk felt sure the young man could see right into him.

Maintaining his stride and steadying his breath, he kept walking. Coming to the end of the corridor a few steps later, he keyed in his sequence for Hangar Bay 3C and was admitted to the vast cylindrical space where his ship lay, suspended and motionless. Approaching the bay's main control panel, he stopped for a moment and wondered how much longer he was going to keep doing this. All those assumed

names, all those forged identities, donned and discarded like so many theatre rags, and it all came down to this. After months of planning, of worming his way inside, playing his role to perfection, he now had only to press a few buttons, and in one fell swoop turn himself yet again into the vilest of all things vile.

Every time, Monk had relished this exact moment, this one second where acid-tinged self-loathing mixed with intoxicating joy as he watched the number rise with giddy alacrity, saw his personal account swell with his former compatriots' hard-gotten gains.

A sound from the ingress corridor brought him out of his reverie. Striding over to the doorway and leaning in, he saw the unmistakable silhouette of the small Intaki in the jumpsuit heading back towards the hangar bay.

Time to work fast, he thought to himself as he ran back to the control panel. Seconds later, the dizzying rush of figures, the pistonic whirr of immense wealth, indicated that his corporation's accounts were dry. Now, all he had to do was get out of here and he was home free. Discard the fake credentials, hack his registration, chuck the fixer his cut, then spend the next year or two on some paradise world or other before doing it all over again.

He was halfway up the stairs to the capsule landing, musing on the ridiculous ease of the whole thing, when he heard the sound of steps on the main platform below him. Casting a glance over his shoulder, he saw the tech enter the room and, without a moment's hesitation, stride over to the bay panel and key in a sequence, lightning-fast.

With a low hum, Monk's pod began to detach from the landing. The bay's bright lights dimmed to a metallic dusk. Monk could feel the leaden silence descend on him as the near-subsonic warble of the station-wide intercom died abruptly.

He turned on the stairs, ready to put up his most indignant mask for the tech, now a shadowed figure on the platform. Just as he realized, somewhat sheepishly, that the small Intaki couldn't see his face, he heard the voice:

"Much better. A far more peaceful environment to work in."

The last word had scarcely fallen when Monk heard a low clap and felt his knees buckle like jelly. As he tumbled down the stairs onto the platform, the crazed thought came to him that finally, fate had decided to tip the scales out of his favor.

He landed in a crumpled heap on the platform, one leg twisted unnaturally beneath him. The tech was already by the main control panel, fingers working with an almost supernaturally assured swiftness.

"Wha—who..." began Monk.

"Quiet," said the Intaki matter-of-factly, finishing up his keystroke sequence. He took the parapistol from his jumpsuit pocket and turned to face Monk again. Setting down on one knee, gun cocked inches from the terrified man's face, he began to speak in calm, measured tones.

"Mr. Dubois, your funds have been wired through an easily traceable route to a corporation with competing interests to your own. When discovered here, you will confess to being an agent of theirs, working to undermine your current associates' position on your real employer's behalf." The easy command of his tone somehow managed to convey unspoken threats that sent Monk's gut whirling.

“Events should unfold within the next two days that will give you ample opportunity to escape the associates you so callously betrayed – after, of course, they have meted out whatever punishment they see fit.” A hint of a smile played at his thin lips.

“Why? Why do this?” asked Monk, bewildered, after a few seconds had passed in silence.

“Consider it your price, Mr. Dubois – your karmic price, if you will. And be grateful that you’re playing a role, however inconsequential, in something that goes beyond yourself. A month from now, should you still be alive, you’ll be able to look back and see the little mark you’ve made on history. All told, I’d say I’m doing you a favor. I’m sure you’ll agree that’s more than any corp thief deserves.”

As he had spoken the words the small man had stood up, pocketed his pistol once more, and, with another rapid-fire keystroke sequence, set the hangar bay to its regular configuration.

As he passed wordlessly through the doorway back to the ingress, Monk caught sight of his name tag: N LEUTRE.

A screaming express of neural connections blazed its way to the forefront of his consciousness, memories of legendary tales told through whispered voices in smokey smuggler dives congealing in his mind.

Niques Leutre. Aeron Assis. The Broker.

Cold sweat didn’t begin to describe it.

The Battle of Vak'Atioth



'We found our kin, and found them strange.'
- Rana Arnov. Memoirs

Two hundred golden, gleaming hulls, gathered on the fringes of the Vak'Atioth system. Amarrian arrogance had mandated the use of such a small force. They did not expect resistance.

For the Amarrians, this was to be a great day. It would renew faith in the Reclaiming, a faith much needed. For weeks they had been advertising their intentions to crush the Jovians; flooding communications networks with propaganda proclaiming their people the chosen of God, rightful owners of the Jovian people.

Vak'Atioth was not a primary system within the Jovian Empire. It lay upon the edge and contained only various small research facilities. It was, nonetheless, here that the mighty Amarr Empire had chosen to show the Jovians the undeniable might of their squadron, a force not even approaching the full size of the great Amarr Navy.

The Jovians valued one thing above all else – information. Their need for information had led to the formation of the Jovian intelligence network, an entity with eyes and ears in most Empires' internal archives. It delivered to the Jovians every plan the Amarrians had laid out for their assault – even before the Amarrian commanders themselves had received the information. This allowed the Jovians to plan extensively for the battle that would take place in one of their own systems – then called Vak'Atioth, now known only as Atioth.

It was a rich and diverse mixture of battleships and cruisers, each ship equipped with state of the art Amarrian laser technology. Their ships were bulky and slow, but made up for their lack of agility with the devastating power of their laser batteries. The fleet organized itself in typical Amarrian military fashion - a staggered line designed to

maximize the ghastly effect of tachyon fire against the enemy's front. Their hulls adorned with religious texts, broadcasting messages of Amarrian supremacy, interspersed with litanies and psalms in honour of the Reclaiming. This was their moment; this was what they lived for.

The first volley of fire erupted from an Apocalypse, its turrets taking aim and firing as one, blood-red beams slicing into the side of a stationary ship until the vessel's hull ruptured, pieces of it scattering like dust among the rank and file of the Jovian force.

It had begun.

The Jovian forces split into smaller wings, each numbering 5 ships, all equipped with devastating Jovian laser technology. Accelerating with frightening speed, they dove into the Amarrian attack forces. Amarrian cruisers equipped with close-range weaponry moved to intercept as wave after wave of the smaller vessels engaged single targets, like a furious pack of wolves, dodging and weaving, maximizing maneuverability.

And then it happened. Massive, eerily green blasts erupted from seemingly nowhere, and an Amarrian Apocalypse went up in flames. Another blast erupted what seemed mere seconds later, and tore through a squad of Mallers, their hulls briefly flickering with bright green energy discharges.

The Amarrians did not expect this. Their rigid command structure inhibiting communications, they did not realize what was happening. Lack of coherence and interoperability in the fleet meant that they could not cope with the sudden appearance of this unseen terror.

It was a Jovian Mother ship.

Swooping in, the Jove frigate forces caused even more confusion, sending the Amarrian forces into disarray. At this point, communications broke down. Amarrian battle doctrine demanded sacrifice, and so the Navy could not disengage. Captains and their crews valiantly threw down their lives for the Empire, confident that they, God's chosen, would be victorious. The few that retreated would later be executed for cowardice, their families enslaved and their Houses disbanded.

For hours streams of glaring light lit up the system that night, the nimble Jove frigates diving into the Amarr fleet, their ranged cruisers supporting them with laser-fire over a distance and the titanic Mothership firing blast after blast of its extreme-range weapons; cannons created specifically for this battle. The smaller vessels holding the Jovian line prevented Amarrian squads from coming close enough to fire upon their nemesis, leaving the fleet defenseless against its onslaught.

Battleship after battleship exploded in a violent bursts of light under the attack from the Jovian mother ship. This left the Amarrians in a position they had not been in before – What could they do but press on and die?

Not six hours later Vak'Atioth was overflowing with the remnants of hulls drifting into the emptiness of space. The Jovians had won the first battle of this war; the majority of the Amarrian fleet had been demolished whilst only a third of the Jovians ships had been lost. The Amarr knew they had to respond quickly and in numbers. Publicly, they blamed impetuous leadership for the headlong assault on the Jovians – even if that was exactly what Amarrian battle doctrine had dictated. So it was that captains that had given their lives for their Empire without a single thought of retreat were posthumously discharged from the Navy, their reputations ruined and their families disgraced.

A much larger fleet was ordered to gather in preparation for another assault upon the Jovians. They never got the opportunity to react.

The Matari chose this moment to rebel against their Amarrian masters. Uncannily well equipped for slaves and high on morale, they proved more than a match for their demoralized Amarrian captors. Faced with losing their grip on the Minmatar, the Amarrians had no choice but to redirect their entire military force to the home front to handle the rebelling slaves. To this day, rumours circulate that the Gallentean Federation secretly outfitted the rebels with weapons, ships and supplies.

And thus, a quick and hasty peace was agreed upon with the Jovians; if only to allow the Amarrians to concentrate on themselves. The Amarrians agreed not to attack the Jovians again. Both sides knew this was not sincere. However, the Jovians were happy to settle and continue as they were. To them, the complexities of the barbaric Amarrian nature were of interest only in the academic sense. Their handling of the Amarrian fleet blessed them with the reputation of an entity not to be tangled with.

No-one has attacked the Jovians since.

Stairway to Heaven



Today, millions of people have permanent residences within space stations, starships and other celestial installations. Space-related industries are experiencing such exponential growth that planetside economies can scarcely keep up, to the point that some semi-independent colonies within the Gallentean Federation have decided to tie their currency directly to the Concord-regulated ISK. Indeed, space plays such a large role in the economic reality of today, that most people fail to realize that until just two centuries ago, space was off-limits to all but the richest individuals.

One of the main obstacles towards the initial commercialisation of space turned out to be one of the most resilient hurdles space exploration has yet encountered, namely the need for cheap and reliable transportation of goods between the planets

themselves and space-based platforms. In order to make space viable as an extension to planetside economies, they first had to find a way to easily transport both raw materials and finished goods to and from the planets. Up to that point a myriad of wildly different approaches had been attempted by various interest groups and national entities, ranging from simple rocket deployment to more outlandish ideas involving gigantic railguns. Almost all were eventually rejected for a single reason; none of them could field the kind of volume necessary to fully interest potential investors.

In the end, the matter was never fully resolved, and transportation remains a matter of taste. While high-orbit shuttle deployment, where an airborne vehicle gradually clears the atmosphere at low angles, remains the most popular method of both passenger transportation and freight, the fact that many planets have different atmospheric conditions means that they have to be custom-built, resulting in only localized industries. However, the space industry has bypassed this by simply creating a subset economy, where goods are manufactured from materials procured in space, and sold to space-based customers. As a result, there is only minimal interaction between the two when compared to the massive scale of interstellar trading.

The Outcast



The poignant tale of the Outcast is a stark reminder that no one people in the pocket universe of New Eden are without sin or blame. Even the Minmatar, beleaguered underdogs of the four great nations and subjects of many a Gallente charity drive or human rights protest, have their own shameful taint, which they above all are reluctant to admit or acknowledge.

Still deeply rooted in tribal folklore and steeped in tradition, the Minmatar often attract scorn for the seemingly barbaric rituals they cling on to; the Voluval, that most integral of ceremonies, chief among them. While it is clearly the most influential and important ritual to a young Matari, it carries with it a terrible burden often swept under the carpet by shamans and spokesmen of the tribal faith. After all, if the fact that those who would fight most fiercely for freedom, would also readily oppress a fragment of their own populace, became known to the public at large – it would surely cut the legs out from under any lucrative charity effort.

The broken shield, the pale eye, the Slaver's fang. These dread markings, while thankfully rare, are an inevitable by-product of the unpredictable genetic lottery involved in the marking ritual. Some force a Voluval subject into a self-imposed lifetime vow of silence under the penalty of having his tongue cut out by his kin should he or she ever break it – others, like the dreaded pale eye, condemn the unfortunate young tribesman to exile, though exile is usually the path chosen by those cursed by a foul tattoo regardless of the penalty it carries. What precisely happens to these tormented children of rage is known by few, and spoken of by fewer – even the liberal Gallenteans, always eager for a good cause to leap upon like lampreys and saturate their media with, have never heard of Vo'shun.

Vo'shun, or 'Hidden Hope', lies on the devastated homeworld of the extinct Starkmanir tribe, once called Starkman Prime but now largely forgotten. It is a sprawling complex of rust and girder, a veritable shanty-town of interconnected, self-contained habitat modules built in a man-made geological feature known as Sorrow's

Gash – man-made, because four hundred years prior, an Amarr orbital bombardment fleet gored this hundred mile canyon in the face of Starkman Prime's largest continent with their ravaging tachyon siege lasers. There, among smouldering sulphur volcanoes, surfing a fractured tectonic plate, dwells the only sanctuary the Outcast can call home.

There is but one law in Vo'shun: no one is turned away. Ruled entirely by tribal law adapted and modified from Minmatar folklore, the colony is a mishmash of utter savagery and social enlightenment the Republic quietly envies. Murder is more than common, suicide is rampant, but above all the people of Vo'shun know freedom. Those stained with the Slaver's fang can sing war songs rather than be condemned to a lifetime of silence; those marked with the pale eye can live among kin.

The Sisters of Eve attempt regular clandestine aid shipments to Hidden Hope, which exists in a state of near-poverty. Due to Starkman Prime's location within Amarr territory, many of these shipments are interdicted, which in turn forces the Outcast to turn to piracy. While the Amarr Navy is brutally efficient at curbing Outcast raids, the only reason the Empire has not allowed slave raiders to invade Vo'shun, is an eagerly perpetuated and not altogether false rumour that the colony is rife with communicable diseases that render its populace unsuitable for enslavement – and, unbeknownst to the bedraggled citizens of Hidden Hope, a curious edict put into law by Idonis Ardishapur himself, whose royal family has domain over Starkman Prime. Enacted shortly after Ardishapur scouts stumbled upon Vo'shun a mere decade ago, the edict, not widely publicized or even understood by imperial lawyers – yet tacitly enforced nonetheless – states unconditionally that no further harm shall directly befall this shattered world.

This edict's name: Khadrea's Law.

Hands of a killer



"These are not the hands of a killer."

And they weren't. Manicured to mechanical perfection, the nails polished immaculately, cut short at exactly two millimeters past the tip of the finger. Fingers that were slender, as far as male fingers can be. The wrinkles at the joints stood out, the only ones of their kind to be found on these hands. The skin itself was pale but smooth, like silk. Golden lines occasionally sparked underneath it like archaically patterned circuitry, as if to accentuate his choice of words. As he toyed absent-mindedly with the object he was holding, glimpses of his palms revealed that they too were soft, betraying a life free of the coarser obligations. He spoke again.

"Yet, we both know that I am. I have seen lives ended at the hands of enraged cattle, good people's shells stripped apart by inelegant tools of destruction. I have in turn killed this cattle, throwing their lifeless husks to the hungry void. I have fought enemies sheltered by walls they thought would keep them safe. I have imagined their screams in my mind. My lasers danced across their unshielded armor-stripped hulls exposing empty interiors to space and I smiled as they died."

"This is what you'll face. Madmen locked inside capsules, squandering lives as if they were nothing. When you are up there you are a tool, nothing more. A slave to the will of a pilot, bound to a man immortal until his mind can no longer be cloned."

"Mankind has taken to the stars and destruction has followed in its wake. Demigods patrol the lifeless expanse above, and they don't care about you. We are pilots. We control your destiny. When you are gone, we will live and we know this."

"These are not the hands of a killer," he said, looking squarely into the eyes of the young man across from him, *"but this is the face of one."*

"Think carefully before you answer. If you decide to rise above your world and begin life among the stars, you will be nothing. You will be a drone in the hive of an insane Queen, existing solely to provide the ship with needs, links in a chain too complicated for you to understand. You will live this ungrateful life until the day you too will be floating, frozen, between distant suns."

The words were true, Daren knew that much. But his long-standing dream, of rising through the ranks aboard a battleship-class vessel - perhaps making it to Engineer, or even Chief Engineer - was all-consuming. He could not resist. The workers at the ground-docks had pointed him to a capsule-cleared pilot only after three months of harsh, unremitting labour. A conspiracy of fate and hard work had permitted him to meet with this Amarrian, who had needed but a brief look at him to know his aspirations.

Taking a deep breath, Daren nodded and spoke the words that would condemn him: *"I understand."*

In a fluid gesture, the pilot across from him slid the datapad he was holding across the table.

"Press your thumb on the pad and slide your IDImplant over the dotted line. Transfer will be booked. Keep the pad with you, it's your pass to my docks. Report to the quartermaster there; he will roster you in, arrange a bunk for you and explain to you your duties. Work hard and you'll be rewarded. There's no place for slackers on my decks."

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I have business deals to conclude."

Nodding his agreement, the young man left the table. Stunned, he made his way out of the establishment, holding the datapad tightly, as if his life depended on it.

Four months later, Daren Athaxis was confirmed as one of six-thousand three-hundred and fourteen reported casualties resulting from the destruction of the Apocalypse-class battleship "Dam-Imud." His post was filled within three days. His family was not notified.

The Crystal Boulevard



"Well, Mr. *I-don't-think-anything-can-be-more-beautiful-than-an-oversized-chunk-of-rock-because- I've-never-been-off-Intaki*, what do you think?"

Mon Dieu, man, pick your jaw up off of the floor, at least. Drool is hard to get off of a carpet.

Heh heh. Yes, the Crystal Boulevard is indeed impressive. You really haven't seen wonder until you've seen an entire street - buildings, roads, lamps and all - made out of clear crystal. This is a view I have trouble getting tired of.

Not all of it's the same, you realize, of course. The buildings and lots change hands constantly, so they have to be made of something fairly cheap that still sparkles in the sun. Usually glass, and some of the cheaper places have actually started using clear polymers in buildings. Completely ruins the ambiance, as far as I'm concerned. Plastic doesn't gleam like crystal does.

A few of the richer, better established places are pure crystal, though. Take the Glittering Dream nightclub, for instance. It's not only made completely - inside and out - of the clearest crystal you can find, it was grown on the spot. They used some of the most advanced shaped crystal growth techniques in the universe to shape that place just how they wanted - that's why it looks like a triple helix. The owner wanted to make a statement about the building blocks of life being built out of the building

blocks of planets or something or other. Why a triple helix, you ask? To be different, mostly, I think.

That does sum up the whole Federation in a nutshell, doesn't it? Being different. Walk down the street of any town on any modern Federation planet and you'll see a thousand different fashions all walking past each other. Some calm, some loud, some downright perverse (ever hear of a place called the Caduceus, on Sovicou? Eugh, don't ask, you don't really want to know). Each and every one of us tries to seize individuality as hard as we can. It's what's made the Federation the wonderful mess of a melting pot it is today.

Damned odd thing about it is, though, it's also what makes us the strongest society in the universe. What do I mean? Well...

Take another look at the Boulevard. Ignore the buildings, look down at the road. Pretty, eh? Cobblestoned, but it's all still clear and gleams like nothing else, not even the best buildings? And it seems bottomless, right? There's a reason for that. The "cobblestones" are just decoration, carved into the surface. The street itself seems bottomless, but it really goes down for twenty meters. You see, the Boulevard itself - the road, and the foundations of all the buildings for about a block all around - is one solid chunk of diamond. Manufactured diamond, but still as hard as the real thing. Five square hundred-meter blocks laid in a row, each twenty meters deep, and the hardest material in the known universe. And for eighty meters beneath that, it's layers of plates of latticed crystal-carbonate-nanofiber armor - the same stuff used in the most elite of military starships. The Boulevard is really the shield for the security bunkers of the three governmental branches and the Military Command in case of planetary bombardment - you can shoot a shell from a thousand-millimeter kinetic accelerator from orbit onto the Boulevard and not achieve a breach through the individual blocks. And even when the diamond shield does break, then you have to go through the layered carbonate-nanofiber armor, and you still have chunks of diamond to get through, which makes any shot bounce and lose force. Nuclear weapons'll do nothing to the topshield - it's already been heated and compressed, after all - and it's heavily faceted in layers so shooting it with lasers from orbit is totally pointless. Never mind the heatsinks, in any case - they bleed off excess heat into the surrounding earth, so you'd have to direct enough firepower onto the Boulevard to turn half the district into molten slag to get through. Only direct-contact antimatter bombs could do the job, and even then it'd need enough antimatter blasts to end up destroying most of the Caille city district in the process. Essentially, you can't get to the bunkers without laying waste to the entire city, and generally invaders who want territory want to try and keep urban centers as intact as possible.

The Ultra-Nationalists came up with the idea, of course (who else would?), during the early days of the Caldari War. They were afraid the Caldari might try and pull something exactly like Tovil-Toba ended up doing, and so decided to spend a ridiculous sum of money on the safest command bunker money could buy. One of them was sharp enough to realize that the project could pay for itself with a bit of deft positioning, though, and suggested putting civilian structures on top of the diamond shield. Even after the UNats were deservedly kicked from office, Tovil-Toba managed to convince just about anyone in office that the UNats might have been on to something concerning a super-fortified bunker for the government in case of concentrated planetary assault. So the thing was built, and the government rented

space on top of it to whoever wanted it. They made back the expense in 20 years and have been raking in profit ever since.

Heh. I can see you're getting tired of the allegories, so I'll get down to it: the Federation, for all of its wild diversity, is a lot stronger than it looks. Any citizen with half a brain can understand that the freedoms that let us wear translucent clothing aren't exactly looked on favorably elsewhere. (I'll admit not everyone has that much of a brain, and again, you want examples, head for Sovicou... or better yet, don't.) They understand that, despite how different we all are, what we have collectively is worth defending. Get a Gallentean angry about his freedom or the freedom of someone he knows and he'll be ready to fight to the death and further. Sure, some folks might be "armchair activists" about Amarrian slavery... that's not what I'm talking about. The Minmatar aren't "our people", or at least the Republic ones aren't. It's one thing to protest something happening many light-years away. But the Amarrians never made more than probing slave raids into the Federation, and you know why? They immediately realized that they'd never be able to enslave us, not without slaughtering most of us. Even if they did get people off of the streets of Luminaire, or Intaki, or Daasa, or Sovicou, or wherever, we'd fight them to the absolute end. Beneath all of our differences there's a single bond between every living Gallentean that makes us hard as diamond: a love of freedom.

And yeah, that's your answer, after a fashion. I figured you were here for my reaction to Kataphraktur's comments about Gallente-Amarr relations. Soon as I heard them I knew a reporter would be here, although I wasn't sure if they'd send you. I brought you up here so you'd understand the reason behind the answer I'm going to give.

And the answer is: I agree. Sooner or later, the Federation and the Empire have to beat the ever-loving shit out of each other and only one will rise from the carnage. One of us surrenders individual freedom for a universal human mission, and the other allows each person to define his own mission. In the end, the two can't co-exist; they're polar opposites, and they'll clash eventually. I respectfully disagree with the good Holder as to who'll win, but he's got the right of it; no matter how long we put it off, it's got to end in blood.

And I just hope to the Gods that we win. If the Amarrians take over the galaxy, we'll never get out of the resulting dark age.

Anyway... enough worrying about the Amarrians, eh? Come on, let's head for the top bar of the Glittering Dream. If you think this view is something, you haven't seen anything yet.

Oh? What's that? Wondering why anyone would ever want to walk onto the Crystal Boulevard, knowing what it really is?...

Well. It's like I said earlier. If you were an invading army, and you wanted to take the planet, would you want to destroy a national treasure, frequented by the citizenry, and be forced to destroy the entire city along with it, just to get at the leadership?...

Now come on. They've got this drink you've just got to try. Quafe, I think it's called..."

- comments made by Duran Ricard, 6th Federal Ambassador to the Amarrian Empire, to a now-forgotten reporter of Intaki descent, 60 years ago.

COLD WIND



Cold Wind was before and will be after, the first of the Winds to blow among the Kaalakiota Peaks and the one that loves things that grow strong. He saw the Raata men arrive and blew his welcome among the kresh trees.

He asked Wind-from-the-West about these men, and Wind-from-the-West told him tales of fires and blood and burning. But the Raata men respected the woods, the stones and the water, and Cold Wind felt happy to share his tales with them.

He blew for many autumns among the Raata. He blew for many autumns until Deteaas heard him and made a flute with the bamboos, and K'vire heard him and made a harp from his bow, and they taught the other men to listen.

Cold Wind told them what moons bring snows and rains, the time of the trees and the hunt, and which herbs are good to eat. The Raata listened and learned, and the wisdom from the tales made them grow strong.

Other men arrived, this time from the West, and Cold Wind once again felt happy. Yet these other men brought the fire Wind-from-the-West spoke of, and the blood and the burning. They tore stones to build walls and trees to make pikes. They killed all those that were different, and claimed all these lands and waters for themselves.

K'vire was fast and strong. Cold Wind taught him the words that make the bow stronger and make the arrow fly true. He taught him to move without sound or track, and to perceive the paths that are hidden.

Deteaas was calm and deep. Cold Wind taught him the words that sing the deeds of heroes fallen in battle and instill fire in the heart of men. He taught him when to run and when to walk, when to wait and when to strike.

The pikes of the men from the West could only find shadows that vanished before they could land a blow. Arrows coming from nowhere took first this one, then another, and another. Their sky was always covered with dark clouds; they could see the sun

and stars no more. The orders their captains yelled were lost in the Wind that day and night kept screaming in their ears.

The men from the West felt fear creep into their heart. Some left, then others followed, then all the rest of them.

The Raata men rejoiced and celebrated their victory, and sang praises to their Cold Wind. He smiled and laughed, for Winds need no praise from men, and said:

“Many are the men, and many are their stories. Those who have the courage among you, travel far away from the Kaalakiota Peaks, travel to other men and other Winds. Haakkin k’len! Return when you have walked all the Lands, and when you have heard all the Tales.”

K’vire was fast and strong; his eyes filled with distant lands, he dashed to the North.

Deteaas was calm and deep; his dreams filled with distant tales, he walked to the East.

No man was stronger than K’vire; in time he forgot to walk and started to lead, and the northern Fuukiuye tribes followed him. None could match Deteaas’ wisdom; soon he forgot to listen and started to speak, and the eastern Oryioni people answered his call. When for the third time the son of the son became father, seventeen houses of Fuukiuye went back South, and twenty-three houses of Oryioni returned to the West.

They found each other under the Kaalakiota Peaks. Time had diluted their memory; they saw the other faces were strange, the Houses’ symbols different. Each claimed these woods and waters as true heirs.

And both refused to leave.

In the first cold dawn of autumn two armies stood face to face, one arrowshot apart. Light snow made silence thick. Men stared men. An eagle cried, and two armies shouted in rage and clashed.

The Winds saw the battle and whispered to the men to stop. Wind-of-the-West lifted the fallen snow and tried to hide one army from the other, but men were already blind with anger and fog would not stop them slicing anything that moved. Mountain Wind brought the cool of the high Peaks into the heart of the fight, yet fury was boiling in every vein and cold would not placate them.

One third of the men fell, then another third. When only a fifth was still standing, Cold Wind felt his pain burn into fury as he had not known before.

“This,” he roared, “ends now!”

Blizzard and ice he spewed until no hand could hold a weapon; until friend and foe lumped blind together, seeking protection from his rage. He blew until none could stand, until every man still alive was left clinging desperately to the last thread of warmth.

Wind-of-the-West lifted the fog. "Forgive these men," he said, "they were blind, but now they will see." Storm Wind uncovered the sky. "Spare their lives," he said, "you have already extinguished their anger."

Cold Wind let his fury vanish and released his grip, and men could feel their limbs again.

"Look at each other," he told them. "How do you tell one man from the other? How do you know which man to kill?"

The men struggled to stand up and looked at their armors; the symbols of their Houses were torn and broken, not visible anymore.

"No two men on this field have the same face, but can you tell them apart now?"

The men gazed at each other trying to distinguish brothers from enemies, yet the blood covering their faces made all of them alike.

Cold Wind whispered: "Remember this. Trust your eyes, you will kill each other. Trust your veins, you can all go home in peace."

The seventeen and twenty-three houses became forty. K'vire and Deteaas became Raata again.

From "Two Bloodlines, one Race: the Raata spirit in the Deteis and Civire soul", Lai Dai Press, YR87. Reprinted with permission.

The Jovian Wetgrave

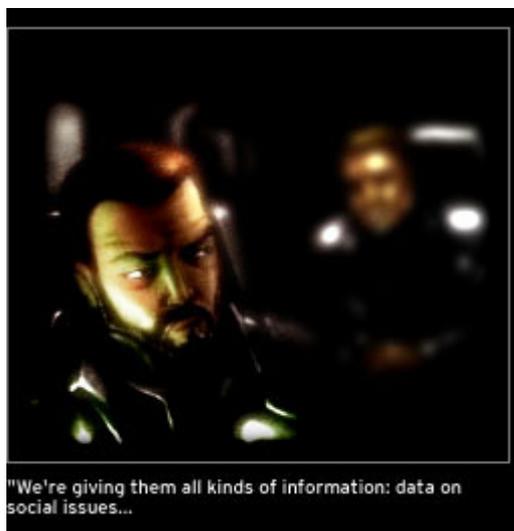
The following short story takes place shortly after the Jovians and Caldari met more than seventy years ago and describes some of their earliest wheeling and dealing

Lieutenant Hirkii Pirkotan looked at his freshly shaven face in the steel mirror in his cabin aboard the Caldari cruiser *Okarioni*. Immaculate. For the first time in weeks the young lieutenant had the almost forgotten feeling of excitement in the pit of his stomach. Pirkotan's father had fought in the war against the Gallentean Federation and his thrilling tales of battles and bravery had made their mark on the teenage mind of Pirkotan. But the war had been over for 15 years, and in all the years that Pirkotan had spent in the navy, hardly anything noteworthy had ever occurred. Scrubbing, drilling, sleeping - that seemed the be-all and end-all of navy life. But then, less than two months ago, a new race had made contact with the Caldari. Pirkotan knew little about the race, except that they were most likely of human origins. Shortly after the first contact, the *Okarioni* had been ordered to the frontier where the new race had introduced itself. And now, after days of uneventful cruising through Caldari space, the ship was nearing its destination - a rendezvous with a ship belonging to the new race.

Pirkotan straightened his jacket for the umpteenth time and left his cabin. While walking towards the bridge his mind once again turned to this unorthodox mission. There were too many loose ends and unanswered questions for Pirkotan's comfort. Why had the *Okarioni* been ordered to berth on a high-security military shipyard belonging to the Ishukone corporation for two weeks before coming here? And what strange devices had been installed and then sealed in Cargo Hold B? Why this secrecy, preventing even him, the second-in-command, from knowing what was going on? Pirkotan was not happy with the situation and while he was aware that many of the crew members felt the same way, he knew better than to complain. With these troubled thoughts on his mind, Pirkotan reached the bridge.

Captain Ouriye was seated in the command chair on the bridge, overseeing the last course-changes to the meeting point. Pirkotan sat himself down in his own chair to the left and a little bit behind the command chair.

"So what's the situation, sir?" he asked.



"We should rendezvous in about 20 minutes," Ouriye responded. The captain and his sub-ordinate sat in silence for a minute. Finally, Ouriye spoke: "Now that we're about to rendezvous I can fill you in on our mission." Pirkotan's ears perked up; at last he'd know why they were being sent here. The captain sat silent for a full minute before he spoke again.

"This race we've made contact with calls itself Jove. I know nothing more of them, except that the high command informs me that they seem highly advanced. The reason for us being here is to exchange information. It seems these Jovians

regard the acquisition of information to be their highest goal in life and are willing to pay handsomely for it," Ouriye chuckled, then continued:

"We're giving them all kinds of information: data on social issues, historical facts, navigational charts, even some military secrets," captain Ouriye was visibly upset by this last statement.

"But our superiors feel that what we're getting in exchange is worth it..." the captain trailed off.

"What are we getting in exchange?" Pirkotan asks.

"I'm not sure, lieutenant, I'm not sure. It's some sort of a device for controlling or communicating with your ship, that's all I know."

Pirkotan sat thoughtfully, scratching the back of his neck. It was still sore after the operation. While berthed on the Ishukone station Ouriye had encouraged Pirkotan to have neural implants inserted into his spinal cord and cerebellum, saying that it would definitely further his career.

"Sir, these things we're giving them, are they in Cargo Hold B?" Pirkotan asked the captain.

"No, that, uh... device, is what we're getting in exchange from the Jovians." Ouriye answered.

"What? We already have what we're getting here on this ship? I don't understand, sir." Pirkotan said puzzled.

"We've got a part of it. All the vital bits, such as the cognitive pattern decoders, are missing. The Jovians we're about to meet will bring those missing bits and show us how everything works." Ouriye said.



Pirkotan pondered for a while. "What I don't understand, sir, is why we were sent on our own to meet these Jovians."

"What do you mean?" inquired Ouriye? "Well, I'd think that at this early stage in our relationship with the Jovians that diplomats, not soldiers, would deal solely with them, sir. I wonder why we weren't assigned a diplomat to handle the discussions..."

"We're not here as official representatives of the Caldari State. Our orders come directly from Rato Momoriyota, CEO of the Ishukone corporation. This mission, this trade, is strictly the business of the Ishukone corporation. Our superiors have every confidence in us to complete this mission on our own." Ouriye explained. "By our superiors, you mean the heads of the Ishukone corporation, sir?"

"Yes, that's correct, lieutenant." Ouriye replied. "But that doesn't make this mission any less important or meaningful."

By now, the vessel they were to meet was clearly visible on the radar.

"Their ship doesn't seem all that big," Pirkotan observed. Indeed, the vessel was only half as big as the *Okarioni*, only slightly bigger than an average Caldari frigate. The ship was a combination of rather dull-looking shiny-metal green, brown and gray. It had a most peculiar shape, almost like it had been grown or carved, instead of built. The communication officer waved them over.

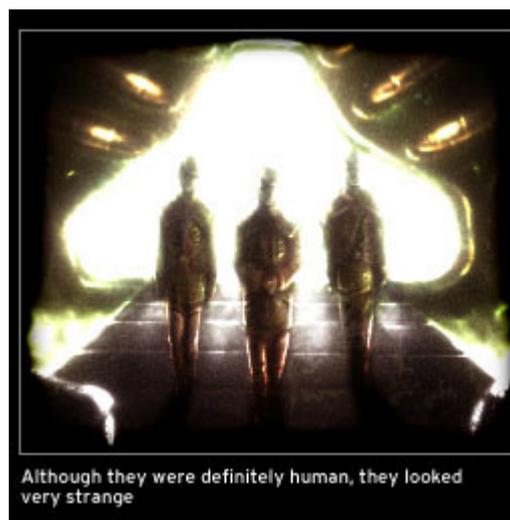
"We're receiving a message from the Jovian vessel," the officer said. "It says they're coming over."

"All right," Ouriye said, "Lieutenant, you know your duty."

"Yes, captain," Pirkotan answered and exited the bridge. He went to the shuttle bay, bringing four marines with him. "Behave yourself, men," Pirkotan said, "These are distinguished guests we're to escort, each and every one of you is now an ambassador for the Caldari State." 'Or the Ishukone corporation, at any rate.' Pirkotan thought.

A shuttle, in the same colors as the Jovian ship, was docking in the bay. Three small men exited the shuttle. Each of them wore a tunic-like uniform of fine materials, light-brown and gray in color. Although they were definitely human, they looked very strange: their skin was pale grayish yellow, almost transparent, with veins clearly discernible. The heads seemed abnormally big, but otherwise their bodies were thin and feeble-looking. Pirkotan couldn't help the uneasiness he felt by looking at them. The three men walked towards Pirkotan and one of them, walking in front of the others addressed Pirkotan. "Greetings, Caldari officer. I'm Anu of Jove and these are my aides Yed and Elas," the Jovian spoke in perfect Caldanese, with almost no detectable accent, his movements and gestures were lithe and graceful. Pirkotan wondered where the Jovian had learned such good Caldanese.

Pirkotan caught himself staring into the pale yellow eyes of the Jovian and stuttered his answer. "Yes, uh... welcome aboard the *Okarioni*, sir. Um... I'm lieutenant Hirakii Pirkotan. Please follow me." Pirkotan tore his eyes away from the probing gaze of the Jovian, turned on his heels and started walking towards the main deck. The Jovians followed and Pirkotan heard them chattering among themselves in a strange language that seemed to consist entirely of vowels. Back on the bridge, Pirkotan introduced the captain and the Jovians. Ouriye seemed perfectly at ease conversing with the Jovians, unlike Pirkotan, who was nervous and uncomfortable. But while the Jovians were making small talk with the captain, Pirkotan for the first time managed to see them as humans and not some outer space aliens. They even laughed dutifully at the captain's jokes, showing their full understanding of the social etiquette found everywhere among humans. Soon,



the conversation turned to the matters at hand and the Jovians asked to see the items they were to receive.

"Lieutenant Pirkotan, bring the crate in my personal quarters." Ouriye ordered Pirkotan, handing him a security key.

"Bring it here to the bridge."

"Yes, sir." Pirkotan answered, motioning the four marines to follow him. As he was leaving the bridge he heard one of the Jovians ask: "Has he been prepared, captain?" and Ouriye replied: "As much as he needs to be." Pirkotan hesitated for a moment, but then continued, contemplating what he'd overheard. 'Were they talking about me?' he thought.

The crater was not all that big, maybe one meter in length and half a meter in height and breadth, but it was surprisingly heavy. Pirkotan unlocked the security bindings and the four marines struggled with it to the bridge. Pirkotan handed Ouriye back the security key and the captain used his personal code on the crater. The lock snapped open with a loud hiss and Ouriye stepped back, allowing the Jovians access to the crater.

Anu opened the crater and started pulling items out of it and handing them to his assistants, who compared them to a list they had, marking things off. Once the Jovians were satisfied that everything was as it should be they began studying the items carefully. They worked incredibly fast, inserting data disks and info clips into their palm computers, scanning the contents for a few seconds, then throwing it away

for another. They fired up hologram reels and fast forwarded through them, casting flickering lights around the bridge and made the heads of the Caldari spin in confusion. After a few minutes the Jovians suddenly stopped all at once and began chattering excitedly to each other. It was obvious that they were satisfied with what they had seen.

"This crater contains what we bargained for. Please take it to our shuttle." Anu said to Ouriye.

"First, let's make sure everything we bargained for is in order." Ouriye replied wryly, emphasizing 'we'.

Pirkotan noticed a momentary hesitation in Anu before he answered:

"Of course, captain. A deal is a deal. Everything according to the plan, eh?"

"Yes," Ouriye answered, glancing at Pirkotan, "according to the plan."



He had read about people being accidentally buried alive in olden times and now he felt like they must have; this capsule, this thing, felt like a wet grave, burying him. 'Is this the end?'

The doors to Cargo Hold B had been welded shut and it took few minutes to cut them open. Pirkotan felt his gut tighten in excitement, but also dread. He'd always prided himself in having full knowledge of every situation, full control. Now that he was left more or less in the dark, he feared the unknown. Pirkotan remembered a saying of one of his teachers in officer training: 'Always expect the unexpected. Then all surprises will be pleasant ones.' Somehow, this did not comfort him all that much at the moment.

The inside of Cargo Hold B was cold and darkly lit. In the middle of the floor was a black metal object, about four or five meters tall. Numerous pipes and wires linked it with the walls of the cargo hold. The object was obviously of Jovian design; it had the same oddly carved shape as the Jovian ship and shuttle. The Jovians walked up to the object and made a quick inspection of it.

"This is a capsule," Anu said to the Caldari. "It is used to control a ship. With it a ship as big as this one can be controlled with only a handful of crew and smaller ships, like your frigates, can even be controlled by a single person."

"How is this possible?" Ouriye asked. He was obviously skeptical, even if he didn't seem as surprised by what Anu said as the other Caldari.

"The controller, captain if you like, of the ship is stationed inside the capsule. Through it, he's neural rigged to all parts of the ship. The capsule is like one gigantic computer, with the captain at the core, controlling everything." Any answered.

"But how can a single man control a whole ship?" Ouriye pressed.

"Thank you, captain, I was coming to that. As I said, the captain acts as the central unit in a highly advanced computer. This role allows him to access and evaluate data at extreme pace. He can easily handle the jobs it takes 5 or 10 people to do normally. It also makes him a better commander, he has better understanding and awareness of his environment and he's not bogged down by tedious crew management issues and frequent communication breakdowns are now history." Anu finished, looking over the faces of the thoughtful Caldari standing before him.

"So what is the downside?" Pirkotan asked. "There is always a downside."

"Not in this case, lieutenant," Anu replied. "The capsule offers greater control to ships, yet fewer crew members. As you know one of the biggest costs in maintaining a ship is training the crew, this cost is now much reduced. We Jovians are not numerous, yet we can field a very formidable fleet because of capsules."

"So what about this capsule controller? Can anybody control this thing?" Ouriye probed, obviously eager to garner as much knowledge as he could about these capsules.

"Not anybody, no," Any answered. "The controller must have the required neural implants."

Pirkotan fingered the newly planted implants at the back of his neck; a grim realization dawning in his mind.

"But why this huge structure? Couldn't the controller simply be strapped into a neural chair?" Ouriye inquired.

"The neural riggings for the capsule are much more elaborate and advanced than those you know, captain; they require the user to be in complete stasis for efficient usage. The capsule is filled with a fluid, in which the captain floats. This fluid filters out all external interferences, as well as protecting and nourishing the captain." One of the Jovian aides had now opened a hologram blueprint of the capsule and Anu used it while explaining how it was built. "Also, the capsule has extremely strong armor, giving even more protection to the captain. We Jovians do not like unnecessary squandering of lives." Pirkotan thought Anu said this last sentence with an unusual fervor.

"So, can you make it work?" Ouriye asked, he had obviously satisfied his curiosity about this thing and now wanted to see it in action.

"Yes, as long as your engineers followed our instructions correctly when building the capsule and connecting it to the ship."

"You mean, this capsule will take control of the ship?" Ouriye asked anxiously. "Yes, but we can override it easily. This is only for demonstration purposes." Anu answered.

The Jovians started fiddling with various control panels on the capsule. One by one, the systems in the capsule came to life, lights started blinking and a low humming noise emanated from it. Finally, Anu turned to the Caldari: "The capsule is now operational. It is ready for testing."

The eyes of the Jovians and captain Ouriye turned to Pirkotan. He felt like a mouse trapped in a cage. He knew now that Ouriye's suggestion about the neural implants hadn't been based on friendship; he'd been cunningly manipulated into this position and he knew it was impossible to refuse now. But why this duplicity? Why hadn't they simply ordered him to take the implants?

"I, uh... you want me to go into that thing, sir?" Pirkotan stammered, hoping against hope that his suspicions were false.

"Yes, lieutenant Pirkotan. You have the honor of being the first Caldari to test a capsule." Ouriye answered. "Don't you feel honored?"

"Ah, yes. Yes, sir. I'm deeply honored," Pirkotan whispered.

The two Jovian aides were now standing beside him. Pirkotan started walking forward, as if his body was moving of its own accord. He was now standing before Anu, who placed his hands on the back of his neck. Anu explored the neural implants with his fingers and stared intently into Pirkotan's face. Pirkotan couldn't make himself meet the gaze.

"Please stand absolutely still," Anu said to him. "We need to hook you up." Pirkotan was too numb to answer, let alone move. One of the Jovians placed a tight rubber cap with lots of tube sockets over his head, covering his eyes and ears. Another Jovian inserted tubes into his nostrils. Finally, he felt his neural jacks being plugged. "He is ready," a voice said. Pirkotan felt hands lead him, he was lifted and he felt liquid engulf him. He was sinking!

But he could still breath through his nose. He couldn't see and he couldn't hear. All he felt was this cold, sticky fluid all around him. He was inside the capsule! Pirkotan slowly ran his hands over the inner surface of the capsule. It was very smooth and

Pirkotan found no seams or cracks, or any controls or buttons for that matter. The capsule was tightly closed and no discernible way to open it from the inside. Pirkotan was not normally claustrophobic, but now he felt panic rise within him and he wanted to scream and run. But he could do neither; the thick fluid hindered all fast movements and when Pirkotan opened his mouth it was instantly filled with the strange-tasting bluish liquid. Pirkotan was forced to swallow it so he could breathe again. Pirkotan tried to calm himself down, but when nothing happened for what seemed like eternity he once again despaired. He had read about people being accidentally buried alive in olden times and now he felt like they must have; this capsule, this thing, felt like a wet grave, burying him. 'Is this the end?' Pirkotan thought. 'Maybe the machine has malfunctioned, maybe they can't get me out!' Then, all of a sudden, a bright light filled his eyes and a sound like rushing wind filled his ears. After few seconds the light dimmed down and Pirkotan was able to see, but everything became deadly quiet. And what he saw made his stomach somersault. He was looking at the Okarioni from the outside! It was as if he was floating in space maybe 100 meters from the ship.

"Can you hear me?" a voice said. It was Anu. Pirkotan tried instinctively to speak, but his mouth was again filled with the fluid and only a strangled croak emerged. 'Hello?' he thought.

"Hello, lieutenant Pirkotan," Anu said. "We can hear you. The communication link in this demonstration capsule is automatically open, normally you control whether it's open or closed. We are monitoring your progress. Can you see the ship?"

"Yes," Pirkotan replied, simply by thinking about it. "Yes, I can see the ship. But whose eyes am I seeing through?"

"You're viewing the ship through a camera drone. Think about moving. Try to move to the right. See what happens."

Pirkotan thought about this and was delighted to find the camera move according to his wishes. He swooped alongside the ship, spinning the camera in circles and zooming it out, all with a mere thought. Pirkotan noticed that no matter how he turned the camera, the ship always stayed in the middle of his vision. As he got more accustomed to this new sensation he could feel his surroundings much better. In fact, if he concentrated he could feel Okarioni, like he and the ship were one; he felt the engines purr in his belly, he felt the electrodes bounce on his skin, he felt the crew crawl around inside him. The feeling was exhilarating.

After a while Anu's voice came back: "You're doing very well. Now we are going to activate the audio synthesizers."

"Audio synthesizers? What do you mean?" Pirkotan thought.

"As you know there is no sound in space, but when we were developing the capsules we found that people wanted to use as many of their senses as possible, thus we added the sound. By letting a computer create three dimensional sound we also add to the awareness you have while in battles, for instance."

Several seconds later Pirkotan could hear the audio synthesizers kick in; he could hear the low humming noise of the propulsion system and the sudden hissing sound of course-correctional thrusters. Anu came back on: "Now we'll test the audio system."

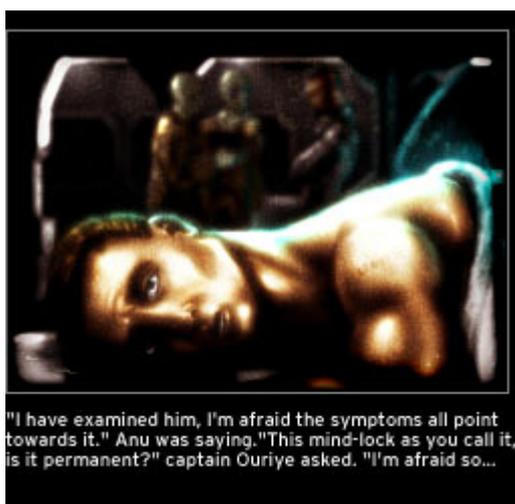
Suddenly a missile was launched from one of the missile bays. It flew majestically out from the ship and disappeared to the right of Pirkotan's vision. Pirkotan turned the camera and watched it fly away from the ship. Then a stab of green and yellow light came from the Jovian vessel, accompanied by a loud crackling noise. The weapon burst hit the missile and it exploded. Pirkotan heard the explosion clearly and when he turned the camera to the Jovian vessel he could still hear the explosion's residue in the background. Once again, Anu spoke: "That went very well. Now for the final test. I want you to shut down the propulsion system, and then turn it back on. You must open the ship control menu and use that.

Pirkotan thought about the propulsion system. Nothing happened. Then he thought about controlling the ship. And then, before him and overlaying the ship, a menu appeared. Pirkotan navigated himself through the menu with his mind and found the shut down action for the propulsion system. He activated the action and the menu disappeared. Pirkotan now saw the propulsion glow fade out and the constant humming slowly died out. Pirkotan now repeated the process, turning the propulsion system back on.

"Well done, lieutenant Pirkotan," came Anu's voice. "You have concluded the testing. Your performance was flawless."

As suddenly as it had appeared the vision before Pirkotan's eyes disappeared and darkness engulfed him. He blinked his eyes several times, the vision of Okarioni still embedded in his nerves, but slowly fading away. Pirkotan then felt as if he was falling at a great speed, but before he could react he passed out.

Pirkotan awoke slowly like from a deep sleep. His eyes were open and he was staring at a dull gray wall. He tried to look around, but found that he couldn't. He felt strangely disoriented. From somewhere behind him he heard low voices speaking. He recognized the voice of his captain and that of Anu of Jove. He tried to speak, to let them know he was awake, but nothing happened. Suddenly the chatter in the background registered in his mind:



"I have examined him, I'm afraid the symptoms all point towards it." Anu was saying.

"This mind-lock as you call it, is it permanent?" captain Ouriye asked.

"I'm afraid so. We have studied it thoroughly and found no cure. It's a shame, if I may say so."

"But how do you prevent it in the first place? I mean, was this bound to happen?" the captain enquired.

"Under the circumstances, yes. The only way to prevent this is with intense training

for many years. That timeframe was unacceptable to your superiors. Besides, you knew what was going to happen all along. You have no grounds for complaints now."

"I know, I know," Ouriye sighed. "I had my reservations, but what could I do? I was under strict orders."

"I understand," Anu replied. "The lieutenant performed admirably. You can be proud of him."

"I am," Ouriye answered.

Silence. 'What is going on?' Pirkotan thought. 'They must be talking about me. What mind-lock?' Then the captain and two of the Jovians appeared before him. They looked at his face, into his open eyes. 'Hey!' Pirkotan screamed in his mind. 'Help me!'

"He looks so peaceful, lying there. Is he conscious?" asked the captain.

"Who knows? Maybe, maybe not," came Anu's reply.

"It's sad to lose him, he was an efficient officer. And a valued friend," Ouriye said. "He will receive the Medal of Valor for this, it will be sent to his parents. His father will be so proud."

"And rightly so," Anu said. "Anyway, we have certain... treatments that can be beneficial to him, if you're interested...?"

"I thank you for your offer, but it is unnecessary," Ouriye replied. "We have very good institutions that can take care of him. He will be well provided for."

Pirkotan screamed a silent curse. His fate was sealed. He had been sacrificed for the greater good of the Caldari State, like a cog in a great big machine. Just before he passed into a murky slumber, Pirkotan read the motto of the Caldari Navy embedded on the captain's sleeve: 'All For the Good of Many.' Much good it would do him, stuck in his own mind for the rest of his life.

The Ray of Matar

“...and the bloated Rock perched itself on the top of the new mountain, gloating and wallowing in its own self-esteem.

‘Look, Mountain,’ the Rock said. ‘Look at me on top of my own mountain.’ But the Mountain answered: ‘Foolish Rock, look beneath you. Your mountain is weak. It cannot support you.’

The Rock looked down, and saw it was true. Its mountain was feeble, frail. The Rock could hear all the little rocks in the mountain groaning beneath its weight.

‘Maybe my mountain will crumble, but I got to the top, as I set out to do; I fulfilled my dream.’ the Rock righteously said to the Mountain.

‘Yes, but then what?’ The Mountain enquired. ‘You had a good place on the side of me; you were in the light, with the wind caressing you and the sun warming you and the moss licking you.’

Suddenly the little mountain the Rock had erected collapsed. The Rock felt itself being dragged down; it toppled down the mountain side and all the little rocks came in its wake. It hit the ground and the little rocks piled in front and back and the sides and on top the Rock. It was trapped beneath all the small rocks that it had gathered for its mountain; they squeezed it tight and the Rock felt like suffocating.

‘Mountain!’ it wheezed weakly. ‘Help me!’

‘What can I do?’ the Mountain said. ‘You brought this onto yourself. You couldn’t be satisfied with the place I gave to you; you had to get to the top. And now look at you, trapped beneath your own mountain forever.’

‘But it was my dream,’ the Rock sobbed, ‘everybody has got to have a dream.’

‘Not if your dream is based on a fantasy, rather than reality.’ The Mountain replied sagely and went back to sleep.”

Vormar finished the story with a small bow and Karin started breathing again. She didn’t hold her breath through the whole story, that was humanly impossible, but she always held her breath during the last part of the story, when the Rock was smothered under its own mountain. Maybe she did it to empathize with the Rock; as a child Karin always took the side of the Rock in its struggle with the evil Mountain. That was before she understood the metaphorical meaning of the story and realized the folly of the Rock’s actions. But the story had always remained one



of her favorites and the chance to hear it now from a master storyteller like Vormar enchanted her even more.

People thronged the large, dimly lit tent. The tent was at the apex of a small camp situated close to the sacred ground. Karin's eyes were watering because of the smoke in the tent and her buttocks were sore from the uncomfortable cushion she sat on. But the tents were the only dwellings allowed within miles of the sacred ground, a tradition refurbished after the rebellion to give people a better feeling for the ancient rituals and ceremonies performed at the place. One of these ceremonies was to take place that night and Karin was to participate in it. This was the most important ceremony in a Minmatars life, called Voluval or the Test of Destiny. In the Voluval a Minmatar faced his true inner-self and, most importantly, the findings would permanently mark the body for all to see. Karin was to participate that night.

Vormar was her essence instructor. His responsibility was to educate those undergoing the test on what it involved and prepare them mentally for it.

Karin was thankful to Vormar for telling them the story of the Rock and the Mountain, for it calmed her nerves for the upcoming event. She approached Vormar at the back of the tent where he was putting away his battered copy of Minmatar folk tales; he didn't actually read from the book, but in his old age he felt comfort in having it at hand in case his memory suddenly failed.

"Ah, Karin," Vormar said when she entered his field of vision. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, it's about my tattoos..." Karin began hesitantly.

"Yes, your tattoos." The old man said. "You're unsure what motif to go for, right?"

"Yes, that's it." Karin said. "Well, as I'm a slave-child and all that. Not knowing my family clan..."

"Don't worry. You're of the Minmatar tribe Sebiestor; that's what is most important." Vormar said and smiled reassuringly.

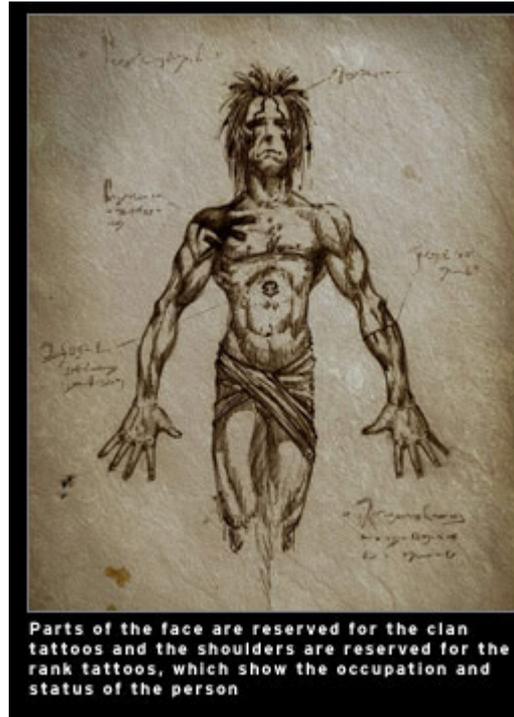
"But what family clan motif should I choose? I might upset somebody by my choice..."

"Not all families have a motif and not all motifs are associated with a specific family." Vormar said. "Here, let me show you something." The old sage started rummaging in his trunk. After a while he produced a large leather-bound book.

"My father gave me this book when I was your age." He said. "It illustrates and explains everything you want to know about tattoos. Take a look at it, maybe it will help you decide what motif you want." Vormar handed Karin the book. She opened it at random. The page showed a picture of a tattooed man, with explanations for each tattoo.

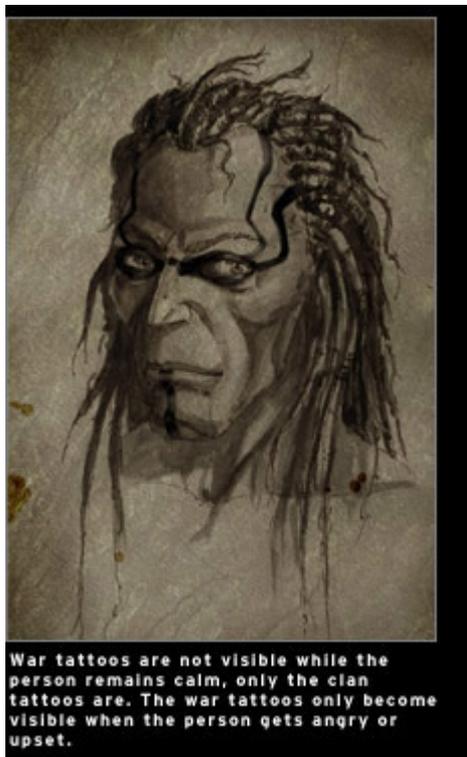
"This book was published shortly after the rebellion." Vormar continued. "While we were under the yoke of the Amarrians they systematically tried to erase many of our most sacred traditions; tattooing amongst them. This book was intended to re-introduce this ancient custom to those that had never experienced it. Admittedly not all modern motifs are in it, but all of the old major ones are there. I've used it before to teach slave-children such as you about tattooing. You can borrow it for a few days."

Karin flicked through the aged tome, examining the finally drafted images. She already knew the gist of the tattooing tradition; that part of the face was reserved for the clan tattoo and the shoulders for rank tattoos. She also knew that facial war tattoos based on nano technology were very popular among the younger generations. This special type of tattoo could appear and disappear depending on the emotional state of the person. Like all Minmatar children in the Republic, Karin had picked up this basic knowledge of tattoos at an early age. But she was still uncertain about what kind of tattoos to choose and now that the Voluval was fast approaching the time was running out, as she was allowed to get tattoos once the ceremony was over. It wasn't exactly essential to make the selection now; many only did so after they saw what mark they got. But for Karin the selection meant more than just decorating her body, to her the tattoo motif revealed and reinforced her identity, something she had always struggled with, being a slave-child.



Parts of the face are reserved for the clan tattoos and the shoulders are reserved for the rank tattoos, which show the occupation and status of the person

Karin sat down in the far corner of the tent to look more closely at the book Vormar had given her. In half an hour Vormar would give the last lesson to her and the other adolescents preparing for the Voluval in his role as their essence instructor and she intended to use these few minutes to study the tattoo book. But when she had just started a commotion in another corner of the tent distracted her. Mattmar Graur and a few of his friends were light-heartedly arguing with some girls. Karin noticed that Mattmar gave her a smile and a wink when he noticed her looking at him and she quickly looked down at the book again. 'The silly fool' she thought. She involuntarily ran through the events of last night in her head.



War tattoos are not visible while the person remains calm, only the clan tattoos are. The war tattoos only become visible when the person gets angry or upset.

Karin was sitting on the flat roof of the tent-house of Graur at the outskirts of the camp. Troinn Graur was the richest merchant in Karin's hometown of Mithuris, and his son and heir, Mattmar Graur, was sitting beside her. They had been friends since childhood, but since Mattmar hit puberty they'd sort of drifted apart. Mattmar became pompous, vain and superficial, all traits that Karin loathed. But their mutual trepidation for the upcoming test tomorrow night made them seek each other out for support.

“What’s on your mind, Karin?” Mattmar asked, watching her stare at the night sky.
 “You should know.” Karin answered after some pause.
 “How could I know?” Mattmar laughed, “I’m not a mind-reader.”
 “Well, I know what’s on your mind.” she replied, leaning backwards on her hands and staring even more intently at the stars above.
 “That’s because I always have the same thing on my mind.” Mattmar said with a twinkle in his eye and moved closer to Karin. Karin paid him no attention.
 “What are you going to do after the ceremony tomorrow?” She asked him.
 “I dunno, depends on my mark, I suppose.” He answered, obviously not all that comfortable talking about it. Karin looked at him.
 “You haven’t thought about your mark?”
 “No, why should I? It’s all subconscious anyway,” Mattmar said, adding: “And besides, almost all males in my family get the same basic mark: an upside-down triangle with two spokes at the top; the bull-mark. I’ll probably get the same.”



Karin and Mattmar talking under the starlit night sky

Karin saw that he was far from being as confident about it as he would let her believe, but decided not to press him about it. She was nervous enough about her own mark as it was. She feared she would get one of the degrading marks: the spiraling circle; the scarecrow; the purple cross; or any of the numerous other marks that could forever exile you from Minmatar society. Fortunately this didn’t happen often; Karin had only witnessed it once, when she was six years old. A teenage boy got the worst mark there was: the pale eye. The poor boy had been driven away from the town, not even his family was willing to recognize him, let alone help him. The memory still sent shivers down Karin’s spine and she huddled closer to Mattmar. Of course the boy misinterpreted this for a sign of affection and he tried to put his

hand around her shoulders. She shook him off.

“What?” Mattmar said in mock surprise. This wasn’t the first time he tried it and failed. Suddenly Karin flared up, all her uncertainties and inner anxiety bursting out.

“What!?! I tell you what, Mattmar Graur. Tomorrow you’ll be tested, tomorrow you’ll find out what future lies ahead of you, and you shrug it off like it was unimportant. I remember the time when we could talk about the future, our dreams, but now... Now, all you want to do is hang around with the guys and ogle the girls. What happened, man?” Karin shook her dark tresses in disgust.

“Hey, chill out kid. I care for the future. I just find it smarter to live in the now, rather than to constantly dwell on the future.” Mattmar leaned towards Karin, his tone suddenly more serious. “To tell you the truth, I dream of becoming a High Justice.”

“Well, in that case you should spend more time on your school books than on partying. With your grades you’re lucky if you get to be a waiter in a Vherokior diner.” Karin said teasingly.

“Aw, come on. I’ve got brains.” Mattmar replied. “Plus, daddy has some friends in high places; he can get me an internship in the Justice Department. And once I’ve got my foot inside the door...” He thrust his hand upwards. “I’ll shoot straight for the stars.” He finished, laughing.

“So, it seems you’ve got it all figured out.” Karin said.

“Sure I do. I always have and always will. What about you? I bet you have some fanciful dreams for the future.” Mattmar asked.



“Yes...” Karin said reluctantly, unsure of how wise it was to confide in Mattmar. “It’s only fair I tell you, right? Well, I feel deeply about the poor situation we Minmatars are in today.”

“What are you talking about, kid?” Mattmar said. “We threw out the Amarrians, we’re free.”

“Maybe so, but we’re still divided into multiple factions. The Republic is nothing but a loosely united assembly of factions, each seemingly with the only agenda to disrupt and disintegrate the state. We can’t extend our political thought beyond the clan and it’s tearing us apart. The result is that the Minmatars are scattered throughout our world of EVE; billions of them are still enslaved within the Amarr Empire and we don’t have the wits to pull ourselves together to free them.” Karin paused for breath.

“So we all hate the Amarr Empire.” Mattmar chimed in. “Don’t worry your pretty little head over these big issues.”

“I do worry, I’m slave-child, remember. My parents risked their lives getting me smuggled out of Amarr space and they’re still there, slaves to some hideous Amarrian.” Karin almost shouted, her anger and frustration again getting the better of her.

“We do fight the Amarrians, we’re doing our best.” Mattmar said soothingly.

“We’re not fighting the Amarrians, we’re fighting the Ammatars, our own cousins.”

“Those scums deserve to die, we’ll finish them off and then the Amarrians.” Mattmar responded.

“No, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. The Ammatars aren’t our real enemy. The Amarrians just play them off against us, keeping us both occupied. But if we’d unite we could take out the Amarrians for good.” Karin said heatedly.

“It’s impossible, we can never unite with the Ammatars.” Mattmar said. “Many have tried, and failed. You don’t want to become a failure, now do you?”

“I don’t care, all I know is that uniting the Minmatars is something I’m willing to fight for, even die for.”

“You know, it’s fanatics like you that give the rest of us a bad image.” Mattmar said, obviously tired of listening to what he considered to be silly ravings.

“No!” Karin screamed and jumped to her feet. “It’s people like you that are stifling the Minmatar race. It’s your narrow-mindedness that’s keeping billions of our people

enslaved and oppressed this very minute!” Karin was fed up and stormed away, furious.

Thinking about all of this now, sitting here in the murky tent with Mattmar and his friends nearby, made Karin regret having said those things to him. Not that she was ashamed of her beliefs, but she shouldn't have blurted them out like that, Mattmar was just the type to misunderstand the whole thing. She also regretted losing her temper, it didn't improve her views in Mattmar's eyes. Hopefully he would forget the whole thing.

Karin was pulled from her reverie by Vormar's voice. He was gathering the adolescents around him, in preparation for the guidance he was going to give them in his role as essence instructor. Once they were seated around him, he began.

“Well, this is our last discussion before the ceremony begins. We've already covered pretty much everything and I think you're all ready for the test. Just remember to stay calm during the ceremony and keep your mind focused. We have a last minute arrival here, Eliza. She's been space cruising with her family for the last few weeks and they just arrived in time for the ceremony. So if the rest of you don't mind, I'll give Eliza a quick review. The rest of you can stay if you want to.”

No one moved, Vormar's presence helped them to relax, something they all needed at this time. Vormar continued:

“Eliza, maybe it's best if you ask me about anything that's on your mind.”

“So, how exactly does the mark appear as it does?” It came as no surprise that Eliza, obviously a keen and bright girl, immediately asked about the most troubling matter on the minds of those undergoing the test.

Vormar cleared his throat before replying: “Yes, thank you Eliza for coming right to the point. As you know, if you've witnessed a Voluval before, those being tested undergo a special treatment by the spirit conductor overseeing the ceremony. This treatment involves direct injections into the heart and the ventral root area...”

“What kind of injections?” Eliza interrupted.

“Well, a large quantity of tyrosine is injected into the heart, which then, through metabolism, is turned into melanin by the body. Frankly, I'm not sure what exactly the mixture injected into the ventral root area consists of; it's a closely guarded secret of the chemists that prepare it. Only a few of the ingredients are commonly known, among them are acetylcholine, oxytocin, calcitonin, and vasoactive intestinal polypeptide.” The names were clearly just as unfamiliar to Vormar as the rest of them, but at least it was something.

“And what does it do?” Eliza probed further. Vormar didn't seem annoyed by Eliza's discourteous questions; he was probably used to all kinds of weird or silly or rude questions from those he was preparing for the Voluval.

“Magic!” Vormar said and smiled. “No, seriously speaking, I can't tell you with certainty. The melanin spreads all over the body through the blood stream, but only the small bit that is affected by the other injection is actually used. The rest flushes out of the body. Now, the real mystery is what the ventral root injection does. We only know what little the chemists that prepare it tell us: that it connects with the subconsciousness and then uses the free-flowing melanin to form intricate marks on the body. These marks become a permanent feature of the person's skin, a permanent tan so to speak that alters according to the skin color of the person to be constantly visible. They describe that person's inner-self; what kind of person he is deep down. I'm afraid that's all I know, and I guess you've heard it many times before.”

Eliza continued to ask Vormar about the effects and nature of the injection, but Karin ignored them, she'd heard it all before. It was obvious to her that Vormar knew nothing more, or at least was unwilling to reveal it.

Like most Minmatar men Vormar was bare from the waist up, only thus could the multiple tattoos be displayed and appreciated properly. She scrutinized Vormar's mark: a circled dot just above his navel. Sinuous tattoos coiled around it, but none covered it. It was forbidden to put a tattoo over one's mark. Karin wished her mark would appear on the abdomen like Vormar's. It was humiliating to get it on the legs or arms or even the back. Karin knew that many dreamed about getting their mark in the face; it was the ultimate honor and brought instant fame to anyone that acquired it. But only one in a million got a facial mark, and the social burden of getting one was something that Karin was certain she could never handle at her age.



Once the session was over Karin joined a group of buddies from school. She couldn't really call any of them a friend; being the only slave-child in the school she was an outsider to most of the others.

The group was chatting about idle things, school and the weather; none of them wanted to think too much about the ceremony that was to start in a couple of hours. Not that the ceremony itself was that terrible, but the results of the ceremony could permanently alter the lives of any of them. Suddenly Mattmar barged into the group along with his loud and boisterous friends.

"Why's everyone so gloomy?" He cried. "We're getting our ticket into adulthood in a few hours and you act like a bunch of scared sissies. C'mon you guys, brighten up. We'll party through the night and tomorrow we go and get ourselves our first tattoos." Mattmar finished with a flourish. All the kids around him cheered. But like the night before, Karin felt that Mattmar's attitude was immature, even if it lightened the crowd. He was too superficial about the whole thing, like it was some kind of a game. Mattmar spotted her sour face and called out:

"Hey Karin, what's up? Afraid you won't get your martyr mark?" He then turned to the others and continued:

"Karin wants to become friends with the Ammatars, she wants to go on a crusade with them." All the kids laughed and jeered at Karin.

'The bastard.' She thought, fighting the tears. 'How could he?' Karin finally realized what kind of a person Mattmar was. To him friendship meant nothing. He only called someone a friend when it suited his own selfish purposes. 'How could I be so stupid to trust him?' She thought. The taunts continued, the kids began calling her names:

"Stupid Ammatar bitch..."

"Filthy slave-lover..."

"Your mother was raped by an Amarr Holder, you ugly bastard..."

Karin ran away, the taunts following her retreating steps, silent tears streaming down her cheeks. She knew her dream was to most people absurd, but she fervently believed in it, and she wasn't going to give it up for anybody. 'Maybe I'm like the

Rock in the story.’ She thought to herself. ‘Maybe I want to build my own mountain, pebble for pebble, stone for stone. And cripple myself when it crumbles.’

The sacred ground was a flat piece of land about quarter of a kilometer on each side. It formed a small stage-like plateau of crystallized rock, formed by the extreme heat caused by the thrusters of a landing space ship. The sacred ground marked the place where one of the huge colonization ships carrying the ancestors of the Minmatars landed thousands of years ago.



A circle of fires enclosed the plateau, the flickering lights illuminating the place and blocking out the stars. Spectators numbering a few thousands thronged the area around it, but the plateau itself was empty. In the middle of it, circles and signs had been painted in preparation for the upcoming ritual.

The ceremony was about to start. The spirit conductor entered the plateau; his appearance silenced the expectant crowd. Behind the spirit conductor the lesser supervisors filed along, each taking their places on the plateau. Music, rhythmical beatings, sprang forth; the men on the plateau began humming a hymn in time to the music; the Voluval had started.

On a stony hillock some two kilometers from the sacred ground a lonesome figure huddled on a rock. Karin watched the ceremony commence, uncertainty written over her face. She wanted to crawl under the rock she sat on, crawl beneath it and disappear forever. But she couldn't do it, she owed it to the parents she never knew to go back and take the test. She kicked a small pebble at her feet and watched it roll down the hillside, taking dozens of its brethren with it. She made up her mind. If she couldn't face her fears here, among supposed friends and allies, then when could she? If she wasn't ready to stand up for her beliefs against her compatriots, then how could she do so when facing Ammatars, or Amarrians? Karin stood up and started running.

The first few participants were through. All had escaped humiliation and many were proudly brandishing respectable marks. Karin joined the back of the line, ignoring the curious gazes around her. Next up was Mattmar.

He strode to the spirit conductor, confidence radiating from him. He kneeled before the conductor, who sprinkled Mattmar's head with a smelly brew intended to cleanse the spirit. Then Mattmar raised his head and one of the assistants handed the conductor a silver syringe. With one swift stroke the conductor plunged the syringe right into Mattmar's chest, through his breastbone and into his heart. Mattmar's body tensed, but he didn't cry out, as so many did. The conductor pulled the syringe out again in another practiced stroke and the assistant pressed a cloth against the small puncture wound on Mattmar's chest.

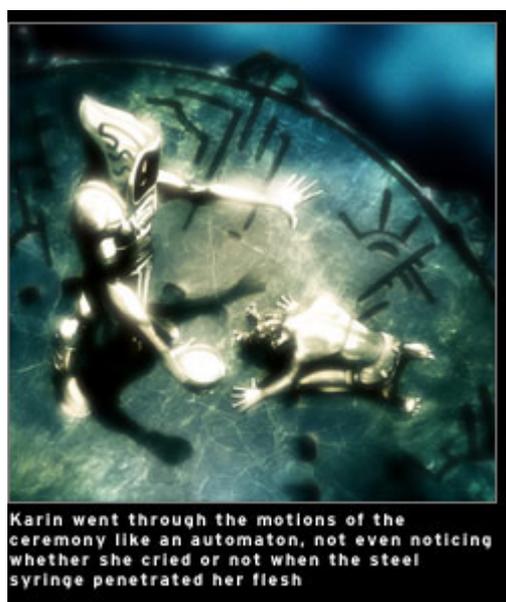


The conductor continued his ritual mumblings, walking behind Mattmar. Kneeling behind the boy he took another syringe from the hands of an assistant. With his left hand he felt Mattmar's small back for a second before plunging the syringe into the base of the spine. Again Mattmar tensed, but there was no cry.

The conductor rose to his feet and walked in front of Mattmar again. Now it was Mattmar's turn to speak, the only time during the ritual he was allowed to. A small saying was required, while the potions started racing through the body. The saying was intended as a declaration of the person's look on life, himself, or his surroundings. Through the ages, many of the sayings became standardized, children saying the same thing as their mother or father before them. Karin had thought long and hard about her saying, finally deciding on two lines from a poem by Hantur Gutrerren: 'Place yourself in the heart of your family/Then nothing can separate you', finding it appropriate for her background and future dreams. Mattmar didn't say anything new, his saying was the same as his father's: 'I take pride in protecting my people and honor in housing them.'

Mattmar rose to his feet and the conductor placed a black mantle around his head and shoulders, covering him completely. It would be removed once the mark had appeared. Everyone waited in anticipation; the minutes ticked by. Finally the conductor declared that the mark had appeared and removed the mantle. Mattmar looked down, then turned towards the crowd. The bull-mark, the horned triangle, was sitting squarely in the middle of his chest. It was the ultimate place for such a mark. Mattmar beamed with pride when the crowd enthusiastically applauded. He took his place on the plateau among those already tested, his haughty manners disgusting Karin.

The ceremony continued, one adolescent after another. Karin didn't pay much attention to the procedure. Between her nervousness and the arrogant glare of Mattmar in her direction her mind didn't seem to function all too well. At last it was her turn. She walked up to the conductor, trying not to shake visibly. She went through the motions of the ceremony like an automaton, not even noticing whether she cried or not when the steel syringe penetrated her flesh. The conductor's voice broke through to her; it was time for her saying. She opened her eyes. Over the shoulder of the conductor she saw the toothy grin on Mattmar's face. Karin opened her mouth and listened to the words spill out: 'Vain flame burns fast/and its lick is light/Modest flame lasts long/and burns to the bone.' Karin didn't realize what she said until it was all out; she was as startled as the others. She saw Mattmar's smile falter a little. He knew what she meant.



Karin went through the motions of the ceremony like an automaton, not even noticing whether she cried or not when the steel syringe penetrated her flesh

Karin felt the tingle, in her spine and under her skin. She wasn't sure if it felt discomfoting or merely unpleasant. The conductor placed the mantle on her shoulders and lifted the hood over her head, shielding her eyes from those around her. Her mind was a blur, but from its depth she heard Vormar's voice: 'Keep your mind focused.' She forced her mind clear, her skin now felt cold and clammy, then suddenly the mantle was pulled off her. She blinked once or twice, accustoming her eyes once more to the bright lights illuminating the small plateau. She looked around her. Every face was staring at her

like she had suddenly materialized from thin air. Silence, none spoke, all she heard was her own shallow breathing. The decade old memory of the boy and his pale-eye mark popped into her mind; the reaction then was the same stunned silence. Karin looked down on herself. Nothing, she saw nothing on her torso or abdomen or legs or arms. Then the conductor lifted a mirror and she saw her face. And there, extending down and side-ways from her left eye were several dark lines, ranging from one to three centimeters in length. She caught her breath. It was the Ray of Matar mark, the rarest and most revered of all the marks.

Karin felt dizzy, like she was going to faint; her mind was in turmoil. And yet her face, staring at her in the mirror, remained impassive and calm. She looked the conductor in the eye; the man was obviously in a state of shock and disbelief. As Karin was the last of those undergoing the test the conductor should be finishing off the ceremony at this very moment, but he stood there immobile. She scanned the faces of the crowd, finally finding a familiar face in Vormar. The pleading in her eyes was not unnoticed by the old man and he walked to her. Vormar took her hands in his and softly said:

“You’re obviously meant for something great, my dear.”

“Yes.” Karin answered confidently. “Yes, I’m sure I am.”

In her mind, the stones were beginning to pile up, one by one.

Catch of the Day

“Gallente frigate Notrimus, you’ve been cleared for docking. Prepare for initiation of docking sequence. Enjoy your stay in Korridi station.” The monotonous voice of the command tower’s personnel sounded even more bored than Gaspar Anoun was feeling. Although the journey had been short and relatively uneventful it was always tiresome to deal with Amarr custom officials, and Gaspar had met a lot of them in the last few hours since his arrival into Amarr space.

The Amarr station loomed large above him, majestic in its monstrosity. Gaspar swiveled his camera drone around, behind him he saw a line of ships waiting to dock while a handful of police vessels shuffled along the lines keeping an eye on the foreign merchant ships. Looking forward again he noticed that from his angle the sun was already partly obscured by the planet - it was late afternoon at the station.

Gaspar felt his ship respond to the commands of the docking sequence sent by the command tower. The ship sailed in a gentle curve towards a docking bay close to the lower end of the station. Gaspar noticed that the docking bay was only half full. This years Trade Fair wasn’t particularly well attended, it seemed. The auto-control eased the ship into a berth, fastening it with a loud clank and a low hiss.

The camera drone had entered the ship when it docked and only the infrared sensors were available to Gaspar to get a picture of his surroundings in the few moments it took the berth crane to lift the capsule from the ship. Gaspar always hated these moments, he relied heavily on his camera drone to get a sense of his whereabouts and with it gone he always became uncomfortably aware of the sticky goo and the blackness enveloping him in the capsule. But this discomfort was offset by the anticipation that in a few minutes he’d be free of the confines of the capsule and his senses would again be allowed to feel and function normally.

Gaspar washed himself clean in the neat little shower box adjacent to the disembarkation room. Then he dressed himself, putting on clothes he kept in the small storage box in his capsule. He chose a smart looking suit with a long-sleeved jacket, nothing too fancy - he didn’t want to irritate the Amarrians too much by his appearance. Gaspar left the room and commissioned a cart robot to follow him with his luggage taken from the ship’s cargo hold.

On the corridor connecting the docking area with the main body of the station Gaspar was greeted by a short Gallentean in a ruffled suit. The man introduced himself, matching his stride with that of Gaspar’s.



Gaspar commissioned a cart robot to carry his luggage from the docking area to the station.

"My name is Naine, Niedanai Naine. I have been appointed as your diplomatic attaché during your stay here." He wheezed, smoothing his greasy hair.

"A diplomatic attaché you say." Gaspar said, hiding his surprise. "I don't recall having requested one."

"It's the policy now, sir." Naine said with a tiny smile. "The Federation demands that all Gallenteans wishing to enter into a formal trade agreement with the Amarrians must be accompanied by a diplomatic attaché from the Foreign Ministry."

"How very thoughtful of them. So, your role is what? Fetch my slippers, make me coffee, that sort of thing?" Gaspar answered sarcastically.

"No, sir." Naine said, visibly hurt. "No. I'm to ensure that your dealings with the Amarrians remain civilized and go through smoothly. In the last few months there have been numerous incidents where the negotiating parties parted on bad terms because of some real or imaginary slights. It is my job to make sure that any misunderstandings don't escalate into a serious breach."

"I see. Tell me Naine, you must have extensive experience in dealing with the Amarrians, right?" Gaspar asked.

"I have worked for the ministry for 14 years. During that time I have analyzed and filed thousands of field reports on every race there is."

"So you have no direct experience of a face to face contact with the Amarrians?" Gaspar probed.

"Well... I, uh..." Naine's face suddenly seemed flushed. "Not as such, sir."

"So, correct me if I'm wrong." Gaspar said in an amused tone. "You, a man with absolutely no experience in dealing with the Amarrians or anybody else for that matter, are going to supervise me - a 20 year veteran of inter-stellar trading - in how to conduct my business. Is that right?"

"Well, I won't supervise as such. I'm more of an advisor, you see." Naine said hesitantly.

"Ok then, Mr. Advisor. Why don't you give yourself the advice to stay out of my face and we'll have peace and harmony all around. I'll quietly make my deal and for you it's mission accomplished." Gaspar said convincingly. Naine mulled things over for a minute before answering:

"I guess that could work, as long as I'm present when you're conducting your negotiations, sir."

"Splendid. Stick to me my dear Niedanai, and not only will we swing a hefty profit back home sweet home, but along the way I'll teach you a trick or two about being a Gallentean super-trader." Gaspar said raucously and put his hand over Naine's shoulders.

"So Naine, where are you from?" Gaspar asked in a friendly tone.

"Me, sir? I'm from Sacreaux." Naine replied perplexed. "In the Neronne district." He added when he saw the lack of recognition on Gaspar's face.

The two men navigated the narrow corridors of Korridi station en route to Gaspar's suite, the cart robot trudging behind them carrying Gaspar's emerald-green travel trunks. Gaspar knew his way well around the station as he'd been here many times before. He stayed clear of the busy thoroughfares, preferring the side corridors as they allowed for a more relaxed stroll. He used the time to explain to the woefully ignorant attaché the purpose of his trip here.

"You know, Naine, the Amarrians can be a real pain in the ass to deal with. But the Amarr Empire is a huge market and it seems every soul there is crying out for Gallentean or Caldari or Jovian goods. The Amarrians like to regulate things, just to let you know who's got the power, and these Trade Fairs are a part of that. You can't just waltz into the Empire and start trading left and right. You have to have permission to trade certain goods. That's what these Trade Fairs are all about -

establishing contacts, making trade agreements, getting permission, you get the picture.”

“So it’s not a market fair, then?” Naine asked. Gaspar shook his head.

“No,” he answered. “There’s very little actual trading going on, it’s all about making those connections.”

“Sir, I’ve been waiting here since yesterday morning, when the fair started. Why are you running so late, the fair ends at midnight tonight?” Naine inquired.

“It’s all part of the head game.” Gaspar said, tapping the side of his head. “My trade rivals will be thinking the exactly same thing. And the more they wonder, the more irritated they become, which is good for us. It’s all a part of the Plan.” Gaspar finished with a flourish, waving his hands in the air like he was talking about some religious experience. Then he laughed heartily and slapped Naine on the shoulders.

“Very clever, sir.” Naine said, obviously wondering how much truth was in what Gaspar had just said.

“Remember, my dear Niedanai, appearance counts for everything.” Gaspar said and looked at Naine’s skeptical face. “You’ll see.”

Gaspar’s suite was more of an apartment, with a huge living room and a luxurious bedroom. The suite was decorated in the latest Gallentean fashion, contrasting nicely with the somber but stylish Amarr fashion. Gaspar unloaded the cart robot in the living room and sent it rumbling back. Then he ushered Naine out of the room.

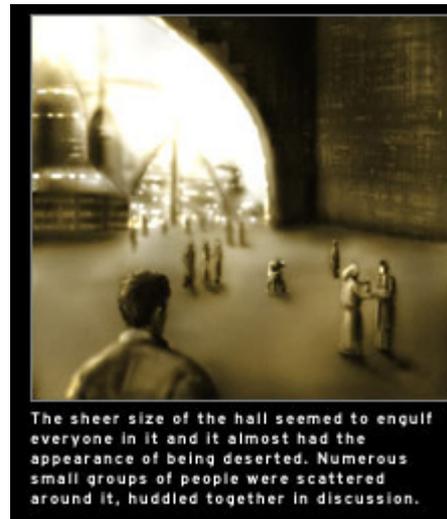
“I’ll have to make some small preparations before we go to the main hall. I’ll be with you in five.”

Once the door had closed on Naine, Gaspar in a quick motion belying his former easy manners opened his briefcase, revealing a small portable computer. He plugged the computer into the station’s public system. For the next few minutes his agile fingers tapped furiously at the keyboard, only stopping occasionally when he established contact with persons in other parts of the station and brief conversations ensued. Finally, he slapped the computer shut, locking it again down into his briefcase. Brushing down creases on his trousers, he then proceeded out into the corridor once more, where Naine was patiently waiting.

“Ready, sir?” Naine asked, the disdain in his voice over Gaspar’s apparent fussiness over his physical appearance barely visible.

“Ready for anything.” Gaspar replied cheerfully, again embracing his jovial charismatic behavior as they set out for the elevators to the main

The floor of the main hall was an unblemished white marble and the ceiling was a sparkling glass dome, through which the lush Korridi planet was clearly visible. The effect was quite magnificent, something the Amarrians excelled in portraying. The sheer size of the hall seemed to engulf everyone in it and it almost had the appearance of being deserted. Numerous small groups of people were scattered around it, huddled together in discussion. The majority of those present were Amarrians, with Caldari and Gallenteans being of about equal number. There were even a few Jovians visible, but understandably not a single Minmatar was in sight. Waiters scurried around carrying trays stacked with glasses filled with every kind of drink imaginable.



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A gaudily dressed Gallentean waddled towards Gaspar and Naine. The man was obese and reeked of greed.

"I knew you would come, Gaspar you bastard!" The man almost shrieked, turning a few heads in the vicinity. "Not sure if could stomach another round against Anton, eh? I'm telling you, this time you'll leave empty handed. Anton hasn't been idle in your absence, no he hasn't."

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the great Anton Ecumide. Master of shaky investments and lost deals." Gaspar replied, seemingly unruffled by Anton's rude manners.

"Don't you taunt me, Gaspar. It will only make you look all the more of a fool when I've stolen each and every one of your deals from under your nose." Anton said and grinned nastily. It didn't help his appearance a bit.

"Let me introduce you, Niedanai this is the esteemed entrepreneur Anton Ecumide. Anton, this is my diplomatic attaché Niedanai Naine." Gaspar said, continuing to ignore Anton's outbursts.

"I see yours sticks to you like a fly on shit. How appropriate. I kicked mine out the moment I arrived. I believe he's sulking in some corner composing a complaint to his superiors." Anton said nastily.

"Aw, I saw pity on the poor lad. I'm teaching him the ropes of inter-racial trading." Gaspar said. Anton replied, addressing Naine:

"Watch out, boy. Don't let the manipulative bastard screw too much with your mind. As for you, Gaspar, I hope you'll sleep well tonight." With that Anton stormed away, giving Gaspar an evil side-look as he passed him.

"I can sense you two share a lot of history." Naine said to Gaspar once Anton was out of earshot.

"Yes, our paths have crossed many times in the past. Old Anton never seems to get the breaks and he blames me for his bad fortune." Gaspar answered.

"And is he right? Are you to blame?" Naine inquired. Gaspar just smiled, clasped his hands behind his back and ventured further into the hall at a leisurely pace.

Gaspar set the course for a couple of richly dressed Amarrians standing by themselves. Once close enough to be heard Gaspar said:

"Governor Sed-Innad, you're looking older than ever." Naine jumped at the words, fearing the Amarrian would flare up at the insult. But when the older Amarrian just smiled he remembered that to the Amarrians looking old was a sign of maturity and stature. The younger Amarrian, probably still in his twenties, had even made obvious efforts to make himself look older than he actually was, thinning his hair and painting his face pale and gaunt. The older Amarrian, the one Gaspar had addressed as governor, was at least a century old. The two shook hands, they undoubtedly knew each other well.

"Gaspar Anoun." The governor said warmly. "So you turned up after all." The old man indicated the younger Amarrian standing beside him and continued:

"This is my nephew, Tarnak Nas-Innad. We're searching for a suitable position for him." The young man bowed a little to Gaspar.

"Of course." Gaspar said nonchalantly. "After all, next to despotism nepotism is the favorite past-time of the Amarrians, right? You guys never change."

"And neither do you, Gaspar. Always the witty one. One of these days your rude quips will become your bane." The governor replied, yet he didn't seem the least bit ruffled.

"Forgive me, my lord." Gaspar said. "Unfortunately Asslicking 101 wasn't on the curriculum at my school. Instead I had to learn such useless tasks as adding and subtracting. Such a pity." By now Naine was literally jumping from foot to foot in his anxiety, fearing the worst.

"Gentlemen, meet my diplomatic attaché, Niedanai Naine. He seems a little agitated at the moment." Gaspar said and turned to Naine. "What's the matter? You need to

use the little boys room?" Naine, noticing that the Amarrrians were still calm despite Gaspar's words, composed himself.

"No, sir. I'm fine. Don't mind me." He finally murmured. Gaspar turned back to governor Sed-Innad.

"How's the wheeling and dealing going?" The governor asked.

"I just got here. No time to screw anybody over yet." Gaspar answered jokingly.

"And the Upper Debyl deal?" The governor inquired, taking a sip from his glass.

"On schedule. It can proceed." Gaspar answered, giving Naine a glance. The governor stood silent for a minute, sipping his wine.

"So what's this I'm hearing about you trading in Caldari wares, Gaspar?" He finally asked.

"Pure coincidence. I happened upon this heap of excellent Caldari scanner systems a while ago. Dead cheap. You know I'm not scrupulous about what I sell. Or to whom." Gaspar answered.

"Well, lucky for you then. Scanner systems are always in demand. Anywhere." The governor said innocently.

"My thought exactly, governor." Gaspar said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to mingle a bit." The Amarrrians nodded their heads in farewell and Gaspar and Naine did the same. Then Gaspar set out for a group of Caldari standing near the main entrance. Naine took the opportunity to berate Gaspar.

"What you did was very dangerous, sir. The governor could easily have been offended and where would you stand then?" He said.

"Me and governor Sed-Innad go way back, Naine. He's as close to being a friend of mine as an Amarr Holder can be. Besides, I've told you, it pays to get people on the edge." Gaspar answered.

"I'm still not convinced of that, sir." Naine said sourly.

"Look, it's very simple." Gaspar explained. "Both the Amarrrians and the Caldari put a huge stock in maintaining their dignity and posture. If you crack that mask a little by unorthodox behavior you make them uneasy, unsure of the situation. Pierce that crack a bit more open and before long you have them eating out of your hand. And that, my dear Niedanai, is the whole idea."

"It will all be revealed in good time, my dear Niedanai. For now, let's just say that I'm playing the head game for the high stakes. It's all about keeping your adversaries occupied." Gaspar answered as they entered the elevator. Once the elevator's door had closed behind them Gaspar fetched a palm computer from his pocket. He frowned at it for a moment.

"It seems my palmer is out at the moment. Can I borrow yours for a second? I just have to send one simple message." Gaspar asked.

"Uh, sure. Here you go, sir." Naine handed Gaspar his palm computer. Gaspar operated it quickly and efficiently and finished before the elevator reached their floor. Nothing more was said before they came to the double-doors leading to Gaspar's suite. Gaspar spent some time staring at the doors like he was expecting them to open on their own. Finally the two of them entered the suite. Gaspar sat by his desk and once again opened his briefcase with the portable computer. He established a com link and briefly chatted with a Gallentean on the other end.

"Who was that?" Naine asked when Gaspar had closed his briefcase.

"That was my good friend Barridour. He's organizing a little something for me later tonight." Gaspar answered. Naine stood mulling things over for a while before he poured himself a glass of water from a jug on a side table.

"I wouldn't drink that if I was you." Gaspar said as Naine raised the glass to his lips.

"Eh? Why not?" Naine asked.

"Because there is a sleeping potion in there. It will put you to sleep for the rest of the night." Gaspar answered.

"How do you know?" Naine said, putting the glass down.

“Because the fool Anton Ecumide more or less blurted it out when we ran into him. And when I noticed that someone had fiddled with the lock on our door it was easy to figure out. But now, we must ready ourselves for the night. Don’t you have anything better to wear than that wrinkled suit?” Gaspar asked. Naine looked down on his suit.

“Uh, yeah. I’ve got a spare suit.” He answered.

“Good, why don’t you change into that and meet me here in 15 minutes?” Gaspar said.

“Very well, sir. But I can be ready in five.” Naine said.

“But I can’t, Mr. Naine. Fifteen minutes, ok?” Gaspar said. Once Naine was out of the room, Gaspar once more got his portable computer out of the briefcase and fired it up. First one to appear on his screen was governor Sed-Innad.

“Well?” Gaspar asked.

“He bought it. Double what we’d figured.” The governor said smiling. “And the Caldari?” He asked.

“They took the bait. Expect to haul them in later tonight.” Gaspar answered. “That only leaves our little deal...” He finished.

“Yes, of course. I’ll give you the confirmation later tonight. And the guards you asked for will be ready, as you requested.” The governor replied.

“Good, good. Then all is settled. See you tonight.” Gaspar said and cut off the link. He established another connection. This time a serene Jovian face appeared on the screen.

Naine was waiting patiently outside in the corridor when Gaspar left his suite some ten minutes later. Naine looked marginally better in a light gray suit, but still left a lot to be desired.

“Where are we going, sir?” Naine asked.

“Now, my dear Niedanai, I’m going to show you how real Gallenteans conduct their business.” Gaspar exclaimed. “Until now we’ve been playing by the business books of the Amarrian and the Caldari - boring conversation between somber men making somber deals that might earn their grandchildren a nickel. They’re always complimenting themselves how smart they are in their long term planning, but there’s no fun in it Niedanai, no fun in it at all. I mean look at them. They labor like ants around the clock, setting aside some measly sum so they can go on some lame space cruising when they’ve become too old and spent to work anymore. They’re spending their youth toiling away so they can have a bit of fun when they’re 150 years old. Too old to have any real fun, as I see it. Where’s the logic in that, I ask you? You know what their problem is?” Gaspar paused, obviously expecting some kind of an answer from Naine.

“Uh, I don’t know, sir. What’s the problem?” Naine ventured.

“They’re too fixed up on keeping work and leisure separate. To them, the two things don’t go together. But we Gallentean traders know that work and leisure go very well together, they’re just two sides of the same coin. Meaningful playing and playful working, that’s what I always say.” Gaspar finished his speech just as the two reached a large double-door at the end of a corridor.

“And now, Niedanai, I’ll show just what I mean.” With that Gaspar threw the doors open. Loud noise and bright lights engulfed Naine, battering his every sense. Behind the doors was a large room and at the moment it was filled with laughing, shouting people. There was a wild party going on. The attendants were mostly other Gallenteans, but a number of Amarrians and some Caldari were also to be seen.



Behind the doors was a large room and at the moment it was filled with laughing, shouting people. There was a wild party going on.

“What do you think?” Gaspar shouted over the din.

“I don’t know, sir. What’s going on?” Naine asked clearly bewildered.

“This is what I was organizing. This is playful work, or meaningful playing, which ever you prefer, in it’s purest form.” Gaspar said and then dived into the crowd.

Gaspar quickly got into his host gear, walking among the guests, shaking hands with many and sharing a brief chat with some. Naine trailed behind, trying to grasp the situation.

In one of the corners Gaspar came upon Anton Ecumide seated with couple of girls on each arm. The man was already well drunk. When he saw Gaspar he cackled loudly and shouted:

“Gaspar! I bet you’re wishing you were asleep right now because I stole the Upper Debyl system from right under your nose, just as I promised!” Anton laughed loudly, enjoying his victory to the fullest. Gaspar seemed a little taken aback.

“How did you know...?” He stammered. “Well, never mind. Say, Anton, I’ll buy it back from you. Whatever you paid plus 50% extra, that’s a hefty profit right there.” He said, looking hopeful.

“In your dreams. That system is mine. You’ll never get it!” Anton laughed again, even louder this time. Gaspar, dejected, walked away. Anton’s shrill laughter chasing his heavy steps. Naine followed Gaspar, wanting to comfort him but unsure how to go about it without embarrassing him even more. Once they were close to the entrance Gaspar whispered quietly to Naine:

“Can he see us?” Naine looked back, Anton was hidden from view by a happy throng of party-goers.

“No, the crowd is in the way.” Naine replied.

“Good.” Gaspar said and then he lifted his slumped shoulders and unwrinkled his saddened face. The old Gaspar was back again, jolly as always.

“Well, Naine. That went rather well, didn’t you think?” He said merrily. Naine felt his head spinning.

“But, sir. Anton just bought the system you were after.” He said.

“Yes, he did.” Gaspar said. “And do you know why I was after it?” He asked with a twinkle in his eye.

“Well, I guess because there’s something of value there.”

“No, the system is totally and utterly void of anything interesting or valuable. I was after it because I wanted Anton to buy it.” Gaspar said. Suddenly it dawned on Naine: “I see, sir. You knew that if Anton heard about your interest in the system, then he would become interested in it. So you deliberately started the rumor that you wanted to buy it. Very clever, sir. But from whom did Anton buy it? No! Don’t answer, let me guess. Governor Sed-Innad, right?”

“Well, the governor’s brother actually. But otherwise you’re correct in your assumptions, well done. You might have a future in politics after all.” Gaspar said. Naine beamed. Gaspar spotted governor Sed-Innad and his nephew. He waved them to come over. Then he leaned towards Naine and said:

“Meet me at my suite in one hour. I’ve got some business to discuss and then some hard partying to do.” Then Gaspar took Naine’s arm and led him to a sofa where two Gallentean beauties were seated. “Why don’t you in the meantime get on first name basis with my friends over here?” Gaspar whispered into Naine’s ear and steered him down into the sofa.

“Sir, are you sure about this?” Naine wailed in near panic as the two girls leaned into him on both sides.

“One hour, remember that!” Was all Gaspar shouted as he led the Amarrians away into the crowd.

An hour later a sweaty but happy Gaspar rounded the corner to his suite. It didn't surprise him all that much to see Naine already waiting in front of the door. His hair was tangled and his cloths disheveled.

"So, did you get on ok with the girls?" Gaspar asked him as he led them into his suite.

"They... they we're like animals!" Naine exclaimed, clearly still flustered from his encounter.

"Ooo! You lucky man!" Gaspar said smiling. The two men entered the living room. Two heavysset Amarrians were seated near the door. They stood up when Gaspar and Naine came in.

"Ah, gentlemen." Gaspar said, not the least surprised to see the two Amarrians there. Gaspar seated himself while the Amarrians planted themselves on either side of Naine.

Well, Naine. I'm afraid this is the end of the road for you." Gaspar signaled the Amarrians, which promptly pinned Naine's arms to his sides. Naine's face registered astonishment and fear in equal proportions.

"What's the meaning of this? I will let you know that I'm employee of the Foreign Ministry, they'll surely hear about this and then it's the end of the road for you, pal." Naine said, anger welling up in him.

"I'm afraid not. The Foreign Ministry has fired you and absolved themselves from any fate that may befall you. And your fate is in my hand." Gaspar said harshly. "I can see you're confused, Mr. Naine. I'll make things a bit clearer for you. I know that you're a Caldari agent." Naine licked his lips, but otherwise his face was impassive. For a minute neither man said a word, then Naine spoke:

"You come here all high and mighty, constantly making boisterous remarks and outrageous claims. But now you have gone too far. I'm afraid I cannot let these accusations go unanswered." He said, sounding confidant, but sweating profusely.

"Don't bother with the lies and denials." Gaspar said. He reached into his pocket and produced a small data-vis chip. He activated it and a pale hologram sprouted from the floor between the pair. Even if it was grainy and occasionally out of focus the men in the hologram were clearly the Gallentean diplomatic attaché Niedanai Naine and major Ati Mittuchi of CBD Corporation. The two were conversing in hushed tones in a bar or restaurant it seemed.

"Do you want me to turn the sound up?" Gaspar said. "It's pretty condemning, what with you spilling your guts about all sorts of interesting issues supposedly a secret. I have a whole stack of these holograms." Naine seemed to go weak at the knees, slumping like a drunken man. Then he contemplated for a moment trying to escape the steel grips of the hulking Amarrians, but thought better off it.

"Your fate is sealed, my dear Niedanai." Gaspar said, driving the facts home.

"What made you suspect me?" Naine finally moaned pathetically, seeing no point in trying to deny anything anymore. He was clearly crestfallen, his little world collapsing around him.

"Huh! You're more Caldari-like than many Caldari I know. You practically reek of being their spy." Gaspar answered. "All I needed was a confirmation and I got it earlier tonight from a Jovian contact I have. Do you know what I had to pay for a proof? Do you know what you're worth to the Jovians?" Gaspar taunted. Naine shook his head.

"A rock. A medium sized rock from Gallente Prime. Not a special rock at all, just... a rock. Don't you find that funny?" Naine was visibly shaking by now, his body hanging limp between the Amarrian strongmen. Gaspar continued:



“But then again I understand that is the standard price for a Caldari spy: a medium sized rock from Gallente Prime. Weird, don't you think? If you ask me I think the Jovians are conducting a little experiment. Are there more Caldari spies within the Gallente Federation than there are medium sized rocks on Gallente Prime? I don't know, maybe one day we'll have to go to the Jovian Empire to visit our ancestral planet.” Gaspar let out a short laugh at the thought.

“What are you going to do to me?” Naine whispered.

“I'm selling you to the Amarrians.” Gaspar said coldly. “Oh, don't worry, you'll be well cared for, you're going to one of their better slave

plantations. I gather the work is not so hard there once you get used to the heat. I hear they got a slave spokesman there, sort of like a union leader. I'm sure if you put the things I've taught you tonight to good use you can work your way up to it. And until then, remember, playful working. Take him away, boys.” The Amarrians started dragging Naine towards the door.

“Wait, wait!” Naine wailed. “Answer me just one question. How did the Caldari deal go?” Gaspar motioned the guards to halt. Then he withdrew the id-chip from his pocket and threw it at Naine's feet.

“That chip is a phony, Mr. Naine. Just like you.” Gaspar said. “It was all a ruse, a bit of a trickery by me and governor Sed-Innad. He got the Caldari to lower their price by 15%, I'll get a share of the profit and my own little deal involving Gallentean-made ship thrusters went through smoothly, what with all my rivals focusing on something entirely different. I guess major Mittuchi is quite pleased with himself at the moment for 'outbidding' my Caldari scanners, but I'm not so sure if his superiors will agree when they discover that I've never bought any scanners on Yria Base. That's what happens when they send amateur negotiators to do a real man's work. Goodbye, Mr. Naine.” The two guards dragged the whimpering man out of the suite.

Gaspar sat down at his desk, pouring himself a stiff drink and DNA drug tested it before sipping. He ran the events of the day through his head. The thruster deal alone netted a hefty 200% profit and his share of the Upper Debyl sale and the Caldari deal was not too shabby either. Firing up his portable computer he scanned his diary, making a few notes and reflecting upon those things next on the agenda. He established connection with the station management office.

“Wake me up at 7 am tomorrow.” He said to the receptionist, glancing at his timepiece. “And can you contact the docking bay and make them have my ship prepared at 8 am?”

“Yes, sir. Have a good night.” The receptionist answered. Gaspar leaned back in the chair, taking another sip.

‘Tomorrow its Hrokkur station for those sly Krusuals and their contraband goods. And the day after... Well, lets not waste today thinking too much about future days. I'll play it by the ear as always.’ Gaspar thought. Saluting himself in the mirror he drank the rest of the spirit and went to bed.

The Artifice Maker

The tall man moved slowly through the packed transit hall. His gaunt, eagle-nosed face registered total lack of interest in his surroundings, like he had seen the same or similar ones a thousand times in the past. His garments, cheap and somber, were identical to those worn by millions of migration workers, constantly on the move from one station to another in search of work. A small satchel was slung over his shoulder, seemingly holding the man's only possessions. At the back of his bare skull a crab-like cyber-ornament clung, its azure colored arms extending all the way to his temples.

The large transit hall was an irregularly shaped circle, with a glass dome overhead. The transit hall had been strategically positioned so that people arriving or leaving the station could gaze through the dome at the reddish planet below and the pale sun in the background. But like with so many small industrial stations in the empire's interior the almost total lack of maintenance had long since ruined the spectacular view, a greasy-brown film of dirt giving those below in the hall only a vague idea of the vista outside. The walls were covered with a once-colorful mural depicting an often-used theme in Amarrian wall paintings – scenes of the Emperor performing assorted heroic deeds. Here and there the mural was severed by an entryway to one of the dozen passages leading to and from the transit hall.

The large man headed towards the passage leading to the lower levels of the station. For a fraction of a second his darting eyes looked directly into the security camera located above the entryway. Then he disappeared down the passage, his face as impassive as when he stepped out of the shuttle fifteen minutes earlier.

The small room was illuminated solely by a two dozen monitors mounted into the back wall. Before them sat a tired looking officer, his heavy eyes scanning the screens before him. The picture on a screen in the middle had been frozen; a gaunt face with a patriarch nose filled the screen. In the far corner of the room a figure stood leaning on a cane, the glare of the monitors only managing to paint it in a ghost-like blue silhouette.

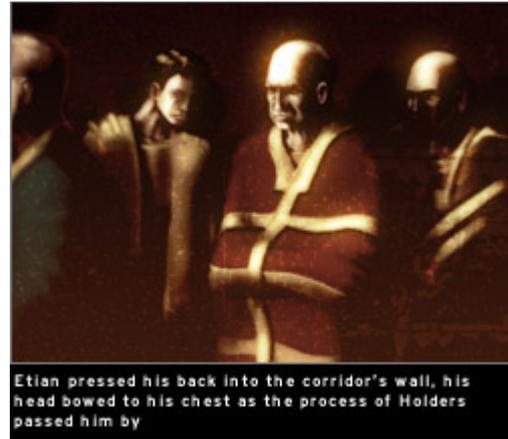
"He's here, sir. He's heading towards the lower levels." The officer said. "Do you wish me to have him apprehended?"

"No need for that yet." The shadowy figure answered. "We'll allow the fox to flush out some hens before moving in."



The large man headed towards the passage leading to the lower levels of the station. For a fraction of a second his darting eyes looked directly into the security camera located above the entryway.

Etian pressed his back into the corridor's wall, his head bowed to his chest as the process of Holders passed him by. Leading the process was the governor himself, his fine linen cloths embroidered with gold threads and platinum pearls. Out of the corner of his eyes Etian watched the others lined up against the wall, commoners like himself, stealing furtive glances at the majestic process as it passed. On some faces Etian could read envy or awe or odium, but each one also registered fear. For those men passing them were the most powerful men on Inis-Ilix station and each and every one of them had the power and the authority to dictate the destiny of any of these commoners that lined the walls in apparent reverence.



Once the Holders had disappeared round a corner Etian straightened his small but stocky body and continued on his way to the St. Helion Social Club, his favorite after-work retreat. As he walked he wondered what the Holders were doing down here on the lower levels, they seldom visited the levels of the commoners. The fact that the Holders had been traveling without any personal guards didn't come as a surprise to Etian; to the common Amarrian a Holder symbolized the grandeur of the Amarr Empire and to attack one was to attack the Empire itself. Such an act was unthinkable to the common Amarr man; the Empire, with its age-old traditions and structure, was the foundation of society itself. To every Amarrian life without the Empire was nothing but anarchy, chaos, dread and darkness.

Etian belonged to a group of skilled workers that traveled from one station to another in the Trigentia sector, offering their services to factories and foundries on the space stations. This custom, which is found almost nowhere else within the vast Amarr Empire, started several centuries ago when the sector was recently settled. At that time numerous minor Holders vied for power, each with his own ideas on how to run things. This resulted in a complex tapestry of rules and regulations regarding for instance education, travel permits and freedom of employment. With time this resulted in great economical diversity between the stations in the area, some prospered while others stagnated. When the emperor re-organized the administration in the sector a sole Holder was chosen to govern it as a whole, with governors on each station working under him. Soon thereafter the first migration workers appeared – people with some specific skills that only a handful of the stations could train and produce. This system worked well in the economical sense – the sector was prosperous and was fast becoming one of the most important industrial zones in the Amarr Empire. But this prosperity came at a price; the migration workers were better informed and enjoyed more liberties than other workers, let alone the slaves. They gobbled up dangerous ideas regarding their rights and stature, resulting in demonstrations and protests, sometimes violent. The Holders were facing a dilemma; they were anxious to keep social stirrings to the minimum, but were unsure how to accomplish this without breaking their golden eggs – the migration workers. While the Holders were searching for ways to keep things getting out of hand the migration workers were clamoring ever louder for greater rights and higher wages – on many stations in the Trigentia sector tension was rising to the boiling point. On many there had been bloody fights, sometimes resulting in the total expulsion of migration workers or severe restriction on their privileges. But there was one fabled one where the workers had succeeded...

To Etian this development was making him deeply anxious. Born into a strictly orthodox family and raised to respect the social order no matter what, these stirrings by his fellow workers seemed almost treasonous, even sacrilegious. Yet, Etian had to admit that this fight for increased rights seemed reasonable enough. His mind was torn between his duty to the state and loyalty to his co-workers; the responsibilities of his public life against the comfort of his private one; all these things sat heavily on Etian's mind as he made his way towards the club.

Inis-Ilix station had seen its share of unrest in recent months, only the week before two migration workers had been imprisoned for 'disturbing the peace', as the official statement read. Etian knew of several small cells operating, but they didn't amount to much – only a handful of the migration workers had truly succumbed to the fervor of power politics, most, like Etian, were doubtful. In their view this whole turbulence could be blamed on those impulsive fools on Turba.

St. Helion Social Club was opened some 30 years earlier by a religious order with the purpose of spreading the word of St. Helion the Virtuous among the lower classes. The order was at that time under the patronage of Lady Temal Kador, one of the Five Heirs, and through her influence the order opened vast number of similar clubs all over Kador's domains. But a few years later the order fell out of favor with the Heir and their clubs were sold. In the three decades of operation the club had slowly degenerated from a respectable, if boring, religious establishment into a grubby workers bar. The club was not big, one room crudely split in the middle by a bar. The interior was still covered with religious symbols and signs but St. Helion's order had long since left and the word of God had been replaced by the drunken drivel of the workers frequenting the place.

Etian took his usual seat in a back corner, scanning the familiar faces on the tables around him. He nurtured his drink for a few minutes in silence until a friend and a co-worker of his, Ryed Gambala, moved over to Etian's table. Most of the people in the room were migration workers like the two of them and many of them were fellow employees at RPI. Yet they were grouped in pairs or at most three at a table, occasionally a person moved from one table to another, this always spurred a person on that table to move on too. The station authorities had banned migration workers from grouping together – a group of more than 2 or 3 people together made the authorities extremely paranoid. So even while relaxing in a bar the migration workers took the precaution to give the impression of separation, in case of lurking informers or camera drones.

"So, Etian." Ryed said, half-whispering, glancing furtively around the bar before continuing: "Will you be coming?" Etian sighed, seeing where this conversation was leading. Ryed was in one of these newly formed cells that dreamt of the success their brethren at Turba had got.

"Look, Ryed, I don't think a public protest will get you anything but trouble. I mean, how many are you? Maybe a dozen. That's hardly a sufficient number to shake the foundations of this station's government. From what I hear, the Turba protesters numbered at least a few hundred. It's a doomed prospect, man." Etian said, exasperated. This wasn't the first time that Ryed brought this up, but each time Etian had turned him down. Much as he wanted to see some changes, Etian was much too clever and cautious to take part in any risky demonstration like the one Ryed's cell was planning.

"Where's there will there's a way. We may be few, but we're dedicated to the cause. Come on, it's now or never." Ryed continued chanting his slogans like in a religious fervor. It was clear to Etian that Ryed had become fanatical about this whole business: he was obviously never going to change his mind and, more

exasperatingly, never going to change the subject. Etian began looking for an excuse to bring the conversation to an end, when he saw her.

She walked into the bar with a light spring in her step that spoke of perfect body control and self-assurance. Etian only knew her first name: Deka. Like him she frequented the club, but apart from her name he knew nothing about her; this perceived mystique only made Etian all the more infatuated with her. Watching her from afar Etian's ample imagination had time and again played out one dramatic scenario after another where he was the hero in white and she the damsel in distress. Afterwards Etian always felt sick of himself; of the way he dawdled over his daydreams constantly, never having the courage to act any of them out in real life. And this time it was no different. While Ryed droned on in the background Etian once again let his mind slip into the comforting mode of daydreaming. The more he dreamt the more he drank and the more depressed he felt.

Staggering home some two hours later he wondered for the umpteenth time if he'd ever be man enough to go talk to her.

The factory of the Royal Precision Instruments, known as RPI, was situated on the lowest deck, like most of the factories on the station. Most of the year the permanent workers made micro-optics and fiber-conduits, but during the months of Domar and Nemar the workforce of RPI tripled as migration workers came in to make quantum clocks, using the volatile argon isotopes laboriously mined in a nearby asteroid field. In those two months the migration workers used up all the factory's supplies of the substance, which then took the company a whole year to restock.

The month of Domar was coming to an end. Etian, working through his hangover and cursing himself for drinking so excessively the night before, let his mind wander while performing his tedious work on the clock's escapement. It seemed to him like the whole RPI was seething, that his fellow migration workers were like a dormant volcano only waiting to erupt. Etian knew he was caught up in one of the rarest of social phenomena in the Amarr Empire; that of social uprising. Somehow this privilege didn't comfort him all that much. Overhearing snippets of conversations around him Etian learned that a big gathering was planned for tonight at St. Helion's Social Club. Etian decided to go, he couldn't tell why. Maybe it was out of curiosity, maybe to show solidarity, or maybe just to get yet another glimpse of her, Deka.

When Etian entered the social club it was already teeming with people. His usual table at the back was already occupied by loud-mouthed men in overalls, so he sat at a table closer to the center. A man was already sitting there, hunched with a cape hiding his features. There was no sign of Deka.

"Are you here for the demonstration?" The stranger asked, a pair of pale-blue eyes peering at him from under the hood of his cape. Etian felt strangely naked in front of that stare. Looking into those eyes set his head spinning and it took seconds before the question registered in his mind.

"I, uh... I don't know." He finally stammered. The stranger seemed a bit annoyed by his answer and Etian felt strangely compelled to please this man he'd never seen before.

"I came here to give my support to the cause." Etian said more forcefully, hoping that this vague answer would satisfy the man sitting opposite him without sounding as a commitment to do something foolish. The stranger stared at him for a few moments before speaking:

"I'm Fradis Ludono." He declared, staring intently at Etian as if to gauge his reaction. Again it took Etian a moment to get his mind around what the man had said. Then the name registered and Etian jumped. Fradis Ludono. The man from Turba. The man who led Turba's migration workers to a victory against the station's rulers. The

man who faced down the Holders of Turba and won for the workers a freedom to work and life as they chose. The man was a living legend, traveling from station to station to preach the word and support the people.

For several seconds the two men stared each other in the eye. Finally Etian managed to get his mind into gear:

“I’m Etian Subidam.” He said and extended his hand. Fradis gripped it firmly. Then he spoke:

“Etian Subidam, will you help me help you? Will you aid me in securing for you freedom from the tyrants of Inis-Ilix station?”

“I guess I do.” Etian stammered. At that moment he noticed Dekka sitting by the bar and suddenly Etian had flash of insight. His biggest weakness was his lack of self-confidence and what better way to alter that than to rub shoulders with none other than Fradis Ludono. If anything was going to work in bringing Etian some self-esteem this was it. And heck, with Fradis here this demonstration might not be as dicey as before.

“I will help you.” He said with fervor, the conviction clearly evident in his voice. Fradis seemed satisfied.

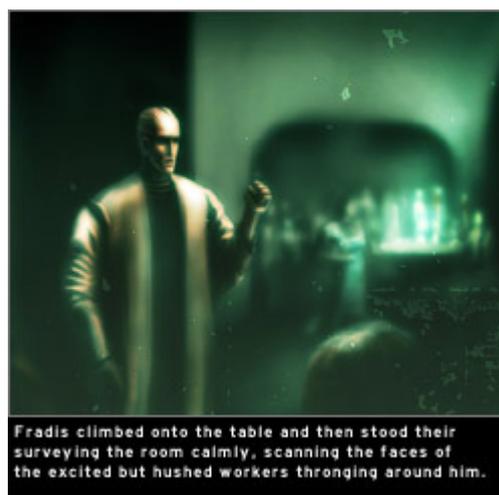
“Good.” He said. “I haven’t been here for long, but we must act as quickly as possible. If the authorities discover I’m here before we’re ready things could turn bad. From what I’ve heard there are already some cells operating in this area, so preparations should be easy.”

“It is true that there are a number of cells around.” Etian said. “But they don’t hold much sway. I’m afraid that most of the workers are a bit skeptical about this whole thing.” He finished almost apologetically, aware that not so long ago he had been one of those skeptics. Fradis didn’t seem at all daunted by this news.

“That’s because they haven’t heard the word yet.” He said with confidence. “We will show them what it means to be a real man.” With that Fradis removed his cape, revealing his bald head with its intricate implant at the back of the skull. If Etian had ever been in doubt if the man really was who he said he was that doubt was totally expelled now – the image of Fradis Ludono was almost as well known in these quarters as the portrait of the emperor himself. No sooner had Fradis removed his cape than people began pointing and whispering excitedly.

Fradis climbed onto the table and then stood there surveying the room calmly, scanning the faces of the excited but hushed workers thronging around him.

“Fellow migration workers.” He finally said, his sonorous voice carrying to the farthest corners of the room. “You all know me. And you know my background. So you shouldn’t guess why I’m here. In a way, I’m answering your call, for many of you have already laid the foundation for our glorious victory over the tyrants of this station that is soon to come.” The crowd was now hanging onto his every word.



“But I know many of you also have doubts in your hearts.” Fradis continued. “You doubt the righteousness of this deed. You doubt whether you are worthy of taking the power from those that took it from you so long ago. For you’ve been conditioned from birth to respect and fear those men that claim to be better than you. I say: cast those shackles of you!” Etian could see that Fradis was getting to the people, yet there were still those that were unconvinced. Etian suspected himself as being one of

them. Fradis sensed this all, he knew from experience that more was needed to convince them, or at least to persuade them join the fray. He continued:

“They have told you time and again that you’re not capable of governing yourself, that you’re too weak of mind. Their teachings have long since reached the core of your souls. I say: to free your soul you must forget those teachings. You must stop believing that you’re incompetent to rule yourself and start believing that a free mind can accomplish anything it wants!” Fradis was reaching a crescendo. The crowd was shouting encouragements, the majority already gleefully shouting their approval. Etian saw Ryed among them. To Etian the words Fradis spoke were much more radical than those he’d heard previously and that frightened him. Ryed and his gang had only been advocating a demonstration for higher wages and more rights, but Fradis’ words seemed to imply a complete overthrow of the government of the station. Yet Etian, for all his misgivings, couldn’t help but be moved by the passion of Fradis and the excitement of the crowd.

Maybe you don’t believe me when I say that you’re all conditioned.” Fradis shouted to the frenzied crowd. “But let us all look at one example. Name me a poem that we all know, a poem that is taught to all children at an early age. A poem that supposedly shows that man should not try to usurp God but put their faith in him, but which in reality describes the way the upper classes trample on the ignorant commoners. Yes, you know what poem I’m talking about. You all know it by heart. Why don’t we recite it together so your eyes can be opened to just one of the cunning ways the Holders have put their shackles on your souls.” And Fradis began chanting, many in the crowd joining in:

‘I raised my head and saw this stair;
A solid structure made of stone,
Reaching high into the air.
I looked around, I stood alone.
This muddy field held no appeal;
Full of care I neared the base;
Sure enough, the stair was real.
What hidden dangers might I face
Climbing up this endless stair?
I knew not, nor ever could
For always gazed in unknown fear
Of future bright or bleak or good;
‘Tis matters not when control lack;
The fate of man in other’s hands.
But then again this skybound track
Might lead me to the promised lands.’

“What does this first verse tell us?” Fradis asked. He waited a second before continuing: “It tells us that we all have a desire to govern our own live, that this desire is ingrained in every one of us and that we dream of becoming our own masters.” He then said, answering his own question. Then he continued:

‘With eager heart and earnest face,
I set out to seek this exulted place.
And once I had the first flight won
I felt as the climb was halfway done.
Soon I learned to stride the stair
With ease and thus became aware
Of my surroundings for the first time,
Around me saw this view sublime.

Fresh air caressed my cheek and jowl,
Below me saw a friendly fowl.
With joy I climbed and noticed much;
Happy games and wonders such.
I knew this world belonged to me
Now at last that I was free.
'Why, arts and music; life and joys;
And let's make all those science toys.'

"And here, like a glimpse into paradise, we're given a taste of what self-government might achieve." Fradis declared. "But dangers lurk, as the next verse tells us:"

'Finally I felt my powers could
Choose my fate as I saw fit;
This world I owned and understood,
It was made for my own benefit.
When I slept I dreamt sweet dreams
Of things to come I knew where true.
Once I'd reach the top my schemes
To make this world all anew
Should at last all bear fruit.
But this sound beneath my soles,
Restless, endless, nagging, crude,
Rasped my soul and raped my goals.
The stair behind me slowly fell,
Erased forever with a tired sigh.
Empty steps with tales to tell
Raced towards me in a silent cry.'

"Here, we're told that our greed and our stupidity will always come back to haunt us. That only those better than us are capable of ruling wisely enough to keep us from destroying ourselves. And the last verse tells us the ultimate price our pride may have to pay if we don't stay in our place:"

'Now I realized this frail old track
Chased me up with no way back.
Faster, faster, I fled in dread;
My every effort spent, I sped
Upwards, fearing death and drop,
When suddenly I reached the top.
Before me stood this man in white.
Slipping still, in dismay I cried:
"Old man, help me on my feet!"
"Poor victim of your filthy greed,
Learn the humble way," he said.
And spat and kicked me in the head.
I fell and felt my mind go blank.
I hit the ground, in mud I sank.
'Who am I and where is here?'
I raised my head and saw this stair.'

"I say to you: is this the world we want to live in? Are we to accept that we're not good enough to govern our own lives?" Fradis was whipping the crowd into a frenzy and Etian felt himself swept into this vortex of emotions and passions, shouting

himself hoarse, for the first time feeling enraged and disgusted with the way the authorities had been playing him like a fool. 'No more!' echoed through his mind and his thoughts were being shouted throughout the room. Fradis raised his hands, waiting for the room to calm down before giving his final verdict, in almost total silence:

"I say, my brothers and sisters: they may govern the way we live, but we can still govern the way we die and if there is any cause worth dying for, then this is it. I have put myself at risk a thousand times for this cause; I have faced death a hundred times; and I've come here tonight to tell you that I will continue to do so until a day will come when we can live our lives as we please with no-one trying to oppress us or kill us." Etian was sold, as was the whole room. If Fradis had ordered it Etian was sure that the whole crowd would march to the upper levels this very minute to die by his side. But Fradis ordered no such thing. Instead he said:

"This is only the first step. We must now prepare ourselves, but we must move quickly before suspicion arises." He stepped down from the table and was immediately surrounded by people asking him questions or simply touching him in awe. Suddenly Etian noticed that Deka had slipped beside him.

"I saw you talking to him earlier." She said quietly, keeping her eyes on the man in question.

"You noticed that?" Was all Etian could utter.

"I've also noticed you staring at me in the past." She said amusingly.

"Ah..." Etian felt himself blush.

"What did you two talk about?" Deka asked, looking at Etian for the first time. He had to muster all his willpower to refrain from shuffling his feet. She was so forward!

"We talked about the upcoming demonstration." He finally answered.

"Really? Are you planning it with him?" She probed.

"I'm helping him out." Etian said evasively.

By now they had moved over to a nearby table and sat down. Etian was cursing himself for lying to her. 'But I didn't exactly lie,' he thought. 'I only omitted some of the truth,' he then justified. But he also knew that only through his supposed association with Ludono did he have enough self-confidence to stay there talking casually with the woman of his dreams. 'I'm now eternally committed to this demonstration,' he reflected gloomily. 'Or should I say revolt? That seems to more to the mark.'

Fradis dispersed the crowd a little later, wisely remarking that such a large gathering was bound to draw notice sooner or later. Etian tried not to look too crestfallen when Deka left, at least he had her promise to meet again to sustain him. Etian was just about to dive into some heavy drinking to sooth his nerves when Fradis laid his hand on his shoulder.

"We've got some planning to do." He said. Etian saw Ryed standing behind Fradis, grinning like a maniac in the company of some of his mates. 'Sink or swim,' Etian thought, joining his fellow conspirators into a back room.

The spacious office overlooked a pleasant little garden, a rare sight on any space station. The man leaned on his cane, looking out over his garden of retreat. Behind him stood a small man clad in a blue and black security uniform.



"What did you two talk about?" Deka asked, looking at Etian for the first time.

"Has he made contact yet?" The man with the cane asked.

"Yes, sir." The small man replied. "Last night in..." he glanced at his notes. "St. Helion's Social Club."

"Good, good. Keep a tab on things. He should move soon, if I'm not mistaken."

"Yes, sir. Is that all, sir?"

"For now, just remember to clear out Hangar 8."

"Yes, sir."

The old furnace could still be turned up for heat, making the small alcove cozy and warm. Etian lay on the divan going over the events of the last couple of days in his mind. He was certain that nothing he had experienced before came close. Not only was he in the midst of some sinister plot to uproot the government, but here, on this very divan, lay the woman of his dreams snuggled up against him sleeping soundly.

She had told him her life story, more or less. Her ancestors were of the lowest class of the commoners, just above slaves. Her large family was still eking their living out as the poorest of the poor. But she had managed to get out, quite an accomplishment by the standards of the empire. But he hadn't managed to get her to tell him what she did for a living.

And now the woman in question was stirring in his arms, slowly returning to the waking world.

"Good morning." Etian said cheerfully. Deka yawned, bleary eyed.

"Mornin'" She muttered, rubbing her eyes. Etian suddenly felt the urge to probe deeper into her life:

"Say, why don't you have to worry about going to your job? I know you didn't go yesterday and you don't seem to be worried for today?" He inquired, hoping to get a glimpse into what she did for a living. Deka only muttered something under her breath.

"You're not unemployed are you?" Etian asked teasingly.

"Certainly not!" She snapped, sitting bolt uprights. "If I didn't have a job I would be forced to go back to my family, I'd rather die." She said with a feeling. Etian was a bit taken aback by her outburst, frightful that it might affect their budding relationship.

"I'm sorry, it just looked to me like you didn't mind your job too well." He said apologetically.

"I mind it very well, thank you." Deka said, still irritable. "My job and my status means everything to me."

"So you'd do anything to keep your job?" Etian asked, racking his brain for what this job of hers might be.

"Of course, it's all I've got." Deka replied. Etian was a little hurt by this remark, but kept quiet. He rose from the divan ensconced between the furnace and the wall and started dressing.

"Why do we have to meet here instead of your apartment?" Deka asked.

"Because my apartment is maybe being watched. Fradis pointed that out to me. This is safer. No-one but you and me know about this place. Nobody comes down here anymore after the new reactor was opened. We're secure here. I've even stocked this place full with food, we could hide here for ages." Etian answered, pulling on his boots. "Come on, we've got a big day ahead of us." He said eagerly, throwing Deka's cloths to her.

The demonstrators came trickling into the back-alley storage area. Etian had left Deka at the entrance earlier – they planned to meet after the demonstration, although both of them knew that things were likely to change dramatically in the next few hours, making any such plans hollow. Etian looked around him, the demonstrators were close to one hundred – young and eager. Most of them male; most only in their early twenties. As could be expected trepidation and uncertainty battled with

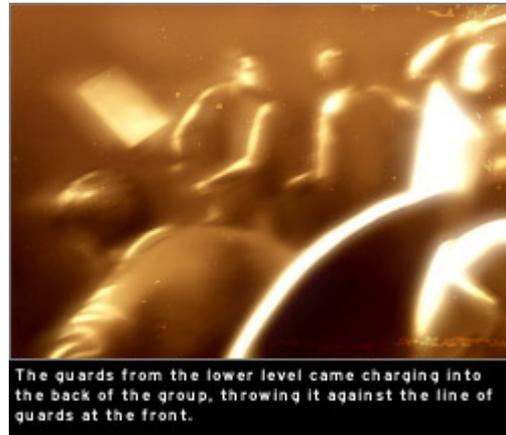
anticipation and exhilaration on their faces as they unfurled their banners and hid their long knives in their jackets. At last Fradis stepped up and made his last speech before they'd march.

"Remember our aim, people. We will march to level 2 where the governor's quarters are and demand our rightful share in the government of this station. We will not resort to violence unless absolutely necessary – we can talk to the guards, they will understand our cause and maybe join us. If things get tough you will follow your group leaders to the designated rally point, where we will re-group and re-organize. Now lets move!"

The march had been carefully stage-managed, the mob was grouped into small groups of 10 people, with one person responsible for their movements and coordination. Etian was one of the group leaders, his group was the third from the last. Fradis marched with the last group, egging people on. As soon as the demonstrators were out on the street they started waiving their banners and chanting their slogans:

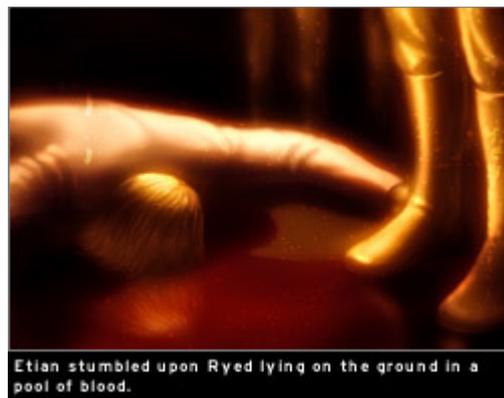
"Power to the People!"
"Down with Tyranny!"
"Out with the Old, In with the New!"

The procession slowly weaved its way towards the upper levels, in every street and at every corner they were met with astonished onlookers. Some shouted jeers or obscenities, other shouted encouragement and a few even joined in the march, swelling the number to well over hundred.



Then they turned into the street leading up to the 4th level. It was empty. On they marched, their shouts echoing on the empty street, putting fright into some of them, their shouts growing fainter. At the end of the street they met a line of security guards blocking the street. The foremost groups happily marched towards them, expecting them to open up before them. Etian became apprehensive – he looked back and noticed that another group of heavily armed security guards were advancing up the street towards them. The front of the march now met the barricade of guards – they didn't budge. Tension was rising, some were fiddling with the sleeves on their jackets fingering their knives. Etian could easily see where this was heading. He sought out Fradis, but the tall man was nowhere visible. Others in the group were noticing the absence of their leader. Fear set in.

Within a few minutes the whole scene had boiled into a bloody battlefield. The guards from the lower level came charging into the back of the group, throwing it against the line of guards at the front. Knives flashed, stun-guns barked and electro-bats hummed. Blood flowed freely. Etian, trying to stay out of reach of the rushing security guards stumbled upon Ryed lying on the ground in a pool of blood; his face turning white and his eyes dim as the blood left his



body. Etian cradled his head for a second, watching the last twinkle of life leave Ryed's eyes, before a guard charged into him and slammed him to the ground. Etian saw red.

Half an hour later Etian stumbled into the darkened interior of the St. Helion Social Club. His cloths were ripped, his hands were bloody and he had only a vague idea of how he got here. Sitting in a chair he tried to gather his thoughts in his head. He fetched a bottle from the bar and sat down again, gulping down a glass of alcohol. Everything was in shambles; the demonstration had been brutally brought down by the security forces, that much was clear. Etian fumbled in his pocket for the piece of paper that had sent his mind into a twirl when he took it from the dead fingers of a security officer he ran into. The paper, blood-smeared and torn, still clearly showed the route marked on the small station map, ending in a X. X marks the spot. Hangar 8. The rally point of the demonstration. Hangar 8. Where, according to this map, a bunch of security guards were patiently waiting for the few stragglers that had survived the carnage on the level 4 ramp.

Etian saw it all clearly now – how he and his fellow migration workers had been set up by the crafty, charismatic Fradis Ludono. How they had been played like fools and then led to the slaughter like pigs. It all seemed so obvious now, in hindsight, always the worst of sights. Etian looked up, the image of his friend Ryed dying filling his vision. The memory of the silly yet affable Ryed welled up, before he caught the rebellious fervor, before all this... madness. Tears welled up in Etian's eyes. He brushed them away, his eyes focusing on a quotation from the Scriptures hanging on the wall opposite him, a relic of the Order of St. Helion:

When the ears hear only,
The mouth shouting.
And the eyes see only,
The fingers broken.
The world has turned,
And God has gone.
Left us with fond memories,
Of sweet life without pain.

-- Apocalypse Verse 8:18

'How fitting this prophetic verse is.' Etian thought. 'Now all that is left is to hide. Hide forever.' And Etian got up and left the club for good.

The tinkle of the small water fountain was the only sound heard. The old man with the cane was sitting pleasantly on a bench, while a small security officer hovered nearby.

"According to the list provided by Ludono we've got everyone except one, sir." The officer was saying. "If I may say so, sir, it was a masterly plan. The migration workers haven't shown as good a behavior as now for ages; they've learnt their lesson."

"I can not take the credit for Fradis Ludono all by myself." The old man said, tapping his cane on the pebbled ground. "This is a joint operation of all the security chiefs in the Trigentia-sector. The Turba set-up succeeded beautifully and the creation of this rebel leader Ludono was a masterstroke, I must say," the old man said with self-satisfaction. "And the fact that we've managed to keep it secret even from our own security forces. Even they think there's a dangerous rebel leader on the loose." The old man chuckled.

“Well, sir. Then everything seems to be in order. Except, there’s still the question of this fellow Etian Subidam. We can’t find him. Shall we intensify our search, sir?”

“There’s no need for that. I’ve already contacted a bounty hunter to find him and kill him.”

“Excellent idea, sir. May I inquire who he is, sir?”

“It’s a she actually. Goes by the name of Deka Nuros. Very reliable. Very efficient. She will tie up any loose ends no doubt, you know how I hate them.”

“That’s excellent, sir.”

Forsaken Ruins

E8-YS9 Solar System, EL8Z-M Constellation, Immensea Region
20.01.106 - 05:41 EVT



Failure always begets reflection, and Mattias found himself asking the same question over and over again:

How could it have come to this?

He stared in crushed disbelief at the rippling translucent inner membrane of the warp tunnel, watching the planets and moons of the E8-YS9 system shoot past his ship. The Blackbird-class cruiser at his command was hurtling through the tunnel at hundreds of times the speed of light. Mattias was amazed the battered vessel was still capable of sustaining this speed without breaking apart.

We were so close to killing him, he thought. So very, very close.

The tragedy would not be in his own death, but in the fact that his prey would continue to live out its wretched, despicable existence. For Mattias and the team of loyal bounty hunters that he had dedicated his life to, this was the ultimate failure. They had lost the bounty, were about to lose their lives, and worst of all, lost an opportunity to do some good in a galaxy controlled by greed and evil above all else.

“Do you believe in God, Mattias?” asked the voice of his enemy. Mattias cursed his own misfortune and refused to answer.

“And what of the Amarr and Minmatar comrades that you are leading to death?” the wicked voice sneered. “Are they believers in an afterlife?”

In an instant, Mattias thought of the entire history of the two outstanding bounty hunters—and great friends—whose lives were in as much peril as his own. Kirlana was an Amarr by birth, but had rebelled against her lavish upbringing and become ashamed of her cultural roots. She renounced her family name and turned her back on the fortune that would have been hers by birthright. The only “possession” she took with her was Matuno, the Brutor slave that had looked after her since childhood.

She transformed him into an independent, Tempest-class battleship captain. Now, he answered to no one. But he would never forget those he was beholden to.

Forever grateful for being set free of Amarrian bondage, Matuno found himself unable to leave Kirlana's side, and together they sought greater purpose in life. After months of wandering Empire space, fate would introduce them to Mattias Kakkichi. Inspired by his passion for truth and justice, they readily joined his self-appointed mission: To become the arm of justice where the laws of Empire space could not reach. The money received from collected bounties was unimportant to them. The real reward was the righted wrong, accomplished through the kill itself. Watching evil succumb to the thunder of guns filled each of their souls with delicious satisfaction. No single feeling was more powerful than knowing that an injustice had been avenged. But on this day, the odds of lethal misfortune for pursuing such a risky profession finally caught up with them.

Mattias, Kirlana, and Matuno were fleeing from the scene of an assassination attempt on Trald Vukenda, the leader of the infamous Angel Cartel and the highest profile target they had ever hunted. The operation had gone horribly wrong. Within sight of their prey, the enemy surprised the bounty hunters with reinforcements, and they suddenly found themselves greatly outnumbered. Their ships were punished almost to the breaking point, and they were lucky to have escaped into warp. But there were only two jumpgates leading out of the system, and Trald already knew which one the bounty hunters were running towards. Both exits were already blockaded by Angel Cartel ships.

"I'm going to nail your self-righteous corpse to that jumpgate, Mattias," snarled Trald. "As a reminder to others about the perils in pursuing delusional moral obligations."

The hatred that Mattias felt swelling in his heart was powerful. He forced himself to suppress his anger and focus on trying to find a way to keep his good friends alive. They would be emerging from warp in just a few moments.

"Kirlana, Matuno...I'm sorry I got the both of you into this, but I'm not ready to say goodbye just yet." Mattias willed the camera drones orbiting his ship to zoom out so he could see all three ships traveling inside the warp tunnel. Kirlana's Omen-class cruiser was in the worst condition of them, venting plasma from a rupture in the hull plating alongside one of the ship's engines.

"Standing by," said Kirlana. Her voice was terse, and filled with fear.

"At your service," said the deep voice of Matuno, who had not known fear since the day Kirlana set him free. Their ships were already beginning to decelerate.

"We're only going to get one shot at this, so pay attention." Mattias was thinking quickly. "When the warp engines quit, Kirlana, point your bow at the nearest object you can warp towards and get out...Matuno, we have to give her enough time to get aligned, so fire up your sensor boosters as soon as you're able to and concentrate fire on anything that tries to cut her off. I'm going to target link with your ship to assist your artillery tracking and target jam anything that tries to close in..." The warp tunnel



surrounding them had just about disappeared, and the jumpgate was coming into view. “Matuno, as soon as she's out, warp yourself out of there, anywhere you can...”

Both of them started to protest at the same time. “Mattias, what about you—“

“Go, damnit! Go! Go! Go!” The warp core disappeared, and the Blackbird's engines switched to impulse power. The ship's threat detectors registered danger immediately. Mattias counted at least 4 ships, and saw the unmistakable profile of a deadly Arch Angel Warlord floating directly above the jumpgate. An icy lead ball formed in his stomach. He was well within range of the Warlord's most powerful cannons, and three Arch Angel Scout cruisers were speeding directly towards them. Mattias was certain that the Scouts were equipped with warp scramblers.

“Kirlana! Go!” Plasma trailed behind the Omen as it pitched upwards and turned away from the jumpgate. The first spread of Arch Angel heavy missiles began coursing towards them. The cruiser made painstakingly slow course adjustments to align itself perfectly with the warp tunnel projected in front of it. The ship accelerated and vanished just in time. Missile exhaust plumes crisscrossed each other at the exact spot in space where the Omen was just a fraction of a second earlier. One away. Right on queue, the Blackbird's sophisticated electronics systems established targeting locks on the three incoming Arch Angel Scout cruisers. Mattias linked with the weapons system onboard Matuno's Tempest, feeding it telemetry. The enormous 1400mm artillery turrets spread along the battleship's hull began tracking in unison. The Arch Angel Scouts unleashed a second spread of heavy missiles towards them.

“Matuno, go!” Mattias could see missile plumes from the Warlord extending towards them now as well. The Tempest's portside seemed to explode as the 1400mm artillery pieces unloaded. The shells slammed into the lead Arch Angel a split second later, nearly breaking the enemy cruiser's spine on the first salvo. Mattias willed his shield hardeners online and target jammed the second Scout. He simultaneously launched a missile volley of his own towards the crippled Arch Angel. “Warp now now now!” Mattias screamed in his mind at Matuno, inadvertently gulping down some of the ectoplasm inside of his pod.

Mattias could see the massive Tempest slowly swing its bow around in the same direction that Kirlana had warped towards. A half second before the detonation of the first incoming missile, a bluish-white aura engulfed the goliath battleship as Matuno activated his own shield hardeners. Mattias counted off eight devastating explosions as the Warlord's cruise missiles slammed into the Tempest, throwing it off course and ripping enormous gashes into the hull. The shockwaves expanding from the explosion sites crashed into the Blackbird, tearing through its shields and punching through the last of the ship's armor. The Tempest was violently spewing plasma and debris directly into space now, and a third Arch Angel missile spread was already on its way as Matuno desperately tried to coax his crippled battleship into warp.

The lead Arch Angel Scout exploded just as Trald's fleet arrived. Mattias activated one last blistering burst of signal-scrambling electronic noise towards the third Arch Angel Scout—now just 12 kilometers away—before randomly selecting a planet on his navigation list and activating the warp drive. Mattias thought he saw a flash erupt from the direction of the Warlord a half-second before the Blackbird's computer registered near-catastrophic hull breaches all over his ship. It was such a powerful impact that Mattias swore he could actually feel the shells slam into the hull from inside his pod.

That's it, thought Mattias. This is how it finally ends.

The Blackbird's thrusters were still trying to correct the ship's course from the devastating impact. The first spread of cruise missiles from Trald's ship began arcing towards it.

"My regards to hell's keeper, Mattias," said Trald. "Good bye."

Mattias rotated the camera drones around and focused them on the ship of his enemy. He always told himself that when the time came, he would stare death in the eyes, and take the hatred for his enemy to eternity. Severing the communication link between himself and Trald, he allowed his mind to let go of the ship's controls, and waited for the inevitable to consume him.

But instead of greeting death, he saw the image of Trald's Seraphim-class battleship yanked away as the Blackbird miraculously accelerated into warp. Mattias nearly swallowed more of the pod's ectoplasm, and had to make a concerted effort to control his breathing through the nose tubes. For the time being, he had survived, and the subsiding adrenaline rush from his near-death experience nearly left him incapacitated with nausea. The ship's vital signs projected a grim image onto his mind's vision:

Shields: 8% and rising.
Armor: 0%
Structure: 4%
Capacitor: 2% and rising.

Come to your senses, Mattias thought. Think. The capacitor was almost completely drained. Wherever it was that he set course for, his ship would come up well short of the target destination.

"Mattias, check in." Matuno had made it out! I need to be strong here, he thought.

"Roger that, Matuno, still alive. Are you with Kirlana?" The Blackbird was decelerating from warp. He was beginning to get his shaking under control.

"I'm here with him, Mattias," she answered. "We're in orbit around the 5th planet in the system. Hull and armor levels are negligible, diagnostics are red across the board."

"Must be that lousy Amarr engineering." It was a half-hearted attempt to relieve some of the tension with humor. Mattias sensed it didn't work, and the Blackbird was nearly out of the warp tunnel. "Make sure you keep moving, and warp to my location as soon as your capacitor will let you." Mattias checked his weapons inventory: no extra missiles other than what was already loaded in the launchers, and 34 total antimatter charges for the Blackbird's 250mm railguns. Mattias grimaced underneath the mask covering his eyes. "How are you two on ammo?"

"A dozen fourteen-hundred shells and a handful of six-fifty rounds, no missiles," replied Matuno.

"Radio crystals loaded, multi-frequencies in the hold, bingo missiles," answered Kirlana.

Great, thought Mattias. Here's where I come up with something brilliant to get us out of this. The situation could not possibly be any worse. His fleet would not survive another engagement with Angel Cartel forces, or any other adversaries for that matter. Some said that Trald Vukenda was the most powerful man in all of unregulated space. Whether or not that was true was debatable, depending on which

pirate you asked. But they would all agree that Trald was definitely the most powerful man in this region of space. As the head of the most notorious pirate organization in existence, it was well within his means to seal off entire systems to prevent anything from coming in or leaving. This space, and everything in it, belonged to the Angel Cartel. Mattias knew that the longer they stayed here, the tighter the noose around their necks became.

In the bounty hunting profession, lofty ambitions bear enormous risks. Mattias was the one being hunted now, and he had placed the lives of the people he cared for most in great danger. Why was doing the right thing always so damn difficult, he asked himself. Why is it that so few of us find the courage to fight for the unpunished injustices of our time? Mattias focused the drone cameras on the Blackbird, inspecting the massive gashes in its hull. Judging from the metallic carnage, he estimated that sections of at least 6 decks were now exposed directly to space. Somewhere beneath where he was sitting, hundreds of crewmembers were sealing off compartments, fighting electrical fires and desperately struggling to keep his ship's vital systems functioning. How many of them died because of this, he wondered. As the captain of the ship, he was sealed inside a pod made of an ultra-strong, Jovian-manufactured alloy and neurologically connected to the Blackbird's systems. Inside of it, so long as the ship was intact, the captain was immune from harm. It was the Jovians who had introduced this remarkable innovation, and it had changed the face of naval warfare forever.

Mattias began contemplating the Jovians and their technology. As spectacular as the pod was, it was also emblematic of the traits that defined the entire Jovian race: hyper-intelligent, but utterly and completely numb to human emotion. Modern day starships are massive and incomprehensibly complex. Before the pod, there were so many points of failure between a captain's decision and the execution of his orders. The ability to create a direct neurological connection between a human mind and a ship's systems reduced those points of failure to zero. Commanding a starship was now a natural extension of the mind's will. All a captain needed was to just think about what he wanted his ship to do, and it was done.

To Mattias, it was all so impersonal. Because of the technology, a captain could skipper numerous ships over the course of a lifetime without ever meeting a single crewmember from any of them. Mattias was one of the few who made an effort to meet at least some. It seemed like the least he could do in exchange for their unquestioning faith in his abilities, and their trust in him to keep them alive.

As the Blackbird's warp drives shut down, Mattias expected to find himself surrounded with the vast expanse of nothingness that exists between celestial objects within solar systems. Instead, he saw that the ship had exited the warp tunnel just 40 kilometers from the surface of a colossal rock formation the size of a mountain range. It was surrounded by several small asteroid fields, and looked almost serene against the greenish-black nebula backdrop of the E8-YS9 solar system. Mattias was no geologist, and was at a complete loss to explain how such a bizarre formation could have formed. He willed the Blackbird to cruise towards it, contemplating the idea of using the range as a place to hide from the Arch Angels.

"Mattias, we are en route to your destination," said Matuno. "Be advised, Arch Angels warped to our location just as we got aligned."

"You guys aren't going to believe what I just found," Mattias answered. The formation was growing larger as his cruiser approached. The Blackbird's avionics registered the arrival the Omen and Tempest.

"Whoa..." breathed Kirlana. "Is this formation mapped?"

"Negative, but it does appear on scanner, which rules out using it as a place to hide," said Mattias.

"I'm not sure the Angels have ever been here," said Matuno. "No debris, no containers, no mining equipment...no signs of activity anywhere along the range."

Mattias rotated the view 180 degrees away from the rocks and watched as his two comrades pulled their battered vessels alongside of his own. The Omen was about the same size as his Blackbird, but the Tempest was much larger than the two of them combined, with more than twice the number of crew onboard. Amazing that the three of us are still in one piece, thought Mattias. The three ships were cruising above the rocks, still trailing long jets of fire and plasma behind them.

"No, something was definitely here," interrupted Kirlana. "Look closer at those pinnacles directly beneath us...can you see that flashing?"

Mattias swung the camera downwards and zoomed in closer. Yes, there it is. The sides of some rock pinnacles jutting outwards from the formation were being illuminated intermittently. He slowed down the Blackbird's speed almost to a stop and altered course just a few degrees to try and find the source of the light.

"There...it's a strobe or beacon of some kind. Actually...that looks like an escape pod or something," said Kirlana.

Mattias zoomed the cameras in even further and was finally able to focus on the image. It was about 5 meters in length, with a polished metallic black exterior. One end was lodged against the base of the pinnacle, and the other had the flashing strobe light. Mattias did not recognize the object, and it was still invisible to his ship's sensors.

"Matuno, do you still have salvage drones onboard?"

"Yes, deploying now." Mattias watched as a tiny drone began orbiting the Tempest. Salvage drones were not available anywhere within Empire space. Matuno had found this one among the wreckage of a pirate convoy that he had destroyed. For all of its risks, bounty hunting occasionally yielded some rare finds. Mega-corporations weren't the only organizations with talented engineers, and pirates were more than capable of generating their own prototype technology. "I can't lock the object, my sensors think that it's physically part of the formation's surface. The drone might be able to make the distinction, if I can get it close enough."

The drone descended from the Tempest to near the formation's surface. It started flying small racetrack circles around the pinnacle area. After several orbits, it abruptly stopped and changed direction, heading directly towards the mysterious object.

"The drone acquired it. Stand by for extraction," announced Matuno. The drone came to a stop and dropped its four, tentacle-like arms onto the surface, gently drawing them around the object. The arms appeared to struggle a little bit, and then it came free amidst a plume of dust and pebbles. Within a few moments, the drone and its mysterious cargo were onboard the Tempest.

For a few moments, there was silence.

"Hold...hold on..." Mattias could feel his eyebrows rise slightly. Not like him to get flustered at anything, he thought.

"This is no pod," Matuno started. "It's a casket of some sort. There are no neurolinks or traces of ectoplasm inside. The beacons were affixed to the external structure intentionally, and there is an engraving on the outside that reads 'FORMATOR IMMENSEA'."



"Immensea? The region we're in?" asked Mattias. He started a routine to perform deep-space scans covering every direction around them. As much as this find was interesting, they were all still in danger of being found.

"If it's a casket, then who's inside of it?" asked Kirlana.

Again, Matuno paused before answering. "A Gallente male dressed in some sort of ceremonial robes. He...looks like he was murdered."

"Murdered?" said Kirlana. "How can you—"

"There is a gold-plated dagger driven up to the hilt through the man's sternum, but his hands are resting on each other over his navel. He actually looks like he's at peace. The body appears that it was deliberately arranged in this exact fashion and laid to rest inside the casket."

Mattias thought about that for a moment. He had killed before. In fact, all of them had, but only by using their ship's weapons as an extension of their mind. To plunge a dagger through another man's heart...that was grotesquely barbaric, if not outright inhuman.

"One more thing," Mantuno interrupted his thoughts. "There are coordinates engraved on the inner plating of the casket. They point to somewhere within this system."

Somewhere. Well, there were risks in trying to find out where that was, and risks for not trying as well. Staying on the move was an absolute necessity, but he was surprised at how his own curiosity exceeded his fear of being discovered by the Arch Angels. Whoever put him in there, he thought, wanted him to be found. The man inside the casket had been murdered, and Mattias found that to be a compelling enough reason to investigate.

"Matuno, transmit those coordinates to my navigation computer. I'm going to have a look."

"Roger." There were no protests from either of them this time, at least not spoken. For all they knew, Trald himself could have planned all this, and set the bait which would deliver them to a pack of bloodthirsty Arch Angels.

Mattias engaged the warp drive. Immediately, the computer indicated that the target destination was a mere 300 kilometers from the rock formation. A few seconds later, the view of an enormous space station rushed into view. He thought for certain this was a trap, and that sentry guns were moments away from cutting his ship to pieces. Mattias was about to panic when he realized that there were no guns or defenses of any kind at all. As the Blackbird approached the dark, foreboding structure, Mattias

realized that the station was abandoned. And more importantly, according to the CONCORD maps, it didn't exist.

"Warp to my location," he ordered. "And tell yourself that what you're about to see isn't an illusion." Mattias steered the Blackbird alongside the station's greenish-metallic hull. Is the dead Gallente the owner of this place? Some of the exterior hull plating was missing along several decks. An ominous feeling descended over him. Something isn't right here, he thought. Every station he ever visited was always bustling with activity, even the ones in deep space. There were no signs of life here at all, even though the station still had power. The contrasting images in his mind made him uneasy.

The Omen and Tempest suddenly appeared.

"Unbelievable," said Kirlana. "This isn't on the map!"

"No sentry guns, no defenses except for the shields." said Matuno. "And harbor control rejects all docking requests."

"So the big question is how the heck do we get onboard this thing," Mattias wondered out loud.



"And why haven't the Angel's claimed it for themselves, assuming they even know it's here," said Matuno.

"The shields," said Kirlana, sounding a little nervous. "Take them down, and you'll get in. It's an emergency failsafe mechanism built into most station's AI. If no active defenses are remaining and the shields are breached, the AI automatically shuts harbor control down, allowing anything from the outside to get in, and anything from the inside to get out. The thinking was that if something was powerful enough to take down a station's defenses—natural or man-made—then it assumes that hull failure and catastrophic loss of life are imminent. It makes zero sense to keep harbor control active at that point. The station is either already lost or about to be destroyed."

"How do you know all this?" asked Mattias.

"The Amarrs learned about it the hard way during the Rebellion," she answered. "The Minmatars tried it successfully during some pretty ballsy missions to rescue slaves just after the Jovians crushed the Amarr invasion fleet."

"Thank God for that," muttered Matuno.

“God had nothing to do with it,” she answered. “Because there's no such thing.”

Her words resonated in Mattias's mind. He wasn't a religious man—at least not in a traditional sense. But the comment still made him uncomfortable. Regardless of her rebellion against the religious paradigms of the culture that she was born into, to hear an Amarr say there was no God was extremely disturbing.

The plasma and fire escaping the gashes in her ship drew his attention for some reason. He decided to reclaim his team's focus.

“So what you're telling us is that we don't have the firepower to get inside.”

“In so many words, yes. Even if we had unlimited ammunition, our three ships combined couldn't overtake the shield's rate of regeneration.” Mattias's attention was diverted again, this time towards the station's hull, now more than 3 kilometers away from the Blackbird. The surface appeared to distort itself slightly, and a ripple began to move across it from left to right. Mattias's sixth sense screamed danger to him, and his heart stopped as he realized what was happening.

“Both of you, put your shield hardeners on.” Mattias ordered.

“Say again? I don't see any—“

“Now! Quickly!” Whitish-blue auras enveloped all three ships as the bounty hunters followed Mattias's instructions, unsure of their purpose. One second later, the reason became perfectly clear, as a Jovian Wraith-class frigate uncloaked just 300 meters from Mattias's Blackbird. Although the Wraith was the smallest ship in the group, it was the most technically advanced, and had the enormous tactical advantage of being able to cloak itself. In numbers, the Wraith was among the deadliest ships in space. Mattias wondered if there were more of them nearby.

“I can't lock him up,” said Matuno. “And even if I could, he's too close, I doubt I could hit him with anything.”

“Stop trying,” answered Mattias. “Who knows how many others are out here. We'd be in pods or worse by now if he had bad intentions.” He brought his ship to a complete stop. The Wraith gracefully slid alongside, closing to within 100 meters. The Jovian opened a communications channel with him.



“A thousand apologies for my abrupt appearance, Captain Kakkichi” began then Jovian. “But the circumstances required this choice of tactics.”

“What can I do for you?” asked Mattias. He had never spoken to a Jovian before, let alone been this close to one of their ships. The camera drones were snapping pictures like crazy.

“My name is Veniel, and as you already know, I hail from the Jovian Empire.” His voice sounded almost hollow, like a drone. Mattias studied the portrait of the “man” speaking to him. He was human, but so...not human either. The Jovians were products of genetic engineering, literally harvested from cultures and grown in fetus

test tubes until “maturity”, as they coldly referred to it. “Would you like me to invite your crew to participate in our conversation?” he asked.

“Allow me,” answered Mattias, patching in Kirlana and Matuno. “How long were you following us for?”

“It isn't often when the Angel Cartel actively hunts anyone specifically, let alone blockades the entrances to solar systems for the occasion. I had to find out for myself who the recipient of this honor was.” He paused for a moment. “I have to say Captain, that I am very impressed with your tenacity for survival.”

“I'm glad you find it entertaining,” Mattias shot back. “But as you can see from the condition of my fleet, I don't have time for games.”

“Of course not Captain, I understand completely. But before I leave you to your business, I have to ask...how, exactly, did you find this station?”

Mattias thought about his question carefully before answering. Odds were that the Jovian already knew the answer, if he was able to follow them to the rock formation. Veniel was fishing for information, and Mattias decided to play along.

“We discovered an artifact in an asteroid field not too far from here, and it led us to this location.”

“And this ‘artifact’, did it contain the corpse of a Gallente?”

Aha. The man knew exactly what he was looking for. “Yes, it did.”

“Then I have a proposition for you and your crew, Captain. First, let me begin by saying that you will not survive another attempt to run the gauntlets in place at the gates in this system. Trald is focused on your destruction, and you will not escape from him again. Therefore, in exchange for the artifact in your possession, I offer you all three of the following: Access to this station, the explanation for its existence, and a way past the blockades in this system.”



Mattias had heard about the Jovians insatiable lust for knowledge, and that they were often willing to trade hyper-advanced technology in exchange for it. Veniel, on the other hand, was offering ways to spare their lives in exchange for, of all things, a corpse. Why he wanted it was both beyond explanation and irrelevant in this context. The upper hand in this agreement belonged to Veniel, and Mattias knew he'd be a fool to refuse. The Jovians were never known for cruelty or deceit, and although this one seemed atypical of the stereotype, he sensed no ill will on Veniel's part.

“Very well, Veniel. Deal.”

“Excellent, Captain. Now, the artifact, if you please.”

“I have your word that you'll fulfill your part of the bargain?”

“Most certainly, Captain.”

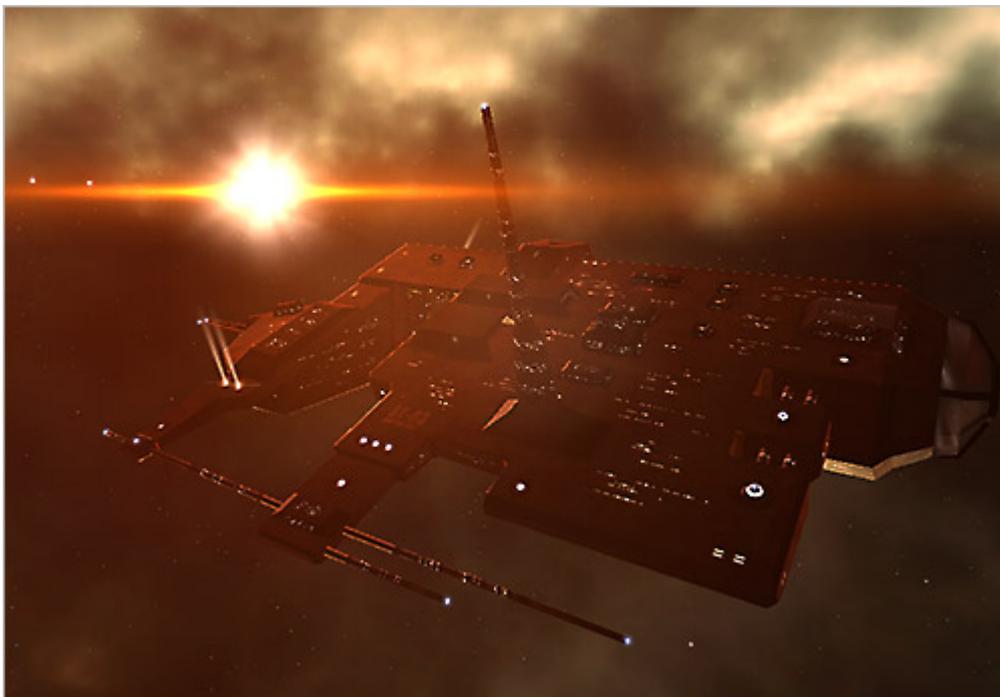
Mattias took a deep breath through the nose tubes. “Alright, then. Matuno, please jettison the casket.”

“Roger.” A tiny cargo container appeared just above the Tempest. Mattias was thankful that the errant plasma and fire jets still erupting from the damaged ship were pointing away from it. The Wraith slowly pulled away from the Blackbird and positioned itself above the floating cargo container, guiding it on board.

“Superb. Now, for my part of the bargain, if you'll excuse me for just a moment...” The Jovian broke the connection. Mattias focused his view on the Wraith hovering above the Tempest, already beginning to question his own judgment. It wasn't the first time he'd done that today.

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The DED is the police force of CONCORD, and a Spartan affair even by military standards. Charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order within the borders of Empire space, the men and women who make up its ranks are meticulous in their work, fervently devoted to their mission, and strict advocates of structured rank and their own respective place within it. Candidates wishing to join the DED are subjected to a near ruthless application process. If accepted, recruits are given a training regime whose intensity rivals or exceeds any military institution in mankind's history.

Their philosophy discourages autonomy insofar as its place within fighting units is concerned. DED ships are rarely seen alone. They patrol Empire shipping lanes and property in balanced fleets of varying military capacity, and are always within range

of other patrols so that the response time to any crisis is almost instantaneous. The DED's prowess for coordinating strikes and rapid-response counterattacks within Empire space is staggering, thanks to the uniquely trained individuals that CONCORD enlists for the task.

But no large organization is without its informants. And the DED, despite the extensive background checks, personality evaluations, and constant surveillance of new and experienced employees, was not without their own. With so much power concentrated there, entities both malicious and neutral went to great lengths to infiltrate the law enforcement agency. The DED quietly dealt with the moles they were able to catch. But with espionage at this level, where the stakes are so high and the potential for damage so great, no one could ever be certain that every spy was purged.

Tantoseisen Kakkichi—the Chief of Internal Security at the DED—knew that other spies existed within the agency. He had been reviewing disinformation items designed to expose potential operatives when the Jovian contacted him. Midway through the conversation, Tantoseisen started believing that he was being set up for a disinformation play as well.

“How many stations did you say there were again?”

“Sixty-nine, to be exact,” Veniel repeated.

“In twenty three deep space regions surrounding Empire space?”

“Correct, Commander.”

Tantoseisen sat back in his chair, glancing towards Veniel's dossier on the other screen. Although they never formally met, this was one of the few Jovians that CONCORD had some record of. Ever since the legendary trade that brought pod technology to the forefront of naval warfare, contact with the elusive race had been rare. Veniel was the only Jovian who surfaced from time to time, and whenever he did, there were always significant repercussions. The consensus among DED intelligence analysts was that Veniel was the Jovian equivalent of a maverick, and they had serious doubts that his actions proceeded with the blessings of his own kind. That notion alone would make anyone wary of trusting him, let alone believe his claim that dozens of stations existed in deep space which CONCORD knew nothing about.

“Veniel, with all due respect, you'll understand that I'm having a difficult time believing your claim.” And that's about as delicately as I'm capable of saying that, he thought.

“If you so desire, I can show you proof.”

“Very well then. Show me proof.”

Veniel's pale, vein-crossed, elongated face was replaced with the image of a Jovian frigate cruising slowly against the backdrop of a station. That could be anywhere, Tantoseisen thought. Something did seem different about it, but nothing so much out of the ordinary.

“Are you convinced yet, Commander?” asked Veniel.

“I'm afraid I haven't seen anything to make me change my mind.”

The image rotated so that the camera perspective was behind the frigate, still continuing its deliberate pace outside the station. Tantoseisen could see the outer hull of the base in more detail. Emergency lighting, he thought. But again, that could be any one of dozens of Gallente stations here in Empire space. Approaching the end of an enormous hull section, the ship began a slight bank to its left. When it finished rounded the corner, the camera panned back again.

The image of a critically damaged Tempest-class battleship came into view.

“Veniel, I thought you said that no one in Empire space knew about this.”

The Jovian did not answer. A second ship—an Omen-class cruiser, also badly damaged—was there, floating alongside the battleship. Both ships looked like they were on fire.

“If my word alone will not suffice,” said Veniel. “Then perhaps his will.” The view focused back to the Tempest, then panned to an angle above and behind it. A third ship—a Blackbird—was also there, on fire and...

The image suddenly registered as being very familiar to Tantoseisen: A Caldari, an Amarrian, and a Minmatar...

Mattias! How can that be? “Is that my brother?” he asked incredulously. His question was answered immediately, as the view was replaced with portraits of his older brother on one side, and the Jovian on the other. “Mattias, where are you? What happened to your ship?”

“Tantoseisen, it's good to see you”, said Mattias, who sounded angry. Veniel was silent. “I'm really sorry you got brought into this, but as long as we're all here, this is what happened...”

Mattias explained the entire course of events that brought them to the abandoned station. He talked about the tip they received about Trald Vukenda's whereabouts and movements, the operation that he and his team had planned to ambush him, and how it went terribly wrong. Tantoseisen was stunned.

“My God, Mattias...why Trald?” Tantoseisen didn't want to start an argument, but he just couldn't help asking. You're completely out of your league is what he should have said. Mattias was always like that, pushing himself to pull off impossible feats and insisting on doing things his own way. It was reckless, and it endangered everyone in his care. The strict military officer of Tantoseisen's psyche hated it. But as a younger brother, he found it inspiring. Mattias was always a source of strength in his life growing up. Tantoseisen surprised himself to discover that he still admired his brother's courage. He knew exactly what motivated him, and what the reply to his question would be.

“Same reason as always, little brother,” he answered. “Because it was the right thing to do.”

Yes, the right thing to do. Tantoseisen nodded his head slightly, not saying anything. He often passed along information about criminals who escaped the punishment of CONCORD to Mattias, always in secret. The DED, as powerful as it was, lacked the resources to chase felons past Empire borders. Justice should have no bounds, the brothers always said. Mattias would be the instrument of CONCORD where the Tantoseisen and the DED could not tread.

“Commander, I can give you the exact locations of the other 68 stations,” said Veniel. “But that is conditional on two terms. First, you and your fleet must come to our present location here in the Immensea region.”

“Hey, wait just a minute—“ Mattias started, but was cut off again by Veniel.

“The second term is that you do not, under any circumstances, tell any of your superior officers of your intentions.”

“So that's how you plan on fulfilling your agreement with me? Goddamn you, Veniel,” cursed Mattias. “You know he can't do that, he's a DED officer! He could be court-martialed and executed for doing something like that. Tantoseisen, don't listen to this snake, we'll be alright over here.”

Veniel was unfazed. “It is true that the risks are great. But there is greater risk by not acting.”

Remarkable, Tantoseisen thought, that he could put the both of us into positions that pit our mutual fates with each other's decisions. Was this man seriously prepared to let Mattias die at the hands of the Angel Cartel if I refused? Was he seriously capable of doing something that sinister? What was it that he really wanted, and why all this trouble for a corpse?

“Why the second term, Veniel. Why is it that my superiors are to be kept out of this?”

“There are certain elements within the DED which stand to benefit directly from this information, Commander. Some would almost certainly use it to advance their own personal incentives, rather than promote the cause of the greater good, as the DED mission statement specifies.”

Tantoseisen was losing his patience. “Certain elements'? Veniel, don't be cryptic with me, give me straight answers—“

“Elements who would take this information and attempt to conceal it from the other Assembly members. Tell me, what do you suppose the repercussions would be if it was revealed that a member government was hiding the existence of these stations?”

Veniel had a valid point there. Unbeknownst to the general public, the political situation within the Assembly had become very volatile, with disagreements between member governments on issues ranging from debt restructuring to deep-space territorial disputes. The internal strife wasn't serious enough—yet—to endanger the integrity of CONCORD, but this was precisely the kind of thing that could ignite the situation. If the right spies were to get hold of information this sensitive, the results could be drastic.

Sixty-nine stations, Tantoseisen thought. Trillions of isk worth of property and assets, up for grabs to whoever wants them...nations have gone to war for much lesser reasons than that.

Veniel continued his case. “Commander, time is running short. Trald's forces are actively hunting your brother, and they could appear here at any moment.”

The comment infuriated Tantoseisen. “What's in this for you, Veniel.” He spoke through clenched teeth.

“Knowledge, of course. And clarity of vision, for I consider myself a student of humanity.”

This didn't surprise him. Jovians were known to covet the things that most other races took for granted. Judging from their grim, ghastly appearance, Tantoseisen could easily see how rediscovering humanity would be at the forefront of any Jovian's agenda.

"I suppose you need my fleet there as well to get inside?"

"That is part of the agreement, yes."

"And you'll share with us what you know of these stations?"

"Correct. We can begin during your journey here."

"No! Goddamnit, Tantoseisen, don't listen to this man!" Mattias protested.

"Mattias, I've already made up my mind. The Jovian is right; it's riskier not to do this. This is the right thing to do, even if the DED thinks the contrary." He began tapping commands on the screen console in front of him, readying his battleship and replacing the hybrid weapons with energy turrets. "I just hope I don't have a mutiny on my hands once I tell the crew where we're going."

"You are a courageous man, Commander. The crew will rally to you, not to a DED protocol." said Veniel.

"Veniel, I'm still not sure what kind of elaborate scheme it is you have going here, or if I even understand what your true intentions are. What I do know is that it is not your place to make assertions of any kind about me, and especially not about my crew. I want you to know that I am disgusted about the manner in which you decided to handle this situation, and that I would prefer it if you ceased making any more judgments about what you think my brother or I believe is right. Are we clear?"

"I intended no disrespect, Commander. I am deeply regretful for offending you."

"You're making a mistake, Tantoseisen", said Mattias. "Your command, your career, your life, all of it is in jeopardy—"

"And I'm talking to someone who has done the exact same thing for years. For this one, I think I'll be the big brother for a change, Mattias." He keyed in an order to have spare armor and hull repair modules loaded into his battleship's hold. God knows we'll probably need them also, assuming we actually make it there, he thought. "The order to recall my fleet from their patrol has already been issued. They will rendezvous with me here in Orien within 20 minutes, then we're going to set course for E8-YS9. That's 44 jumps...my ETA is 2 hours. I'm going to leave this channel and will contact you after we cross the line into unregulated space. Any questions?"

Neither of them said a word.

"Good. I'll be seeing the both of you soon." Tantoseisen terminated the connection and looked down at the DED 5-star patch insignia on the breast of his uniform. He was about to violate every principle that he held his own crew accountable for. The only way out of this, he thought, is by going right through it. Without hesitating any longer, he rose from his desk and made his way for the door.

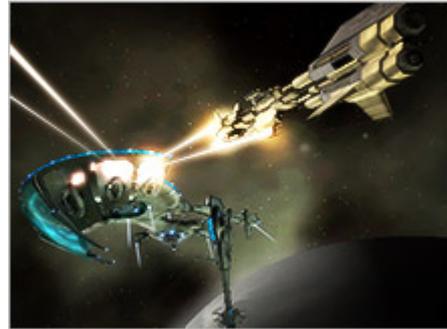
E8-YS9 Solar System, EL8Z-M Constellation,

Immensea Region

Planet VI, Moon 4

Unknown Station

08:58 EVT



Mattias was awestruck as the CONCORD-class battleships and their escorts unleashed a torrent of devastating firepower into the station. Tantoseisen had brought an entire task force with him—18 ships in all. Minutes earlier they had decimated the same Angel Cartel blockade which, hours before, had nearly killed Mattias. Using his cloaked Wraith, Veniel told Tantoseisen exactly what to expect before his fleet jumped in. The Warlord battleship was destroyed so quickly that the remaining ships retreated, but Trald—the slippery snake that he was—warped out immediately after the CONCORD ships arrived. It was anyone's guess whether or not he would return with a bigger fleet. But oddly enough, no one seemed concerned.

The mood should have been more elated, given the brutal decisiveness of the battle that had just taken place. Instead, there was complete silence, even as the tachyons and heavy beam weapons drilled into the station's shields. Everyone was stunned by the story Veniel had told during Tantoseisen's journey to E8-YS9.

About 40 years ago, a movement of radical thinkers emerged from the swirling maelstrom of galactic politics that were unhappy with the institutions responsible for shaping the post-EVE era." The group saw no purpose in borderlines or the imposition of cultural ideals into the populace through the use of government. They cited that this kind of thinking was counterproductive and ultimately to blame for the greater "fallacies and debacles of our time", as Veniel had said, which included the continued imprisonment of Minmatar slaves by the Amarr Empire and the Caldari-Gallente War. They wanted to create a society that looked beyond bloodlines and focused more on the commonality between all the races; to embrace human diversity yet retain the true "embodiment of mankind" that has "kept our species from disappearing from the universe forever."

Every generation, Veniel had explained, has its prodigies. From time to time, people with extraordinary gifts surface in the gene pool, and the results are often unprecedented breakthroughs and contributions in a discipline commensurate with the individual's talent. The leader of the radical thinkers was a man named Sébastien Moreau, and his gift was charisma unlike anything the galaxy had ever seen. He was a powerful speaker and motivator, but could also make anyone feel at ease within minutes of meeting them for the first time. His charm—and soon, his mission—became irresistible to almost everyone who listened. Through the sheer power of Moreau's persuasion, "Immensea" was born.

Refusing to take his cause for racial unity to the floors of government halls out of pure spite for the "antiquated institutional paradigms" they represented, Moreau sought believers of his mission in private. He recognized that his dream society could not coexist with the Empires. To make real strides in pursuing his goal, he needed to attach the idea of racial unity with a physical objective that his followers could work towards. Therein, Veniel explained, the concept of "Immensea" was defined: The "immense sea" that separates the horrors of yesterday from the utopian bliss of tomorrow. Earth—like the notion of utopia—is out there, but a vast physical and

spiritual distance must be traversed in order to reach it. "Paradise was always within", Moreau had once said. "And so the journey home completes the circle: From one we were defined, and to one we shall return, unbound, and true to our own pure selves."

Moreau's followers, now numbering in the thousands, became so passionate about this quest to "return home" that the task itself began to assume the form of a divine imperative. A massive research initiative was planned with a host of ambitious objectives, which included studies on how to stabilize the EVE gate in New Eden and a fast-track development of jump drives. All they needed was a base from which they could pursue these studies in earnest, far from the prying eyes of governments and "institutional bigots". The cost to build even a single station was astronomical, but money, as it turned out, was hardly an obstacle.

Immensea was spreading, picking up momentum, members, and resources at a frenzied pace. Because of Sébastien Moreau's supernatural gift, the talent pool and economic resources of the Immensea were enormous. CEO's of mega-corporations, high ranking military officers, government officials, and brilliant scientists from each sovereignty were either secretly a part of it or contributing directly to its growth. Immensea had become a cult with the financial and intellectual capital to rival any organization in EVE, and because it had pervaded every level of society—military, government, corporate, and even criminal—people looked the other way as convoy after convoy disappeared into the deep of space.

True to the cult's directive to keep the institutions in the dark, no one said a word. People who tried to raise alarms about missing equipment or deleted journal entries were bribed to stay quiet. When that failed, they were silenced permanently. The first stations were built in the Immensea Region; they would eventually be constructed in a total of 23 regions, in some cases with the direct assistance of the local pirate cartels themselves. These "institutional outcasts" were especially vulnerable to Moreau's persuasion, who welcomed them as would a "foster parent to an abandoned child."

Every station was completely isolated from the commerce of Empire space, but entirely self-sufficient. They were all equipped with refineries, factories, clone banks, research facilities, and starship fitting hangars; everything that they needed to exist harmoniously with each other and pursue their mutually shared goals under the now prophetic vision of Moreau. Loners, families, and sometimes even entire colonies would vanish from Empire records as they traveled to deep space. They wandered into the open arms of the Immensea, which held no person accountable for any sins committed under the roof of the Institution and never, ever discriminated by bloodline. Caldari, Amarrs, Minmatar, Gallentes, and even the occasional Jovian found refuge in this hidden society. Utopia, so it seemed, had been achieved.

But it was not to last, said Veniel. Two things had happened which spelled the beginning of the end for the Immensea. One, its members began to think of Moreau as a god; and two, Moreau also began to think of himself as a god. It was all perfectly sensible to Moreau that the Immensea should worship the man who had created so much from so little. How else to explain his wondrous powers of persuasion and the results of his vision as anything other than divine? Sébastien Moreau cultivated the image of a god as much as he could, fabricating miracles with the use of technology and demanding worship from his followers. There was nothing that he would not take; no custom that he would respect; no law that he would honor; and no woman—married or not, young or old—that he would not ravish, for who could deny the seed of a god?

Moreau had descended into the darkest realm of the categorically psychotic, yet he retained his charismatic personage—a lethal combination that has manifested itself many times over in various rulers and tyrants throughout mankind's history.

The deification of Moreau began to resonate deeply within the souls of the Amarr among the Immensea. While some were born directly into the cult, every Amarr was still deeply rooted in his or her belief in One God, and that hell itself awaited anyone who blasphemed the Faith by creating false idols to worship. “For the Amarr,” said Veniel, “it is better to have never been born, should you be guilty of this sin.” As for Moreau, the only evil more sinister than worshiping an idol was to claiming to be one. In the end, the religious conscience of the Amarrs proved to be too much, and they tried—unsuccessfully—to assassinate Moreau.

The botched attempt on his life enraged Moreau and catapulted him even further into a deranged, diabolical mental abyss. He was now “fully capable of horrific atrocities and astounding cruelty.” He issued an edict declaring that all of the Amarr among them were to be exterminated for “interfering with the divine imperative that is the destiny of Immensea.” The result was effectively flat-out civil war and genocide. Suddenly bloodlines were drastically relevant again, and the Amarr were pitted against everyone else. In the end, all of the Amarr's—every man, women, and child among them—were mercilessly butchered by the other followers.

Moreau meditated on the event and decided that its cause was due to the stations being too autonomous, thereby detracting from his “divine” cornerstone philosophy of interdependence and unity for one, single race. To set matters straight, he ordered the destruction of all but one of the three “life essence” modules aboard each station, decreeing that only one of each shall be permitted to exist per region. If his people would not cooperate with each other in the exact way that he ordained, then he would force the issue upon them and mend their foolish ways. His remaining followers rendered station modules useless by sabotaging them in ways that would make them impossible to repair, and murdered anyone who tried to stop them.

In Veniel's opinion, the act merely accelerated the inevitable. Rumors of the slayings began to spread, and contacts within Empire space quietly began distancing themselves from any association with the Immensea. The logistical nightmare of having to support three stations with one module each for every region they had settled in was unmanageable. One by one they fell into ruin and were abandoned. Almost overnight, the Immensea had all but disappeared, and some of its survivors—many of whom were the source of Veniel's information—took their own lives, overwhelmed by the heavy burden of guilt from their complicity in the greatest human atrocity of the post-EVE era.

Veniel said that there are remnants of the Immensea among us. Most of the Empire-based intelligentsia who supported the cult, but did not actively participate in the Amarr massacre, continued the grim task of keeping their identities and roles within the Immensea a closely guarded secret. Veniel said that he was once close to obtaining clear evidence that “the government officials of several sovereignties” were secretly hunting down Immensea survivors, but suddenly lost all contact with his source. Many intelligentsias still remain in positions of considerable power including, very much to Tantoseisen's concern, positions within CONCORD. Veniel refused to name anyone he personally suspected until he had irrefutable evidence, which as always, he would trade—for a price.

Until this day, the fate of Sébastien Moreau had been unknown. By blind luck, Mattias had unwittingly stumbled across the final piece of the puzzle, and Veniel would have paid handsomely for it had the bounty hunter's situation been any less

dire. He explained that Moreau's corpse held enormous scientific value to the Jovians, who were extremely interested in determining the biological components of Moreau's legendary charismatic qualities. The Jovians had been actively monitoring the Immensea stations for some time, searching for clues on the whereabouts of the cult figurehead. But to everyone's amazement, the Jovian's never ventured inside any of the stations to look, believing that it was not their place to disturb what was left before the Immensea's existence became known publicly.

According to Veniel, the Angel Cartel knew the exact locations of every Immensea station in space. In fact, all of the major pirate organizations did, including the Serpentinis, the Guristas, and the Blood Raiders. And most importantly, so did Trald Vukenda, who by now had to know where Mattias and the CONCORD fleet were, and that the dark secret of the Immensea was about to be revealed.

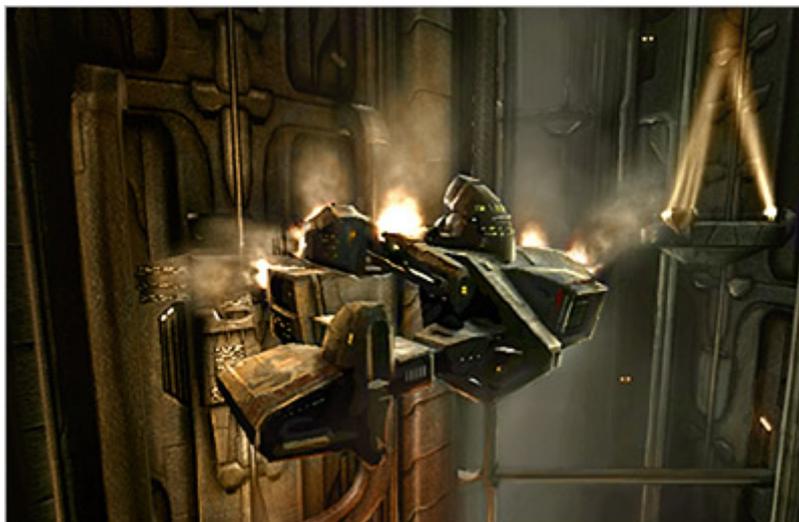
As the tachyon laser turrets from the CONCORD battleships continued to spit focused white beams of searing energy into the station, Mattias focused on the last thing that Veniel said before concluding his story. He said that the pirate cartels wouldn't go near the Immensea stations. Far away from Empire borders, legends and stories can grow unchecked by rationality. The isolated life that pirates lead in the remote systems of deep space lends itself to being highly vulnerable to superstition. Out here, said Veniel, the word "Immensea" was a curse. The pirate's tale was that if you listened closely enough, you could still hear the screams of dying Amarrs as the demonic Moreau and his minions struck them down by the thousands. For the more practical minds among the scoundrels such as Trald, the reason to stay away from the stations was apparent in their condition. The Immensea made certain that the damage they inflicted to their own outposts was permanent. The pirate cartels were well financed and smart with their money. It was far more economical to build a station from scratch than to even attempt to make use of stations in such bad shape.

There was one more part of the story that Veniel had intentionally omitted, saying that he would continue it once he was onboard, and in doing so complete the three terms of their agreement. Mattias panned the camera away from the CONCORD ships and back towards Kirlana's battered Omen. Neither she nor Matuno had uttered a word since the Jovian stopped speaking. He was deeply concerned about her.

"Mattias..." said Tantoseisen. "It is done."

He panned the camera back around and saw that the CONCORD fleet had ceased firing, and were slowly aligning themselves behind the Wraith. One by one, the ships began a procession into one of the station's massive hangar bays. Matuno's Tempest swung around behind Tantoseisen, with Kirlana's Omen trailing in its wake. The ominous feeling that Mattias had when he first saw this station was much worse now.

E8-YS9 Solar System



Immensea Uncharted Base One – Main Hangar Concourse – Deck 22

09:23 EVT

My God, you just lose perspective when you're looking at all this from a camera drone, thought Mattias. He was standing inside of the Mobile Gantry Unit (MGU) that had just extracted his pod from the Blackbird. The size and scope of the damage to his ship made him shake his head as the MGU flew downwards past one of the cruiser's massive engines. As big as his ship was, it was nothing compared to the immense size of the hangar it was floating inside of. They built so many of these stations, he thought. How could they have done all this so quickly? The darkness made him uncomfortable. Usually there was lighting from the windows of hundreds of offices, labs, and living quarters built into the walls of the hangar. In here, all of them were darkened. The entire cavern had a hazy, bluish glow from the emergency lighting system, and he could see debris drifting throughout as the MGU continued its descent towards the concourse.

A click hiss sound marked the end of the trip as the MGU docked with the deck hub. Mattias oriented himself as the door in front of him opened. The hangar was a zero-G vacuum environment, but all sections that were accessible by habitants were surrounded by gravity wells and pressurized with breathable air. His knees buckled a little as he stepped through and adjusted to his own weight again. Matuno was waiting for him inside.

"Mattias, Kirlana is not herself", he said. "She has not been the same since the Jovian told his story." Matuno was speaking quietly. "She will not tell me what troubles her."

"I'm worried about her too," said Mattias. "I don't think she's ever been that close to death before in combat, and as if that wasn't enough for her, to hear about what happened to the Amarrs who used to live here..." Mattias kept trying not to think about the comment she made earlier, about there being "no such thing as God". He took a deep breath. "I know I don't have to tell you this, but...just keep an eye on her."

"There is something else," added Matuno, leaning even closer. "The Jovian and your brother started looking through station's logs as soon as they arrived. Veniel pointed to something on the screen and said very audibly, 'Without question, that is Admiral Sulei Manatir. Now, look at the hooded female surrounded by the Amarr bodyguards.' Your brother looked very surprised, almost shocked, and then said 'Veniel, are you sure that's her?' The Jovian answered that he was 'certain of it'. Then your brother re-entered the hub and went back to his ship."

Mattias blinked. "Back to his ship?"

"Yes. Veniel is still here, just outside in the concourse, still pouring through the logs. Tell me, Mattias...do you know who this hooded female is that they were referring to?"

Mattias said he honestly had no idea, and shrugged. Matuno took one step closer to him. The Minmatar Brutor towered over Mattias, and was almost twice his weight.

"I certainly hope you'll tell me if you know." Mattias was slightly unnerved, and stepped to the side.

"Of course, Matuno. I'll...see what I can find out." As he took a step forward, Matuno lowered a giant hand onto his shoulder, preventing him from exiting the hub.

"Mattias...if it is her, then you know how personal it is with me."

Mattias looked up at him. "I know it is, Matuno. It's probably personal for a lot of other Minmatar's as well. But now is not the time, even if it's who you think it is. So, if you'll please excuse me, I need to get back to the business of trying to keep us alive."

Matuno removed his hand and allowed Mattias to pass into the concourse. The only light came from the hangar itself, through the transparent side of the concourse. The arched doorways to offices, freight warehouses, and even hovertram stations on the other side were barely visible. The Blackbird was high overhead, and its blinking navigation lights sent soft pulses of light throughout the darkened hall. Kirlana was sitting on floor with her back against the glass, staring blankly at a locket she held in her hand that was still hanging from her neck.



Veniel was standing in front of a console built into the hub that Mattias had just exited from. The greenish hue from the console gave him a ghastly appearance. Without saying a word, he extended his hand towards Mattias. A disc was between his thumb and index finger.

"What's this?" Mattias asked, taking the disc.

"The last part of our agreement," Veniel answered. "A way for you to get past the Arch Angel blockades on either side of this system."

"You mean having a CONCORD fleet blast through them for us wasn't your plan all along?"

Veniel dismissed the remark. "Your brother has also been given a copy of that."

"What's on it?" Mattias asked. Matuno stepped out from the hub.

"The Immensea had some help when they built these stations, Captain", Veniel said. "What you are holding in your hand are the exact locations of not only these bases, but of a jumpgate network that you will not find on any CONCORD maps."

"What are you talking about?" Mattias asked. Kirlana looked up from her fixation on the locket.

"This jumpgate network rings Empire space, but does not traverse it. Thus, every region in deep space is interconnected and completely independent of Empire influence."

Mattias was stunned. "The Immensea built them?"

"Not the first ones, but once Immensea began establishing a presence in the outer regions, the gate builders realized they shared common ground with Moreau, especially where it concerned hiding their existence from certain Empire influence." Veniel emphasized that word.

"So, the Amarr built them?" asked Mattias.

"Quite the opposite," answered Veniel, who was now looking directly at Matuno. "The rise of Minmatar power was always puzzling to us, considering the extent to which the Amarr Empire went to suppress their ambitions. Amarr ships used to patrol all of the gates leading to and from Minmatar systems; nothing could travel in or out without being checked. We wondered how an enslaved nation was able to amass armies and construct warships right before the watchful eye of their alleged masters."

"The answer was hidden jumpgates, unknown even to us until very recently. With the help of Gallente engineers, Minmatar tribes began construction on the gates in complete secrecy and without Republic knowledge. The pirate cartels operating in the vicinity were sympathetic to the Minmatar's plight, but also saw an opportunity to advance their own agenda by assisting them. The gates provided the Minmatar with a 'back door' through which rescued slaves, construction materials, supplies, troops, and warships could travel unhindered by Amarr checkpoints."

"Years after the Rebellion, the cartels continued work on extending the network to include more systems. When the Immensea constructed their first bases here in the Immensea Region, Moreau convinced the cartels of the mutual gains that could be realized by sharing resources. Moreau offered them access to his stations in exchange for access to their jumpgates. The resulting partnership quickly accelerated both projects, since they complimented each other's practical needs and counter-institutional ideals. In the end, 96 gates were constructed over the course of more than 140 years, with more than half built in the last 30 or so, after Immensea was founded."

"One of those gates is in this system, Captain, and Trald Vukenda believes that you are unaware of its existence. Most of the smuggler gates are used primarily to ferry supplies, the majority of which are illegal within Empire space. The pirates have never felt a compelling need to guard them, except when traveling near the borders of rival or competing clans. The only ships you will see near there will be Cartel industrials, although I imagine all that will change once knowledge of this network comes to public light."

The sound of the click hiss from another MGU startled Mattias. Tantoseisen emerged from the hub.

“Well, it's official, I'm to be court-martialed as soon as I return,” he said. “But so long as I'm here anyway, I'm going to have a look around. If there is any evidence here about any intelligentsia still in power within Empire space, I need to find out.”

“How did CONCORD take the news?” asked Matuno. Tantoseisen shook his head.

“They're completely shocked. I'm still not sure they even believe it, and knowing them, there's going to be an expedition—this time, an authorized one—to confirm everything.”

“I hope you exercised caution in choosing whom to share that information with, Commander” said Veniel.

“It's been taken care of,” he answered. “No matter what, they won't be able to keep this discovery quiet.”

“Court martial,” Mattias breathed. “Tantoseisen, I'm sorry,” said Mattias. He knew how hard his little brother had worked to build such a remarkable career in law enforcement, and that if not for his own bad luck and poor decisions, this would have never happened.

Tantoseisen took a deep breath. “We were spotted near the Edbinger crossing by a convoy that was on their way out to deep space, and they reported it to the press. Now it's public knowledge that we're out somewhere we shouldn't be, and the spin on things is that I'm 'defecting', or some other nonsense. Anyway, it's against the rules to take a CONCORD task force on a joyride through unregulated space without authorization, and I'm going to be punished accordingly for it.”

“Where should we be looking for clues?” asked Matuno. “And how do we know for certain we're really alone here?”

“I cannot say I agree with this idea,” said Veniel. “But if that is what you feel you must do, this is where I would look.”

Matuno, Tantoseisen, and Mattias gathered behind Veniel, who stepped aside so everyone could see the screen. Displayed on it were schematics detailing the deck level they were currently on. Mattias could recognize the floor plan of the concourse and the hub they were standing in front of. Five blue dots were clustered around it.

“In this program, the blue represents detectable heartbeats. These sensors and others like it are embedded in hull structures throughout the station,” Veniel explained. Then the image zoomed out slightly so that more of the area was visible, but a section covering the entire right half was blacked out.

“The dark areas denote zero data. The sensors in this area were either intentionally disabled or destroyed. This section is also where the clone facility would be, prior to its destruction as per Moreau's orders. I can tell you for certain that nothing lives outside of this area.” Veniel tapped on the darkened section. “But in there, I cannot say. There is no way to find out if any clones are intact unless someone goes inside. However, the station's computer is indicating that the area is a 'breach zone', which means there is no air, and no gravity.”

"I have to do this," said Tantoseisen. "And I know I don't have a lot of time to get it done. The troops outside are understandably restless, and I can't ask them to do much more for me."

"I'll go with you," said Kirlana. Everyone turned towards her. It was the first time she had spoken since coming aboard.

"Kirlana, are you sure? You haven't—" Matuno started.

"I'm fine, really." She picked herself up off the floor. She appeared alert, and the distant look she had up until now was gone. "But we're going to need survival suits and weapons, and mine are on my ship."

"Weapons?" asked Mattias. "Who do you think is going to be shooting at you in there?"

"You've always been a cautious fellow," she answered, almost sarcastically. "And I've always been a cautious gal. If I don't know what I'm getting into, then I say bring a weapon."

That sounded like the Kirlana of old, but for some reason the confidence in her voice still wasn't as reassuring as it used to be. It sounded so feigned. "Well, if you're going, then I'm going," said Mattias. "And that means Matuno is also."

Veniel had a strange look on his face, almost as if he was worried. "There is a former security outpost alongside the bulkhead which separates the corridor from the clone facility. You will find weapons and survival suits there."

"Are you coming with us?" asked Tantoseisen.

"With all due respect Commander, no. But I will remain in contact with you from here, and provide whatever assistance I can. But again, I highly suggest you act quickly, and not overextend yourself for the task."

"Noted, Veniel. And thank you for your support," said Tantoseisen. "We'll be aboard our ships in 60 minutes time at most."

"All of you, be careful," Veniel said. He spoke without emotion, but it was sincere.

Deck 22 Security Outpost – Main Concourse

09:53 EVT

Mattias watched Kirlana recheck the ammunition clip on her rifle. She was acting as though nothing was wrong, even as the rest of the group acted cautiously around her. His brother was testing the camera feed and a portable radar-imaging device (PRID) with Veniel over the radio. Matuno was lucky to find a suit big enough to fit him, no doubt a product of the multiethnic culture that this place once fostered.

None of this feels right, thought Mattias. It had felt that way for so long now that he wondered if anything would ever feel right again. He could understand his brother's reasons for doing this. It was a last ditch effort to save his career, and Mattias felt he had no right to complain since they'd all be dead without his brother's help. But he had put Kirlana and Matuno in enough danger already, and this was by far the riskiest proposition of the day. You could make a mistake in a starship and maybe your crew and your shields would get you out of trouble. But in a pitch-black, zero-G

chamber with god-only-knows what floating around in there, the margin for error was a lot narrower, and most of this bunch hadn't seen zero-G training since flight school.

The bad feeling he had about Kirlana just wouldn't go away. And since he failed to understand exactly what was causing it, he couldn't justify putting a stop to her coming along. He'd seen her and Matuno argue about missions he had objected to her participating in a hundred times. That was just the kind of person she was. In fact, they were all stubborn that way, the three of them. Tell any of us that there's something we can't do, and you may as well consider it done. Until today, their collective stubbornness had paid off well.

But now even Matuno wasn't sure how to read her, and he couldn't remember the last time he ever expressed concern over how she was acting. It was the combination of her past and the events of today which kept coming to mind; her rejection of God and the entire Amarr culture, this crazy Sébastien Moreau person and the cult he created, and who could forget what happened to all those Amarr people...

And then it dawned on him: She's questioning all of it, Mattias thought. Everything that's happened today is making her question the choices she's made in her life. That must be what it is. Who could blame her? We were all probably doing the same thing.

"Alright team, helmets on," said Tantoseisen. "We're just going to check a few of the clone banks, then we're out of here. Veniel, we're ready when you are."

Mattias could hear Veniel on the radio via the earpiece inside his helmet. "Have your team enter the airlock, Commander."

"Roger that. Everyone inside," said Tantoseisen. The "airlock" in this instance was actually the antechamber allowing access from the security post to the clone facility. Stations were built like ships; every compartment was separated by one or more antechambers that could be sealed off in the event of an emergency. The corridor between the two doorways was barely large enough for the four of them to fit inside. "Everyone inside and clear of the hatch?" Tantoseisen asked. All answered affirmatively.

"Clear," said Tantoseisen.

"Sealing the hatch, standby," said Veniel. The door behind Mattias hissed shut.

"Disabling gravity well." Suddenly Mattias felt himself rise off the floor grating slightly. "Mag boots," said Tantoseisen. There were eight thumps as the magnetic fields generated by the survival suit boots were all switched on.

"Standby for depressurization." A loud whoosh sound filled everyone's ears as the air inside the chamber was removed. Mattias immediately felt claustrophobic. He was standing behind Tantoseisen, who was facing the door leading to the clone center. Or whatever the hell else is on the other side.

"Opening the clone center door," said Veniel. The helmet's breathing apparatus made each exhale much more audible than usual, and he could hear himself start to breathe faster. The door slid open slowly, and there was nothing beyond it but pure blackness. It was suddenly very cold, and Mattias could feel the survival suit generating more heat to compensate. He watched his brother step through the doorway.

Beams of light from Tantoseisen's helmet cut through the darkness. "Okay, Mattias, I'm on solid ground where I am. Move forward and hold next to me."

The magnetic boots made a hiss ker-chunk sound that was audible only to Mattias as he took several steps forward and stopped alongside his brother. He kept the light beam pointed downward at the floor grating until he saw his brother's right boot. Looking up, the light beam caught reflections of some small debris floating not too far in front of them. There was a considerable amount of dust in the room, and the beams weren't powerful enough to reach through to any walls or structure in front of him.

"Mattias, fire up the PRID," said Tantoseien.

"Roger," he answered. Mattias set the tripod in front of him, kneeling to make sure it was anchored to the floor. Satisfied that the device was secure, he turned a dial and the tiny parabolic dish began tracking slowly back and forth.

"No one move," Veniel said suddenly. Mattias froze. The dish was sending its return images to Veniel, giving him a fuzzy picture of what was inside. "You are standing on a catwalk about 125 meters in length, but there is a gap in the scaffolding about 5 meters in front of you. There is a 60-meter drop on either side, at the bottom of which there appears to be significant quantities of wreckage. The ceiling is approximately 50 meters overhead, and you should be able to see breaches in the hull which are directly exposed to space." Mattias looked up and to his left, hoping to see something that would help him get his bearings. He only saw more dust and haze in his beam, and blackness everywhere else.

"The entire facility is filled with a large debris field," Veniel continued. "And there are several large fragments floating directly above the both of you."

Kirlana was still waiting in the doorway, eyes wide as saucers. She took one step forward.

"Don't come in here," warned Tantoseisen.

Kirlana was training the beam from her rifle upwards of Mattias and Tantoseisen, holding the weapon out in front of her as she took another step, clear of the doorway.

"Kirlana! Wait!" said Matuno. Mindful of Veniel's warning, Mattias rose slowly to a crouched stance. For some reason, he felt like he was going to lose his balance even though the boots fastened him securely to the floor. He turned around to face Kirlana, watching the light beam from her rifle slice through the dusty blackness above them.

Veniel's voice came through the radio, directed only at the brothers and Matuno. "Her heartbeat is racing, and her breathing is fast and shallow," he warned. "You should disarm her and get her back inside."

Mattias was about to speak, when the length of the beam from Kirlana's rifle suddenly shrunk as it illuminated debris just 2 meters over her head. Her eyes opened wider and she started to scream, just as Matuno's hand came from behind her and swatted the weapon away. The rifle tumbled end over end, its beam cutting 360-degree arcs through the blackness, changing directions several times as it collided with invisible objects. Matuno wrapped his massive arms around Kirlana and pulled her back inside the doorway.

"What the hell happened?" shouted Tantoseisen. Mattias could see her anguished, horrified face through her helmet, screaming as though in extreme pain and agony.

Suddenly, the inside of Kirlana's facemask was splattered as she retched violently and began coughing spasms.

Matuno was banging on the hatch leading back inside the security outpost with one hand, and holding Kirlana around him with the other. She didn't look like she was moving anymore.

“Veniel! I have to get her back inside!” Matuno screamed.

“Mattias, Tantoseisen, get clear of the door,” said Veniel, whose voice was completely devoid of panic, urgency, or emotion.

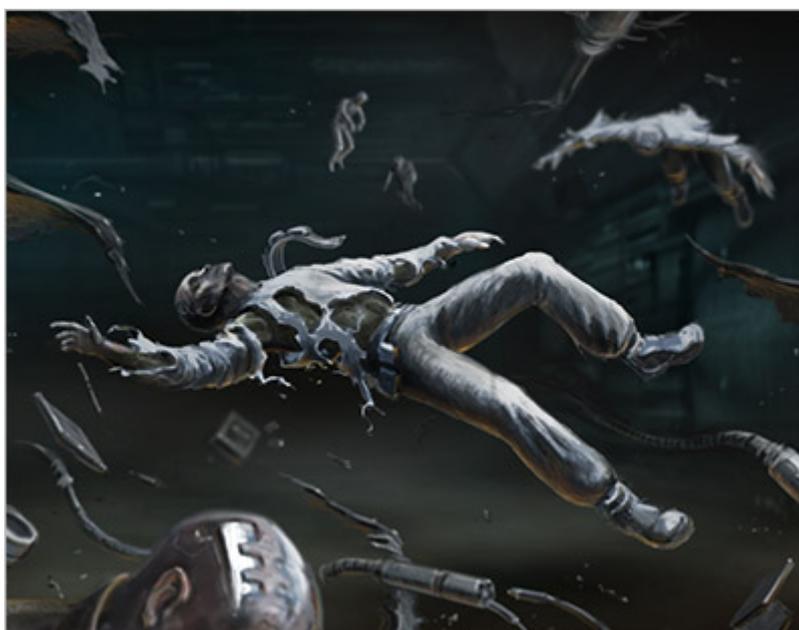
The doorway closed and sealed, leaving the brothers standing in a sea of darkness. The only light came from their helmets and Kirlana's rifle, far off in the distance. Mattias's head was spinning, and he was trying not to panic. He wasn't used to this at all. But his brother was well trained for zero-G operations, just like all enlisted men and women in the DED were.

“What did she see that made her react like that?” Tantoseisen asked.

Mattias dropped to a knee again, just wanting to be close to catwalk grating. It was the only thing he could use to keep his bearings. “It was right above the door,” he breathed, trying to stay under control. He was just staring at the floor grating. “I should have never allowed her to come, I don't think she's ever had this kind of training before.”

“Oh my God...” gasped Tantoseisen.

Mattias looked up, and saw the beam from Tantoseisen's helmet focused on something almost directly above him. His heart stopped from the reaction that something invisible had been so close to him all this time. But then his eyes widened in terror as recognition of what was floating there settled in.



The ghastly visage of a corpse was staring right at him, illuminated by Tantoseisen's beam. The skin was a grayish-drab color, preserved from the lack of oxygen and extreme cold. Its eyes were still open, mouth agape, neck split across the Adam's

apple. Mattias stopped breathing for a moment, and then started shallow breaths as his own heartbeat started to race in panic.

“Stay under control, brother...” breathed Tantoseisen, panning the beam to his right and catching the suspended arm of a second corpse floating over the door. The dead appeared to be wearing the same expressions as the instant they perished.

Veniel's voice came through. “Kirlana is in shock, and is being rushed to a CONCORD ship for treatment. She has suffered some kind of traumatic emotional breakdown, and will be unable to pilot the Omen.”

“Veniel,” breathed Mattias, trying to get his breathing under control. He felt extremely dizzy now, almost as if in a nightmare, for he could not think of anything except darkness and the face of the corpse. “Find a way to light this place...flares, emergency lights, anything...”

Mattias was on all fours now, resting his helmet on the grating. Veniel did not reply. He felt a hand on his back. “Mattias, easy,” his brother said. “We're going to get out of here, right now.”

“Veniel...Veniel, do you copy?” said Tantoseisen. “Veniel, come in, we need to get back inside. Veniel!”

There was no answer, and Mattias started to lose his composure as the panic began to overwhelm him. He could hear his brother shouting something, cursing, but none of it registered. He just focused on the floor grating now resting directly against his face shield, getting lost in the details of its nothingness, wishing he could escape from the corpse who was trying to speak to him and the blackness that existed everywhere else.

Mattias lost consciousness while listening to the words of the dead, who spoke to him of righteousness and avenging injustices.

Epilogue

Using the smuggler jumpgates, Tantoseisen Kakkichi's CONCORD task force returned safely to Empire space. Veniel provided forward scouting for the fleet, breaking contact after they had safely crossed the border. Tantoseisen immediately turned himself in to DED authorities and was arrested. All charges, save for one, were eventually dropped after the full account of the Immensea became known.

Before starting the long journey back to Empire space, the remaining crewmembers of the Blackbird and Omen cruisers were transferred to CONCORD ships. The vessels were then scuttled outside of the Immensea station in E8-YS9.

Mattias Kakkichi would make a complete recovery from the temporary delirium that was induced when he succumbed to spatial disorientation inside of the clone facility. Shortly after he lost consciousness, Veniel appeared at the security outpost, manually pressurizing and then opening the door from there. He claimed that the station's AI would no longer allow him to operate the door remotely after Matuno and Kirlana were back inside.

Kirlana would not fare as well. She vowed to never pilot a starship again, and that her days as a bounty hunter were over. She never disclosed to anyone, not even Matuno, exactly why the story of Immensea was so personal to her.

Before breaking formation with the CONCORD fleet near the Empire border, Matuno asked Tantoseisen to pass his brother a message for him. Tantoseisen agreed; Matuno transmitted the encrypted message and then disappeared. When asked some time later what that message was, Mattias would only say that Matuno was chasing after his “life's ambition”, and that when the time was right, he would contact him again.

The press demanded an explanation as to why a CONCORD task force would leave Empire space. Dantennen Fisk, the legal counsel and longtime friend of Tantoseisen Kakkichi, answered before the DED could. He publicly stated that his client's actions were “justified” and that the reason for his excursion to deep space was not rebellious or the result of any falling out with DED high command. Because of the publicity surrounding the issue, CONCORD had no choice but to associate the discovery of the abandoned stations with Kakkichi's actions, which they did in a press release of their own. But before they would reveal the station's locations, they wanted answers about the Immensea, and to recover as many of the dead as they could.

Through a deal brokered in secrecy by Veniel between the DED and the Jovians, CONCORD was able to recover thousands of bodies and compile a detailed history of the Immensea. DED scouting vessels carrying investigators met Jovian warships at all 69 stations, exchanging information for the firepower required to get inside. With the exception of a single leaked photograph from the inside of one of the E8-YS9 disabled modules, the DED has clamped down on the release of any investigation details.

Veniel disappeared after brokering the deal. No one has reported seeing him since.

The regional government's public reaction to the Immensea was one of apathy, but in reality sent their respective intelligence agencies into upheaval. Furious officials scrambled for an explanation as to how, exactly, news of this scope and size could have eluded them all this time. No government would ever publicly admit to an intelligence failure so pronounced.

Mattias Kakkichi found other bounty hunters who shared his ideals, and continues to patrol deep space in search of injustices to avenge.

The Spirit of Crielere

Even from afar the partially built space complex showed all the signs of being a place of science. The circular shape representing eternity was a good omen to Ariko Cumin. The perfect symbol. Maybe the punishment her father had intended for her by sending her here would turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Ariko felt her spirit lift, for the first time in weeks. Maybe this wouldn't hurt her career as much as she'd feared.



The powerful cruiser she was traveling on made slight adjustments to its direction vectors as it entered the docking procedure, sliding majestically towards the station that already loomed large despite being only half finished. Other ships were cruising around the station, some waiting to dock, others outward bounds. Ariko noticed that many of the ships were Gallentean and despite herself she gave a shudder; like all Caldari children she had meticulously studied the war between her own

people and the Gallenteans. The ninety years since the war ended had done little to ease the apprehension any Caldari felt in the presence of a Gallentean, even for those, like Ariko, that had never experienced the war personally. The war stories were all-too vivid in her mind to be at ease and she felt her small fists bunch. As the ship eased into its berth, groaning to a halt as the docking arms grabbed it and embraced, Ariko had to utter a few mind mantras under her breath to calm her nerves. She should be calm when entering her new place of work, duty dictated it.

The station had that unique smell that only new stations have before the ventilation filters start cluttering up and the lingering odor of humanity overrides everything else. Crielere, Ariko thought, smelled like freshly polished, brand new hover car. There was no one to greet her. She was just one of the many employees flocking to the station; engineers, technicians, scientists and common workmen, numbering in the thousands. The place was a total chaos and it took Ariko several hours to sort out the locations of her workplace and living quarters. By the time she entered the room assigned to her she was exhausted.

Lying down on the narrow bed to rest, she reflected on the events which brought her here. The total anarchy she'd met on the hallways didn't improve her view of the place and, as so often in the last few weeks, she got that nagging feeling that she'd made a mistake. As if that didn't bother her enough, it also meant that her father had been right and she wrong. She cringed at the thought. Only a few months earlier she had been the most promising physics student the School of Applied Knowledge had seen in ages, sure of a bright future at Wyrkomi, her foster corporation. And now here she was, stuck somewhere on the outskirts of civilized space, participating in some mad scheme hatched by two crazed scientist she knew next to nothing about.

She had been so sure she wanted to belong to something big, something grand. Something else than the dead-end job her father had. And yet her conscience troubled her now that she had broken free of the silk-bonds that Caldari society bound. She knew she should be repaying her corporation, her family, for the sacrifices they'd made on her behalf. But she feared the lifelong commitment demanded once she'd become an employee of Wyrkomi, her ambition pleaded for more. Thinking of her ambition she recalled the words of her father the day she stood

up to him. 'A child is irresponsible in its desires, it learns responsibility through duty. Are you a child, Ariko?' Her mind cursing the desires of her heart, she drifted into a fitful slumber.

Ariko woke with a start. Somewhere in the distance a horn was sounding, its muted cries bearing on in dissonance. Rubbing her eyes it took her a few moments to gather her senses. The horn stopped for awhile, then started blasting again. It was 7 am, time for work.

Ariko's incredible academic success made her a privileged recruit for the Crielere project. Despite her young age and lack of work experience she had been assigned as a junior assistant to the two pioneers responsible for the whole project, Henric Touvolle and Taroni Umailen. The two held some administrative duties due to their status, yet they insisted upon working in a lab, allowing them to get their hands dirty with the common research worker. The lab was located in the only part of the station completely finished and Ariko was pleasantly surprised to discover that it was fully equipped with the latest gadgets and science equipment. The lab was actually divided into several rooms. The anteroom, which Ariko's workbench was located in, was the largest and served as the main research area. The wall leading back to the station's corridor had only the one entrance door, but the other three walls had several doors each, leading to conference rooms and offices as well as restrooms and a kitchen. There was even a small greenhouse at the back, breaching the hull of the station to reach some sunlight. It wasn't utilized to produce food or oxygen rich plants, though, the main greenhouse section several levels down took care of that. Instead it was used by the biochemists in their research. The chief scientists had their own spacious offices in the back, though Ariko soon found out they seldom used them, preferring to work in the main area with the rest of the staff. A slender Gallente boy met her as she entered the lab and shyly introduced himself as Gunaris the apprentice. He showed her the workstation she was assigned to and left her there. For some reason Ariko felt really self-conscious around him, but in a pleasant sort of way. She scolded herself for her feelings; they were totally inappropriate, after all, he was a Gallentean! She had long since laughed off the boogey stories she heard in her youth that Gallenteans had black hearts and poisonous fangs, yet she had always been uneasy fraternizing with them. But here she was going all gooey over a Gallentean boy!

Ariko caught herself staring at the boy from across the room. Furious at herself, she turned her back and set about familiarizing herself with the computer systems and equipment at her desk, some of which was of Gallentean design and thus unfamiliar to her. She was wrapped up in trying to get a simple tachyonphotometer to work when she noticed two men enter in a hurry, each carrying wads of paper and looking more than a little flustered. She recognized them as Touvolle and Umailen. She had seen holoreels of them in the news, but knew little about them personally. She knew that they had met during the war, Touvolle working as a researcher in a biological warfare unit and Umailen as a military engineer. But the details of their first meeting or why they became these great philanthropic scientists were unknown to her. She had been brought up not to jump to conclusions when there was insufficient data to support an educated opinion, but she couldn't help but feel some indignity towards the pair; wasting their brilliant minds on dreamy delusions.



While Ariko knew relations between the State and the Federation were improving she nevertheless felt a little resentful towards Umailen, befriendng a Gallentean was so

totally alien to what she had been taught. But then she remembered her own feelings when meeting Gunaris and shook her head in confusion. 'My first day here at Crielere and already everything is so much more complicated than home,' she thought, for the briefest second pining for the comfortable routine and stability that State citizens enjoyed.

She was hoping to get the chance to chat a little bit with the two scientists, but when she approached them a plump, red-faced woman of Mannar ancestry intercepted her, blocking her path to the venerated pair.

"Get back to your workbench," the woman snapped. Taken aback, Ariko retreated to her workstation, quite bewildered. Out of the corner of her eye she watched the woman fawn around the scientists. Gunaris sidled up to her, also watching the woman.

"Don't take too much heed of Medila," he whispered, "she's the personal assistant to Touvolle and Umailen and she's, well, very protective of them, to say the least. I'd advice you to stay out of her way as much as possible. You don't want her badmouthing you to the bosses."

"Why do they let such an obnoxious person be their assistant? Don't they see her behavior can impend the work we're doing in all sorts of ways?" Ariko asked, still bristling from the way she had been treated.

"It wasn't their choice. The Federation Senate appointed her when they accepted the funding of the project. She's a Senate crony through and through. You'll soon discover that politics play just as large a role here on Crielere as real science. Everyone seems to be looking for an opportunity to stab each other in the back."

"Are you?" Ariko shot back before she could catch herself. Gunaris blushed, then smiled shyly.

"No, I was only talking about the Big Guns, that's what we call those that call the shots around here."

"You mean Umailen and Touvolle?"

"No, the money men. Men like Otro Gariushi, Pier Ancru and Jacus Roden. Umailen and Touvolle provide the vision, they provide the wealth."

"But isn't the Crielere project supposed to benefit everybody equally?" Ariko asked, somewhat confused.

"In theory yes," Gunaris replied, sounding a little sad. "It's a complicated matter, some discoveries will become public right away, other only after some time. I don't know the details all that well, it's not something I'm all that interested in."

By now, the over-protective Medila had herded the two scientists into an adjoining office, teaming them up with people Gunaris described as 'those on her good side'.

"You're not on her good side?" Ariko inquired. Gunaris shrugged.

"I don't think she even knows I exist," he said. Ariko could see that he was quite content with this arrangement.

"Well, I'm supposed to be a junior assistant to them, how can I do my job if I can't even talk to them?"

"You've been misinformed," Gunaris replied, sounding apologetic. "That title doesn't mean anything else than you work in this lab. Getting access to them is quite another thing." Ariko stood quiet for awhile pondering this. Gunaris found the silence awkward and soon excused himself so he could carry on his work.

Her mind still in turmoil, Ariko sat at her console and started to browse reports and documents concerning the research taking place in the lab. If she was in doubt about the wisdom of coming here before, she was doubly so now after her conversation with Gunaris. She had been quite exhilarated that morning to be a participant in something so grand, she now felt she was a mere sidekick. 'If that's the case,' she thought sourly, 'I could have just as well have stayed home and behaved properly.' For the briefest moments she wondered whether she could just return home, begging her father for forgiveness. But she banished such thoughts from her mind as soon as they surfaced; she was not a quitter.

Returning to the reports she was soon totally engrossed in them. As more and more of the Crielere project was revealed to her, the more excited she got. What dreams Umailen and Touvolle had! And yet, it all sounded so simple, so elegant and so plausible. These guys were way ahead of anything being done in the State, Ariko realized. In fact, she now pitied her fellow science students back home, toiling in darkness on trivial research projects. She might not be on the straight and narrow career-path needed to reach prominence within the State, but she now understood she was in a unique position to actually make a difference; to make her mark on the world.

But for her to do so she would have to get past that pesky Medila. She would just have to show that old sow! The grim-looking Mannar woman might be headstrong and vengeful like all her kind, but Ariko was resolved to show her what Deteis were truly made of. Feeling all fired up Ariko wanted to storm into the conference room and confront Medila then and there, but if her strict upbringing had taught her anything it was the merits of self-restraint. Patience was the keyword here; she would bide her time, learn more about the work schedule of the scientists and their daily routines. Then she'd make her move.

Soon, Ariko had settled into the routine of her work, which mainly consisted of double checking test results of others and filing them appropriately. It was a menial job that required little thought. As she suspected, Medila kept the two pioneers isolated from all but those she deemed favorable, i.e. those she could dominate and bring under her forceful will. The research progress was painfully slow. Medila was largely to blame, but there were other distractions. There seemed to be an endless stream of bureaucrats and officials visiting, all needing time and effort to deal with. And the station itself was only half built yet. Even though the lab was in perfect working order the same could not be said of most other facilities on the station. Routine things such as just getting something to eat could be an adventure in itself.

Ariko was one of dozen or so junior assistance working in the lab. It was a mixed crew. Every member race of the Federation seemed to have a representative, the stubborn Mannars, the elegant Intakis, the materialistic Jitai and of course numerous Gallenteans. The Caldari had representatives of their own, including one other Deteis. He was a middle-aged man named Wobanen with a carefully combed hair and distant demeanor. Ariko tried to strike up a conversation with him on several occasions, but never got more than grunts and curt retorts from him, so she gave up trying to befriend him.

Instead, she found herself drifting closer to Gunaris. The two were of similar age, whereas most of the others were older. They were also the only ones lacking work

experience; Ariko having only just graduated and Gunaris still working on his final thesis. He was studying mathematics at Caille University , but was offered an internship at the lab after winning a mathematical competition sponsored by the Quafe Company. He was touted as a mathematical genius and though she was skeptical at first, considering herself to be a more than a competent mathematician on her own, she soon discovered that her talents paled next to Gunaris's. Moreover, while Ariko regarded mathematics simply as a necessity giving her choice of career, Gunaris was refreshingly enthusiastic about the field; it was almost like he revered or loved numbers the way he talked about them. Ariko couldn't help but share in his contagious enthusiasm and let herself be drawn into his world of numbers as he, with a dreamy stare, started talking. Theories and functions formerly so dense and boring sounded simplicity itself coming from Gunaris, and interesting too! As the days passed Ariko discovered that her little talks with Gunaris kept the tiresome monotony of work from making her go crazy. One time he tried to explain to her the work he was doing, but she had difficulty comprehending it. Apparently, there were places in space where earlier macroscopic phenomenon left microscopic residues resulting in dense clouds of plasma particles and charged microscopic dust which blocked electromagnetic radiation. Space ships inside these clouds could get no bearings from cosmic background radiation or known pulsars and were thus unable to warp out again. Gunaris was working on an algorithm, which, when coupled with a common sensor array, would filter out much of this interference. Along with complex multilateration based on nearby gravity wells, it would allow for an accurate location lockdown for ships inside such clouds, allowing them to warp out. She'd gotten a headache after listening to him for awhile, and he didn't broach the subject again.

Ariko was unable to completely shrug off feelings of discomfort when talking with Gallenteans, so she was glad her relationship with Gunaris never developed beyond the chit chat phase. But there were times when she cursed her inhibitions and wished for more.

Ariko used every opportunity to get familiar with the complex political situation on the station. As she had discovered on her first day at work the philanthropic vision of Umailen and Touvolle was only the tip of the iceberg. The Crielere project was the largest undertaking the Gallente Federation and the Caldari State had jointly embarked upon since the end of the war. The funding was divided between the Federation Senate, spurred on by president Souro Foiritan, independent Gallentean moneymen and the Caldari mega-corporations, notably Ishukone and Kalaakiota. The intense public interest in the project coupled with the expectations of what would be accomplished put immense pressure on everyone involved. The share scale of it was also far beyond anything Ariko had imagined. The Crielere station would be a high-tech jewel the likes of which the world had never witnessed, but it was becoming ever more obvious that the construction process was not going well, delay upon delay already had the fund raisers squirming. But the whole management structure, faulty as it was, was strictly regulated and interference from the leaders of the corporations and federal agencies was forbidden. The clause had been inserted as one of the amendments demanded by the Senate before they agreed on funding the project; fearing undue influence by the Caldari mega-corporations.

But the main reason was something that Ariko could well identify with; the Gallenteans and the Caldari simply didn't get along all that well. Apart from daily confrontations between construction workers from either race that often escalated into fisticuffs or even worse, the two races had radically different views on work procedures and methods. It was obvious that the whole construction process was an administration nightmare, lacking all coherency due to lack of direction from above and many feared the station would never be finished, never being able to fulfill its

promises. Failure loomed high on the horizon and morale was low. Ariko was hard put to keep her concentration while at work. A distressful call from her mother begging her to come home and plead for her father's forgiveness didn't help her state of mind. Maybe it was the ingrained xenophobia in her, but to Ariko it was obvious that the Federation Senate was largely to blame for this mess. And with Medila the top Senate official on the station Ariko felt it was only the patriotic thing to do to undermine her authority. That this would increase her chances for getting access to the scientists was only an added bonus.

A plan was needed, but Ariko was desperately short of options. Then aid came in the guise of a job offer. It wasn't a normal job offer in any normal sense of the word. She would even get to keep her current job in the lab; in fact, her presence in the lab was an essential requirement for this new job. In short, an agent working for the Wiyrkomi corporation approached her one day during her lunch hour and said if she would indulge in a bit of industrial espionage for her parent corporation her sins for leaving would be forgiven and a golden career path ensured. Ariko was skeptical at first, but when the agent offered help in ousting the pesky Medila as an added incentive, she couldn't refuse. Getting rid of Medila was all well and good, but the vision of her returning triumphantly to the State, Wiyrkomi singing her praises and her father browbeaten, was enough for her to accept the offer. She felt lightheaded all afternoon and it wasn't until she was alone in her small room that evening that it finally sank home; she was now a secret agent for the Wiyrkomi corporation, engaged to spy on her paymasters.

For the next week Ariko got an impromptu crash course in covert ops, especially in communicating and exchanging information in the utmost secrecy. Though a part of her was still reeling from what she was doing she couldn't help but enjoy it all immensely. She met her contact, who called himself Mitsu, every night in some unfinished part of the station. One night, another man was with him. It was a very ordinary looking Caldari, clothed in unassuming workers cloths. Yet even if he was so nondescript that he almost blended into the gray background she could sense that his mind was something else entirely. Her contact introduced the man and said he owed Wiyrkomi a small favor, which he would now repay by helping them to besmear Medila. The name Mitsu gave, Jirai Laitanen, didn't ring any bells with Ariko.

"I see you do not recognize me, even if I decline to employ some ridiculous pseudonym to hide my identity," the stranger said. "Maybe you know me better by my nickname, Fatal?" he asked mockingly. Ariko did. She felt a cold shiver run down her spine. Fatal, and his companion the Rabbit, were the leaders of the pirate group called Guristas. The pair, along with their fellow pirates, had harrowed the Caldari State for years, pulling stunts that seemed almost as much aimed to taunt the State as ruin it. Ariko was curious to know why Wiyrkomi owed this enemy of the State favors, but didn't dare ask.

"So are you enjoying your little spying game?" Fatal asked, still using that mocking tone.

"It's interesting, but I'm still a bit uneasy, what with the whole moral issue and all that," she answered hesitantly.

"Yeah, I know what you mean. It's like when you're having sex and need to take a dump at the same time. While you're going in and out at the front you don't know if something will stay in or come out at the back."

Ariko blushed at his vulgar words, then blushed even fiercer when Fatal laughed scornfully at her obvious discomfort.

"Enough of this banter," Mitsu said brusquely. "Let's talk business. Medila is a Senate puppy and will remain so while the Senate sees her as the champion of their cause. We must drive a wedge between Medila and the Senate, it's the only way possible to get rid of her for good without rousing suspicion. Now, my thought was to try and besmear her in the eyes of the Senate by showing her cavorting with Caldari, but Fatal has a much better idea. Tell her about it, Fatal." Fatal produced a small crystal vial from inside his grubby coat, exaggerating his gestures as he showed it to Ariko, holding it between his thumb and forefinger.

"In this little vial here is a small gift I received from my very good friend Virge. It contains a little something his labcoats cooked up for him."

"Is it toxin?" Ariko asked. "Are you going to poison her?"

"No, nothing so crude. Killing her would rouse unwanted attention, which, Mitsu tells me, is a definite no-no." Fatal said this as if he lamented not being allowed to kill Medila. It sent another cold shiver down Ariko's spine.

"This stuff here makes you go funny in the head," Fatal explained.

"A drug?" Ariko asked, still unsure where Fatal was going with this.

"Sort of. Sort of a drug. But not quite. It makes you go funny as in crazy." A nasty laughter gushed from him. "Completely goo-goo." Realization dawned on Ariko.

"You're going to drive her mad?"

"Yes," Fatal answered, returning the vial to his coat pocket.

"For how long?"

"Oh, fifty, maybe sixty years. Depends on how long she'll live." Ariko was aghast. Pangs of conscience assaulted her. She had asked for help to get rid of Medila, but this? She knew there was no way for her to stop it, the ball was already rolling and she had no say in the matter now. That much was clear. The question now was, was she willing to take part in this scheme? Standing there, with the two intimidating men hovering over her, she wanted most of all to run away, to forget it all. But it wasn't an option. She'd gotten herself into this situation, foolishly letting silly romanticism about being a fancy spy cloud her judgment. The only way for her now was to go through with this.

Fatal procured the repulsive vial, but she had to administer it to Medila. She was the only one of the three in the position to do so. The only problem was for her to get the vial into the lab, as there was a tight security regarding everything entering or exiting the research zones. Fatal came up with the solution, using Ariko's personal code he could break into the security system and program it to disregard any survey checks made on Ariko. After discussing the task a little longer, Fatal finally gave her the vial. She hid it in her bra, praying it wouldn't break.

"Oh, one last thing," Fatal said as if it was an afterthought. "I may be paying my debt to the Wiyrkomi corporation, but I expect a favor returned from you in the near future." He indicated Ariko. She wasn't sure what he meant, so she just nodded her head. He seemed satisfied and bid his farewell. Ariko wasn't sorry to see the back of him.

The next morning a bleary eyed Ariko entered the lab, still dazed from her lack of sleep. Her conscience was nagging her constantly so she was actually glad when

Medila confronted her later that morning and launched into one of her furious tirades about some perceived insubordination. Once the verbal assault was over Ariko was all poised and ready drive the tiresome woman mad, literally. That very evening Ariko snuck into the small lab kitchen, rummaging in the refrigerator until she found Medila's favorite food; it was some kind of a meat pâté native to the Mannars, but most others found revolting. Ariko carefully unscrewed the vial and stirred its contents into the foul-smelling pâté.

Only when she was falling asleep that night did she wonder just how insane Medila would become. Perhaps some precautions would have been wise. But it was too late to do anything about that now. The next day Ariko would almost come to regret it.

The morning turned out to be quite peaceful actually. Ariko managed to lose herself in cross-referencing data codes for a promising drone AI project, with no sign of Medila anywhere. After lunch, though, with Medila having eaten a generous portion of her loathsome pâté, things quickly escalated into the realms of the absurd.

It started innocently enough, with Medila being unusually domineering around Umailen and Touvolle. But as the hours passed she grew more and more possessive, while at the same time showing increasing megalomaniac tendencies. Late in the afternoon Medila had convinced herself that the fate of the project rested on her shoulders solely and that it was her genius and her genius only that would spark all the wonderful new discoveries. This didn't sound too bad until she got the notion that only by devouring the brains of the other scientists could she fulfill her own prophecy of becoming the Queen of Inspiration. She managed to lock herself, along with Touvolle and Umailen, inside one of the offices, barricading the door. Someone had called security, but the door wouldn't budge.

Ariko was in shock. It was bad enough being responsible for driving poor Medila insane, but now she had to contend with her possibly killing the two men that the whole project hinged upon. She watched the frustrated efforts of the security guards trying to force the door open. 'This is absurd,' she thought, 'this is a lab. There must be something here that can help us open this damn door.' She looked around, searching for something, equipment, chemical components, anything. Her eyes finally came to rest on a half-assembled infinite impulse processor, part of some linear audio phaser research she wasn't party to. But it gave her an idea.

Grabbing the equipment she made her way to her own workbench, where she located a small fusion array. She wasn't all that sure this would work, but it was worth the try. Working quickly, she fused the two items together. She then rushed to where the security guards were still trying to pry the door open, all the while shouting through the door for Medila to give herself up. There was no time to ask nicely.

"Get away," she shouted, as she put her newly created audio blaster on the floor in front of the door. The security guards looked at her in confusion, but Wobanen was quick on the uptake and dragged them away. Ariko activated her newly created weapon, cursing for not having enough time to set up a timer. She could only hope the directional field in the processor was working adequately, or she would blow the eardrums of everyone in the room. And possibly fry their brains in the process. She waited for the fusion array to charge completely, then she turned it to maximum output, released the holder key and scampered away.

The sonic boom shook the room like an earthquake. Ariko was sure it could be felt around the station. After all, it was circular. Raising herself, all she could hear at first was a high-pitch buzz in her ears. It faded quickly though. A few others were not so

lucky, as she would later find out, the blast causing permanent damage to the sensitive auditory system.

Most importantly, the door was now open. The two halves of it were bent backward as if they were made of butter instead of a hardened steel alloy. Ariko rushed into the room, fearing the worst. The office was a mess, but the three people inside were thankfully unharmed. The security guards quickly took hold of Medila, even as she fought them with the inhuman strength of the deranged. She was no longer screaming for brains to feed her newfound queenhood. Instead, she was shouting abuses at the guards.

"I'm Medila!" she screeched hysterically. "I must contain the maniacs!" She nodded her head in the direction of Touvolle and Umailen. "I gave a sacred oath!" she continued. "To Mentas Blaque himself. He charged me with suppressing this whole idiotic project! I'm a smotherer! A smotherer!" she screamed as the security guards dragged her away.

'This is interesting,' Ariko thought. 'In her crazed state she has given up her secret mission.' During her research on the political structure behind the Crielere project she had often come across the name Mentas Blaque. He was the leader of the Federation Senate and a sworn enemy of president Souro Foiritan. She chuckled to herself. While she felt sorry for the sudden and tragic downfall of Medila she couldn't believe how things had played into her hands. Not only was the Senate crony now gone forever, but the Senate wouldn't dare replace her now that it had been revealed it had tried to impinge on the project in a most improper manner. Ariko also realized that her first impression of Medila being the main obstacle to the project really taking off was completely accurate.

Following the downfall of Medila, the Senate was quick to denounce any knowledge of any secret dealings with the mad woman and withdrew completely from meddling with the running of the station. Ariko could easily picture Mentas Blaque sulking in some extravagant luxury yacht somewhere, cursing the name of Medila and all her ancestors from here to eternity. The thought made her laugh.

In the quiet aftermath following the uproar few witnessed the arrival of the man destined to be responsible for the rise and then the ruin of the Crielere project. Otro Gariushi, CEO of the Ishukone Corporation, arrived silently at the half-built station in the early hours of the morning, slipping almost unnoticed into a docking bay on an unassuming shuttle. Branded an ugly brute by his enemies, of which there were many, he had never been quite able to shake off the dark rumors of a shady past that followed him wherever he went. Driven by some secret inner demons, his blind ambition lent him a powerful charisma that swept those around him into a maelstrom of obedience and compliance.

Gariushi, tipped off by his agents on the station, was quick to grasp the change in the power structure and his arrival was no mere happenstance. Like the other CEOs of the mega-corporation Gariushi had watched in worry the problems on Crielere escalate, but unlike the other CEOs he was more than willing to take an active part in rectifying the situation; a breach of protocol was not something Otro Gariushi lost any sleep over.

A former adversary of Gariushi once remarked that 'Gariushi fills a power vacuum like an obese person a spandex suit' and before the day had turned to evening Otro had firmly asserted himself as the man in charge on the Crielere station.

Though Gariushi was not held in high esteem in the State due to his shady background Ariko was inwardly pleased that a Caldari was now calling the shots. The Gallenteans naturally grumbled a bit, but they had suffered from the lack of leadership just as acutely as the Caldari and most of them were simply glad that someone was taking charge, even if it was an obnoxious Caldari.

Ariko decided it was best for her to lay low for awhile until the situation had stabilized. She had no idea how Gariushi might react to what she had done or, more importantly, if he knew anything of her secret dealings with Mitsu or Fatal. Working the graveyard shift for a few weeks was much preferred than being booted out of the station. She had accomplished what she set out for; getting rid of Medila and gaining the favor of the scientists in the process. She wasn't about to jeopardize that now by sticking her neck out. Instead, she opted to observe activities from afar. There was another reason for her decision, the family name Cumin might ring some unwanted bells with Gariushi. She didn't know all the gritty details, but she knew that when she was a girl, her father, an important negotiator for Wiyrkomi at the time, had been sent to the headquarters of Ishukone to barter a deal. Gariushi had entangled her father in a conspiracy ploy and then threatened to reveal it to Wiyrkomi unless a very favorable deal would be settled on. Her father had no alternative but to accept, being branded an idiot was far better than that of a traitor. After his return her father's career slowly faded into obscurity and instead he pinned the hope of his family on Ariko's slender shoulders. Ariko was pretty sure that Gariushi had long since forgotten the name of Cumin, but she didn't want to take any chances on the matter. She would stay in the shadows for the time being.

Gariushi was quick to stamp his mark and in only a few days the construction process was as fast as it had ever been. In fact, construction materials were soon in short supply. At first Gariushi tried to increase shipments from the contracted shipping firms, Inner Zone Shipping and Ytiri, but they were slow to respond. Undaunted, his next move was to get freelance pilots, mainly from independent companies, to ship materials in. By appealing to the altruistic nature of the Crielere project, aimed to aid everyone, the response was overwhelming and gave a good indication what a shrewd nose Gariushi had when it came to political machinations.

The problem of an inadequate workforce remained. Much of the budget allocated to build the station had been spent, yet it was only half built. A week after his arrival, Gariushi ordered the construction zone to be sealed off, as well as the docking bay serving the zone. He justified this by stating that the workforce needed to shield itself from outside interruptions and attractions, so they could concentrate fully upon the task at hand. Ariko couldn't quite understand this need for seclusion, but dismissed the conspiracy theories about slaves being used to bolster the workforce as fabricated rumors spread by former cronies of Medila. The sudden appearance of burly Amarrians walking the station's halls was merely a coincidence, Ariko reasoned. Whatever methods Gariushi was employing he certainly seemed to be getting the results, as new sections of the station seemed to open up almost every day.

The impact these development had on the research effort was evident to everyone. Better facilities, coupled with optimism that the Crielere project was finally spreading its wings, meant that new and fabulous discoveries were being made. Already blueprints were being churned out and the eye of the world again turned to Crielere for wondrous news. Ariko enjoyed being part of what was happening, particularly for her small but significant contribution in getting things on the right track. Vanity tickled her to shout her accomplishments to the world, but she had plenty of common sense to wrestle it to the ground. But when Gariushi declared that the first fully developed blueprints, for advanced mining equipment, would be made public to everyone, she

felt that it was time to come out of the shadows again. She didn't know what Gariushi was up to, giving away discoveries like that. She doubted his stated reasons of philanthropy, but couldn't discredit them. But his actions meant that if she wanted to be of any value to her new secret employers then she'd better get closer to the two pioneers.

Gunaris was still working on his calculations, happily oblivious to the hectic goings on in other parts of the station. But he was on the inside track when it came to communicating with the two scientists. Through him, Ariko got to meet the scientists on a regular basis, even sometimes participating in brainstorm meetings or being asked to note down theories or ideas they seemed to be constantly throwing between themselves. The creative atmosphere surrounding the pair was so contagious that Ariko found herself easily caught up in the fever and enjoyed every second of it.

Umailen and Touvolle turned out to be quite the characters. Their relationship was almost a symbiotic one, they complemented each other so perfectly that after decades of working together they often finished each other's sentences or merely glanced at each other to see what the other was thinking. Far from being the stuffy old bores like many people imagined scientists to be they were almost like children in their irresponsible, playful behavior. Ariko could sense a darker side to them, something to do with their war experience all those years ago when they were both young men. It was as if those haunting memories they had drove them on, yet never surfacing in a negative manner. In fact, Ariko often felt like she was back in college, such was the atmosphere in the lab now that the stifling regime of Medila was at an end. She especially enjoyed the silly banter the scientists often engaged in. When they entered the lab in the morning they frequently made boastful proclamations about who would discover more wondrous things that day. She particularly enjoyed their 'science is' game, where they likened science to some thing or another, in a tongue-in-cheek manner. In time she became a participant herself in this game, where the trick was to out-do the others based in previous comments.

"Science is like a prostitute," Touvolle would perhaps say out of the blue. "You lust for a short-lived pleasure, but are left with something itchy and indescribable in the long-term."

"I beg to differ," Ariko would counter. "Science is like a callgirl. You know the number, but have no idea how to handle all the complexities."

"Ah, you're on the wrong track all together," Umailen would retort. "Science is like a marriage. It starts with an exiting affair and ends up eating all your time."

Thus it would go back and forth for awhile, before they all delved once more into serious work. Despite spending time playing silly games like 'science is' they were still even more productive than before and new blueprints saw daylight more or less every week. It was a fantastic achievement.

While Ariko was in a privileged position being part of the team surrounding the two scientists she was still just a junior assistant and as such still had some tedious assignments to complete. Working late one evening she decided to make a routine check on the blueprints already filed. It wasn't the most fun job in the world, but it always filled her with a sense of accomplishment seeing a concrete proof that coming here hadn't been the disaster she initially thought it would be. Her father had sent her here when she refused to come work in his office after graduation. It was intended as a punishment and she had taken it as such initially. Now she knew differently. She thought it was ambition that had brought about her little rebellion, but now she knew it really was a longing to be part of something important; where she felt her contribution

was not only appreciated, but also of value to more than just her family's prestige or her corporation's bottom line.

Ariko couldn't come near the blueprints themselves; their high value meant they were only accessible to a handful of people. Instead, she had to use a complicated robotic system to access and file the blueprints. Putting her mind into automatic, she filed the blueprints one by one while letting her mind wander about the impact these blueprints would have on the world. A soft beep on the console she was working on brought her back from her reverie. Blueprints were missing. Accidentally, Ariko had made a fateful discovery of the most innocuous nature, but which would unleash a series of events that would in the end shake the whole world.

At first Ariko thought it was an oversight on her part, due to tiredness, but she double-checked, then checked again, always with the same results. Missing were original blueprints of many of the most stunning and exciting discoveries made so far on the station. Ariko was at a loss what to do. Was it a theft or just an innocent mistake? She wanted to believe the latter, but her gut feeling told her otherwise. Her sense of duty told her she should report this to her superiors. But if this was a theft, who was responsible? Even the mere existence of the blueprints was top secret, making it almost impossible this was an outside job. Ariko didn't like the path her train of thoughts was taking her down, but there was only one inevitable conclusion; if this was theft it was done by an insider. Not only that, it was done by someone high up in the chain of command.

Ariko was in no position to investigate the matter herself. But she had no idea whom she could trust. The one thing she did know was that she had to report this to someone, otherwise the blame would fall on her. Gariushi she didn't trust. Besides, he was away on a visit to New Caldari. But she knew just the people to turn to.

The news spread like wildfire through the station. The next day when Ariko woke up the station was buzzing. She had told the scientists last night; after telling Mitsu first. Obviously the scientists had wasted no time in getting the story out, or at least not bothered much to conceal it. When Ariko entered the lab the tension was tangible. No one managed to do much work that day, suspicion and uncertainty the only thing on people's mind. Ariko hadn't slept much during the night. She was out in the open now, with all eyes on the station on her. She felt naked and defenseless, sure that everyone could see all her dirty little secrets. During the night she had half expected the police to come crashing through the door, dragging along Mitsu bound and gagged. At a time she even thought that the whole thing was a setup. After all, how stupid was it to steal these blueprints? It was bound to be found out eventually. How much better just to make copies or at least record the information, but leave the originals behind, then no one would have been any wiser that anything was amiss. In the darkness of her room Ariko was certain the only explanation was that someone wanted to pin this on her. Now, in the daylight, she laughed at her silly paranoia, though the uneasy feeling remained. There were other explanations: maybe the thieves didn't have time to make copies, or maybe they wanted to possess the blueprint technology all to themselves, or maybe they were simply cocky and didn't care if they were found out.

Gariushi, back from New Caldari, and his people were also ominously silent. Some took this as a sign that the whole thing was a hoax and would be cleared up shortly. Others took it as a sign that Gariushi was trying to think of ways to cover this up. As day turned to evening the first orders from Gariushi's office filtered down; no one was allowed to leave the station, communications with the outside world were severely restricted and only employees of the station were allowed in.

At first Ariko thought these measures were to hinder the thief or thieves from getting their ill-gotten items out of the station, but then she realized that it was much too late for that – the thieves could have left long ago. The only explanation for this order was to hinder news of the theft from spreading outside the station. Ariko suspected it was also much too late for that. Of course, this also meant it was too dangerous for her to talk to her contact for the time being. But she had talked to him last night and there was no need to talk to him again quite yet.

The next day Ariko was finally called in for questioning. She had had butterflies in her stomach the previous day, fearing what her discovery the previous night might entail. A couple of officials showed up at her small apartment and escorted her to a secluded room in the upper levels of the station. There she met a soft-spoken man that simply interviewed her about her findings and her subsequent actions. It wasn't quite an interrogation, because Ariko was so co-operative, but she sensed that the soft-spoken man was quite ready to turn the screws on her if the need arose. He even seemed a bit disappointed for her not giving him an excuse for doing so. The interview only took a couple of hours, after which she was allowed to go. Ariko breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed that although Gariushi was unhappy with developments, having openly raved about her incompetence and disloyalty in informing the scientists first, he wasn't going to take it out against her. And more importantly, her cover was still intact.

The atmosphere was muted when she got back to the lab. Ariko was certain that Umailen and Touvolle would be crestfallen at the loss of such valuable blueprints, but they seemed as cheerful as ever. Touvolle summed up the feelings of the pair when he said:

“Ah, those blueprints may be of some value at the moment, but with the ideas me and Taromi have they'd be obsolete in a few months anyway.” Having said that he urged his coworkers to start working again, the best way to stick it to the thieves was by producing even better blueprints as soon as possible. Touvolle's short speech lifted the gloomy spirit in the lab and soon everyone were back at their workstations, toiling away happily. Ariko joined the others, glad that the research effort was still in full swing. ‘All the more for me to report,’ she thought grimly.

The next day the station was again buzzing. Not because of the stolen blueprints, but because Otro Gariushi had slipped away during the night, disappearing just as quietly as he had appeared a month earlier. While leaving behind a deputy to take care of business, it was obvious that Gariushi was washing his hands clean of the Crielere project. Ariko suspected he had already got what he wanted. She could only admire the man. He shrewdly manipulated the public opinion to remain in charge, while behind the scenes he carefully acquired what he was really after. ‘Then he slipped away like a thief into the night,’ Ariko mused. There was no doubt in her mind that Gariushi was responsible for the stolen blueprints. It was only a question of whether he would get away with it or not. She couldn't help but compare how differently Ishukone did business than her own Wiyrkomi corporation. ‘With Gariushi at the helm Ishukone simply comes in and takes what it wants. All Wiyrkomi could do was to recruit lowly me.’

The deputy left behind by Gariushi did his best to hush the blueprint theft. He launched an internal investigation, but gave no progress reports, or even an indication on when the investigation would be concluded. Days passed and still there were no official news. But there were subtle hints that behind the scenes a cleanup was taking place. Several high-ranking officials, including some Caldari scientists, had handed in their resignations, claiming they were too distraught by the theft to continue working on the project. All of them immediately got jobs elsewhere for

empire corporations. The theft was becoming old news. Ariko was hoping the whole thing would blow over, allowing the research effort to resume. But she failed to take the righteousness of the Gallenteans into account. They wouldn't forget something like this and they would want to find the culprits. All they needed was someone to enforce their will. And that is just what they got. A week after Ariko first reported the stolen blueprints, Souro Foiritan, president of the Gallente Federation made an unannounced visit to the station.

Foiritan had been one of the staunchest supporters of the project from the very beginning. It was well known that the man had a passionate interest in technology and new gadgets, and from what Ariko had heard from her coworkers Foiritan had to wrestle the Federal Senate tooth and nail to get it to fund the project. Thus, his arrival now when his pet project was in danger came as no surprise.

Of course, Foiritan had no official authority on the station, but with the current leadership being as tentative as it was he could steamroll over all barriers and protocols like a scorpion in a henhouse. Ariko would have thought Foiritan would storm right to the command center to take control, but she didn't count on his fascination for technology. He had to take a tour of the facilities first, starting with a visit to Umailen and Touvolle, whom Foiritan had come to love and respect. They showed him around the lab. Foiritan's face lit up each time a new invention was shown to him and by the time they came to Ariko's desk he was positively beaming.

"Here is the girl that discovered the missing blueprints," Touvolle said, introducing Ariko. She shyly shook Foiritan's hand. A shadow had past over his face at the mention of the stolen blueprints and now he looked grave and troubled.

"Ah, yes. The missing blueprints," he said softly, staring Ariko straight in the eyes as they shook hands. She could feel the charisma radiating off him and understood finally what the Gallenteans saw in this man that many considered a buffoon not fit for office. She remembered all the times she and her schoolmates had mocked this man after his latest folly. It made her blush and avert her eyes. Foiritan smiled knowingly and released her hand.

"Such a shame that some people are willing to sacrifice the future for such a short term gain," he continued softly, still looking intently at Ariko.

"Quite so," Touvolle concurred, a bit bewildered by the short exchange of words between president Foiritan and Ariko the junior assistant.

Ariko tried to breath calmly as Foiritan continued his tour of the lab. The sheer animalistic charisma of the man was enough to overwhelm anyone, but his words had hit her like a sledgehammer. Did he know about her being a spy? Or was it just innocent small talk? She couldn't tell.

She watched Foiritan as he talked privately with the two scientists for a few minutes, his bodyguards making sure no one could approach them. The scientists glanced furtively around the lab a few times, but never at her. She breathed a sigh of relief. If they were talking about her they surely would have looked in her direction at least once.

Later that day Ariko found out that Foiritan had ordered a thorough investigation into the theft, to be carried out by a team of independent investigators brought from outside. Foiritan made it quite clear that this team would have full access to the station and all relevant data, in order to speed up the investigation process as much as possible. Having come what he set out for, Foiritan and his entourage of PR

people and the media, left the station on the large luxury yacht that had brought them here.

The next few days went by like in a dream. Ariko tried to keep her mind on the job, but her mind kept returning to the stolen blueprints. She knew that the future of the project hinged on the results of the ongoing investigation and so did the rest of the workers. Even Gunaris seemed too distant and preoccupied to talk to her. Only now, thinking about the future of the project, did she realize really how important it had become to her. She had been skeptical for a long time and the spying game had distracted her from seeing where her true priorities lay. Now she knew; with the project. With Umailen and Touvolle. She also feared that the investigation would turn up something unwanted, such as her being a secret agent. She hadn't heard anything from Mitsu in days, and though she hoped this merely meant he was being cautious she sometimes feared he had been arrested. She needed someone to talk to so she wouldn't go mad, turning these thoughts around in her head again and again. She finally managed to break Gunaris down and get him to talk to her. She stayed well away from discussing current affairs with him, as she feared this would shut him up, so she opted instead to talk about his youth. After a hesitating start, he soon got into gear and started telling her about his enthusiasm for numbers.

"I've always been fascinated by numbers, for as long as I can remember," he confessed. "My home planet, Ation VIII, has 21 moons and I remember I thought this was a magic number when I was a boy." He smiled his shy little smile that Ariko thought so endearing before continuing.

"To me mathematics was like magic and I loved number puzzles or strange sequences. Like this number," he said, picking up the light pen on his desk and drawing the number 142857 in the air. "It seems like just a random six-figure number, but try multiplying it by two." Ariko quickly did so in her head.

"285714," she said.

"Right, now multiply it by three, four, five and six." This was more difficult, and Ariko scrunched her face in an effort to do this quickly. Gunaris laughed merrily as he saw her struggle.

"Never mind," he said. "I'll give you the numbers." He wrote the numbers down below the first number, in a list. "Now, add the individual numbers of the first number together, what do you get?"

"27," Ariko replied promptly. This was easy.

"Correct, and the next and the next?" She looked at them, wonder spreading around her face.

"27, they're all twenty-seven."

"And if you add them vertically?" he prodded. Now she gasped and smiled in amazement.

"27 too, for all of them. That's amazing!" They both laughed.

"Yeah, well, this was the kind of stuff I found fascinating when I was a small boy, four or five probably. It sparked an interest in numbers that has never dwindled. Even though I've found no true magic in there."

“Are you still looking?” she asked. It was meant as a tease, but Gunaris became serious.

“I am,” he finally said and Ariko saw he meant it. Then the investigators arrived in the lab and the conversation ended.

The investigators, most of them Gallenteans and Intakis, worked fast and efficiently. The thieves hadn't been all that careful in covering up their tracks, as they seemed confident that the powers that be would protect them. So the investigation was over swiftly and the results didn't particularly surprise anyone: men working under direct orders from Otro Gariushi had systematically plundered blueprints and even prototype equipment.

After the findings of the investigators had been announced it was like all the racial and political tension that Gariushi had held in check were now out in the open twice as forceful as before. With growing dismay, Ariko watched helplessly as confrontations between Gallenteans and Caldari escalated by the hour. Bar brawls became common, soon intensifying into full scale riots. The day after the investigative report was made public, a Senate delegation arrived to take stock of the situation.

With the arrival of a new Senate delegation, throwing the leadership on the station into confusion, things quickly escalated beyond control. The security personnel on the station, hitherto considered to have the easiest jobs around, suddenly found themselves in full riot gear, facing a mob that seemed ready to tear the just completed station apart with their bare hands. Conflicting orders filtered down from above, inflaming the volatile situation even further. Martial laws were declared, but with little effect. People started leaving in droves.

The Senate delegation left in a huff, furious about not being given sole command of the station. It came as no surprise to Ariko when she heard the next day that they had pulled the financial plug. The Caldari mega-corporations followed suit shortly after. The Crielere project was in a crisis, with most of the staff gone and now no budget. And yet, Ariko felt defiant. Not because she wanted further chances to conduct industrial espionage for Wyrkomi. In fact, she was fed up with the greedy corporations and their power politics. She didn't want the project to end.

The Crielere project was a like a dream you have when you're neither awake nor asleep, one you never want to end. Ariko realized what she wanted most of all was to keep the dream alive. It was too valuable for it to succumb to petty corporate rivalries and racial antagonism. She was reminded of one of her heated conversations with her father shortly before she left where he accused her of betraying her corporation. She could still feel the sting of tears of frustration in her eyes. To be branded a traitor and a spoiled brat by her father, whom she'd looked up to her entire life. She remembered how angry and humiliated she'd felt at being accused of betraying the corporation that had reared her, even if it wasn't true. She had intended to work for Wyrkomi. She only wanted to do it on her own terms. But now, his accusations were true. She didn't even try to convince herself that staying with the scientists gave her further opportunities to wring some valuable information out of them. She was too smart for that. She was staying because she wanted to use her talents the way they were supposed to; not stifled by the corporation, but allowed to flourish doing something that really mattered to all mankind.

Ariko had thought that coming to Crielere, bad as it sounded at first, would at least quench her thirst for adventure, but instead it opened her eyes to how narrow-minded

her father was, or she had been, for that matter. How could she stay loyal to her corporation when it meant betraying humanity?

Entering the lab, Ariko mused that what was now left of the Crielere project was the essence of what it stood for. All the money grabbers and band wagoners were gone, leaving only those that truly wanted to make a difference, even if it meant sacrificing their careers. Gunaris was there and the sight of him made the cynical side of Ariko wonder how much the fact that he was staying behind had influenced her own decision unconsciously. Ariko knew the time was drawing near when she had to bare her feelings for him, as much as she dreaded it.

Touvolle and Umailen were seated in their favorite brainstorming chair, but for once they weren't discussing new science theories. The pair had earlier in the morning sent out a plea to the outside world asking for support, financial or otherwise. It had met with a bland response. There was an air of resignation around the lab. Ariko knew that if she didn't convince them to continue with their work, then all she had to look forward to was to return to the fold of Wiyrkomi and sign her life sentence of obedience with them. A few months earlier it would have truly honored her. Now it was abhorrent to her. Ariko had never considered herself to be of much a motivational speaker, but she had passion and hoped it lent her some powers of persuasion. She surveyed the motley crew assembled before her. There were maybe fifty of them left, a fraction of the thousands that had swarmed the station only few short weeks earlier. All had the look of gloom in their eyes, but she hoped the reason they hadn't left yet was because they still harbored some secret hope that the project could go on. She recalled a parable from back home, told to all aspiring young Caldari students.

"There once was a great rich merchant," she began hesitantly, suddenly all too aware that all eyes in the room were on her. But she plunged on regardless, steeling her nerves. "He lived to a grand old age and possessed every wealth a man could dream of. Many looked to him in awe or envy, coveting his treasures and desiring to imitate his great successes. Yet the old man was never happy and on his deathbed, a young clerk working for him asked: 'You must feel that your life has been one great success story, what with all the wealth you have accumulated.' But the old man replied. 'My life has been one of misery and sorrow. As a young man I chose wealth over family, discarding the love of my life. When I die all that I will leave behind in the world is money. But money is the same all over, mine is no different from anyone else's. Once my wealth has been scattered, all that I will be is dust and vague memories. My life is a failure young man, don't make the same mistakes I did.' The young clerk heeded the old man's advice, making sure he had the time to rear a family even if his focus was on his career path." Ariko took a deep breath, watching her attentive audience ponder her little anecdote. "Now, this story may not be all that relevant to our situation here, but to me, and I hope for the rest of you, I've become to realize that the Crielere project is the love of my life. If I abandon it now, no matter how successful I'll become later in life, I'll always regret having done so. This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make our mark on the world, to create something that will go down in history and not scatter in the wind like dust. I have no idea if we can pull this off on our own, but by Fate, I'm willing to try my best until all avenues are spent." By this time Ariko was almost shouting, her passion and enthusiasm shining through. She didn't know what more she could say. She wanted to run to each and every one of those in the room, shake them by the shoulders and beg them to stay on.

No one spoke for a minute. Ariko was certain her words hadn't hit home, that she'd sounded too desperate, too manic. Then Touvolle stood up, a thoughtful expression on his face. He slowly walked over to where Ariko was standing and, in a sudden gesture, embraced her. "Thank you," he whispered in her ear. "Thank you."

It was done. They would stay and continue. Ariko was thrilled, but at the same time, her pesky cynical side couldn't help but wonder if all of them were living a dream they hoped never ended, but a dream nevertheless. No. This was no illusion. The Crielere project was real. Maybe more real than anything else she'd ever known.

Ariko had grown accustomed to the hustling and busting of the station while the project was in full swing. Now the empty corridors echoed back her footsteps, hammering home the bleakness of the place. Everything seemed to be malfunctioning and the few dozen people she'd managed to convince to stay on had to spend most of their time keeping the station up and running. Closing down a few sections had alleviated the problem somewhat.

Touvolle had taken Ariko's speech to heart and was now carrying the torch for the rest of them. Ariko was happy to step back into the sidelines and let the energetic old man take on the role of a leader of this rag-tag team. Umailen was not far behind in spurring people on and together great progress was made everyday. But supplies were getting low and the crew was even forced to beg benevolent visitors for handouts. And Fatal would come soon and claim his reward, somehow Ariko was sure of that.

Mitsu was long gone, but he left her with a small communication device she could hide in her room. It was dangerous to use, even if they employed codes and encryptions. She used it only sporadically, just enough to keep Mitsu happy. But he was becoming impatient with the lack of hard data she was sending, demanding more and more. For a long while his threats of total ostracism from the State kept her in line. He even stooped so low as to threaten to make the life of her elderly parents difficult if she didn't comply. But as her admiration for Umailen and Touvolle grew she began to loath this secret side of her life ever more. It was beginning to affect her self-esteem; she began to loath herself for her treachery and low moral fiber. She was thankful to the State for rearing her for all those years, but since her arrival here at Crielere she had seen a darker, more sinister side of it. This was its true face, she realized. This is how the State behaved behind the pretty veil it cast on its citizens. It may shelter them, but it deceived them at the same time. What worth was the life's work of an honest man when it was made under deception and guile? She knew it was time to cut the umbilical cord for good. Maybe complying with Mitsu offered her a future with the State, but it wasn't a future she wanted anymore. She contemplated just throwing away the communication device; maybe Mitsu would think it had been damaged or she found out. But she wanted a clean break. It took her a few days to amass enough courage, but in the end there was nothing to it. Sure, Mitsu cursed her and all her ancestral line. He dragged her poor parents into it again. But she wouldn't budge. It was an ugly break, she shook all over for an hour after cutting the com-link for the last time, but it was over. She was now a persona nongrata. A person without a nation. She was remarkably relaxed about this, given that to most Caldari this was almost worse than being dead. The State had given her the time and the resources to grow and be educated, but she had given it all her time in return. Yet it always demanded more, demanded all of her time all for itself. This she was not prepared to do. Her time was now here, on the Crielere station, with the scientists and the all-important Project.

'If only we had a little more time,' Ariko thought for the umpteenth time. 'Then we could complete some of the stuff we're developing and sell the blueprints. With a bit of luck we can become self-sufficient in a few weeks.' Ariko didn't consciously think the world worked in a predestined way, but if she did, then she would have cursed Fate for the blow it dealt next. The empires withdrew their police forces from the Crielere system. And then Fatal arrived. With his friends. Lots and lots of them.

The Guristas were quick to assert their authority in the system. Fatal had come to exert his due reward – full access to the station and every secret it held. This was an extortion of the highest magnitude and Ariko didn't blame the scientists to balk at Fatal's demands.

The empires turned a deaf ear when the scientists pleaded for their help in fending off the Guristas. It seemed as if they were on their own. But then help arrived from an unexpected source. The independent pilots, formerly so helpful in getting the station completed in time, arrived in droves. They had heard the pleas of the scientists and, unlike the callous empires, they had decided to respond.

Some came because they wanted to help fellow humans in need. Others because they believed in the project and wanted to help keep it intact. Still others came for glory, for the chance to hunt down pirates, hoping to get valuable loot or simply out of curiosity. But their strength and determination amazed Ariko and showed her how strong and vivacious the independent pilot community was becoming. She knew many discounted them as being immaterial, but Ariko now knew better. They were the future because they were organized yet flexible, tolerant yet principled; an ever growing organism whereas the empires were bound by their traditions and mistrust of each other.

The skeleton crew left on the station was already stretched thin working on the energy systems so the huge particle accelerators and other energy draining research equipment didn't overheat or destabilize. Now it also had to contend with bolstering what little defenses the station possessed. Power was re-routed to the shields and weapon platforms. It gave them all some sense of security, but Ariko knew enough about shields and weapons to deem the station defenses as pathetic; if it wasn't for the pilots out there sacrificing their ships or even lives then the Guristas could almost have waltzed right into the station. This was undoubtedly what Fatal had counted on, hence his decision to risk directing his pirate fleet so far from their traditional playing grounds.

The arrival of the freelance pilots was a surprise to the Guristas, but it wasn't a sufficient threat to make the pirates flee. A fierce battle ensued. Most of the Guristas engaged the freelance pilots, but several cruisers headed towards the station and started blasting it with everything they got. The Guristas obviously hoped to damage the station so severely it would be forced to surrender. Missile after missile slammed into the feeble shields, battering the hull in the process. The crew watched in mounting horror as the fission core used in their morphite plasma research became unstable to the point of threatening to explode. A team was hastily deployed to make emergency repairs, Ariko being one of them.

Laboring in the bowels of the station to stabilize the overheating core took Ariko out of the loop, leaving in her complete darkness as to how the battle was going. Later she would often reflect if it would have mattered had she been in the command center when the greenhouse was breached. Would she have stopped Gunaris from going there for emergency repairs? Would she have argued with Umailen for his decision to close the section off? Would she have had time to say goodbye?

In the end it didn't really matter. The only thing that mattered was that Gunaris volunteered to enter the greenhouse, in an order to seal a breach that was letting essential oxygen escape. When subsequent explosions damaged the greenhouse section beyond repair, Umailen had ordered it to be sealed off before the whole station was extinguished. It hadn't been an easy decision, Ariko knew that when she looked into Umailen's haunted eyes. Yet she wished he hadn't had to make it.

They found his body the next day, lying peacefully between some tomato plants as if in deep slumber. It was impossible to tell whether he had suffered in his death or not, but Ariko didn't feel it mattered. She felt empty inside. Never having experienced true sorrow before in her life, she was unsure how to behave. Suddenly her time with Gunaris, their small talks and short walks, took on a whole new meaning. They were now cherished memories of someone she would never see again. Never talk to again. Never touch. In the first few hours after she returned to the lab and found out his fate emotions had raged through her. Anger, bitterness, loneliness, confusion, denial, grief.

The Guristas were beaten back finally, retreating into nearby systems to lick their wounds. This hardly registered with Ariko. Yet again she lost sleep that night, her mind in turmoil. For the first time in her life she prayed to her ancestors. She knew many Caldari did it; her mother for one. Until now she had scorned such practices as relics of the past, but now she found solace in it. It also allowed her to steel her mind against the grief that threatened to overwhelm her. All the emotions she had felt for Gunaris, but suppressed, now came flooding back, multiplying her sorrow. When morning came she had resolved to stay strong. She would find time later to grieve properly. Now the scientists needed her. And she needed to focus on the task at hand: successfully defending the station against the Guristas. They might have been driven back yesterday, but they were not beaten.

The lab had been turned into a makeshift command center. Nobody had wanted to take up residency in the old one, so they'd simply stripped the necessary equipment and set it up anew. Some had even started sleeping in the lab, not wanting to wander the empty corridors alone. Ariko couldn't blame them, thought she still stayed in her drab room. With half the station at her disposal she could have easily found something more grand, but she didn't bother.

Yesterday's events were being discussed as Ariko entered. The lab grew quiet. Everyone knew how Ariko and Gunaris had felt for each other. 'Everyone but me,' she lamented. She managed a smile and joined the discussion, brushing off all attempts at compassion. Soon, the conversation was back on track.

"That should show the empires how people feel about the Crielere project," Touvolle exclaimed when the independent pilots were being discussed. "These pilots can understand the value of our work."

After the initial rush of euphoria a battle council was called on the urging of Ariko to discuss how the station could be defended on a permanent basis.

"The Guristas will most likely attack us again," she explained. "And even if they don't then somebody else will pop up sooner or later. We can't depend on those independent pilots to keep defending us. Heck, from what I gather they've already started bickering amongst themselves over spoils of war following the retreat of the Guristas. They could even end up turning against us." This sobered the elated scientists somewhat. Umailen spoke up:

"We don't have the money to hire professional help and the empires have washed their hands clean of us. Maybe depending on those pilots is naïve, but they're our only hope as it stands. We just have to keep the wolves at bay for a few more days, some of what we're researching is nearing completion."

"If we can find the time to work on them," Ariko answered gloomily. "Listen, I don't particularly enjoy being the party-pooper, but somebody has to do it. Sure, we don't

have money in the hand know, but we're rich in human resources. Surely we can sell that to somebody.”

“You mean selling future discoveries?” Umailen said, sounding skeptical. “Then we'd lose our independence. We could just as well give up right away and start working for one of the large research firms. Being independent is essential so we can fulfill our promise of helping all mankind.” The others nodded in agreement and Ariko saw it was a futile argument.

Touvolle had remained silent during much of the discussion, resting his chin in his hand. Now, seeing Ariko's discomfort, he spoke up.

“You have to understand, Ariko, where we are coming from. During the war, both me and Taromi worked for our respective governments. They used our creative energy to increase the suffering and the pain of the common man. Have you heard of Rutheren IV?” When she shook her head no, he continued. “That is understandable, few have. The name was stricken from the records, erased so completely that even those that were there have a hard time convincing themselves it was real. But it was. I bet you have heard of Nouvelle Rouvenor or Hueromont, but there were greater atrocities committed in the war than even those, bad as they were. Rutheren IV was the worst of them and it's there that I and Taromi met. On the ground. Face to face with those bleeding and dying. Until then I had been proud of my work for the Federation, convinced, nay, righteous in my belief that what I was doing was for the greater good of all. On Rutheren IV the reality, the enormity, of it all came crashing home. Through happenstance, which takes too long to describe, I met Taromi in a hospital tent, tending for those still clinging to life. And we made a pact. Good intentions count for little if the cause isn't right. I know your belief in Fate, Ariko, though you try to deny it. That day we decided to take our destiny into our own hands. That is only possible if we're our own masters. Getting funds from the Federation and the State to bring the Crielere project about was a necessary evil we had to endure. We hoped by having both sides onboard, then the common good of all would prevail. Maybe that was naivety on our part, I don't know and it doesn't really matter. What matters is that we can't now put our destiny in other hands than our own. We simply can't. I hope you can understand that.” Ariko only nodded her head, she couldn't argue with that.

The meeting was soon called to an end. Pretty much the only thing that had been agreed upon was to urge the independent pilots to remain alert and prepare the defenses of the station as best as possible. Umailen had come up with a way to bolster the station's shields manifolds by re-routing the power generator through the heat sink system. Though it wouldn't hold a determined attacker at bay indefinitely it was nevertheless a great improvement.

The Guristas came at them again the next dawn. The vigilant freelance pilots engaged them as soon as they came in sight and soon had the assaulters pinned down. Umailen and Touvolle looked a bit comical sitting in front of the command desk with com-link devices covering their ears and eyes. Yet Ariko felt strangely affectionate as she looked upon them in their excitement. They monitored the battle from the lab, using the sophisticated sensor systems brought from the command center. The old men participated fully from afar, often shouting encouragements or warnings to the pilots who so valiantly defended the station.

The Guristas showed little in the way of devious battle tactics and seemed happy just to slug it out with the resilient defenders. This seemed very strange to Ariko, as the Guristas were not known to squander their ships in such a wasteful manner.

“The Guristas are retreating again!” Touvolle exclaimed. “They're withdrawing to the Thelan system. We cant allow them to rally now that they're in disarray! Follow them!” By now Touvolle was literally jumping up and down in his seat, sweat pouring of his face as he scanned the screens in front of him, tracking the pursuit. Suddenly, Umailen chimed in.

“I've spotted a second Guristas task force coming from the opposite direction. They're closing in on us.” Ariko could feel cold sweat trickle down her spine. The retreat was a ruse. But the shields were up, stronger than ever, and Ariko was confident they could keep this small marauding fleet at bay until the defenders returned.

But then her personal console lightened up. It was Fatal. Ariko furtively glanced around, but thankfully no one was looking in her direction. She quickly disconnected the visuals in the com-link, blackening the screen once more.

“Hello there, pretty one,” Fatal said, teasingly. “How's your parents?”

“What do you want?” Ariko said between clenched teeth. She wondered briefly how he knew about the threats Mitsu had made to her parents during their last talk.

“Now, now. Don't take that tone with me,” Fatal continued, faking indignation. “You and me go a long way back, I thought we were friends.” Even if Ariko could no longer see Fatal's face she could easily visualize the slimy smile licking his lips as he spoke. When Ariko didn't answer, Fatal continued.

“Well, enough fooling around. Me and my boys are keeping your vigilantes occupied, allowing my friend Rabbit to do what he does best; sneak around,” Ariko shivered at his words. What was he up to? “I want you to open bay door number 3 for him. Open it up and you will have repaid your debt,” he continued matter-of-factly. Ariko was incredulous.

“You bastard. You think you can make me sell the station into your hands just like that?” Ariko was fuming, she knew she had promised to repay the debt she owed Fatal, but this was too much.

“Ah, well,” he sighed. “I was hoping your sense of duty was stronger. Obviously fraternizing with Federation puppies has tainted your sense of responsibility. But nevermind. I wanted to give you the opportunity to redeem yourself.”

“Shut up!” Ariko screamed, turning a few heads around her. She had had enough of this arrogant bastard. “You're never getting in here. You hear me? Never!”

“Listen to the girl,” Fatal now sounded amused, infuriating Ariko even more. “I don't need your help. What do you think I was doing on the station the other day? Taking a vacation? Thanks to you, I have the access codes. You really shouldn't have let me rig the security system, it allowed me to plant this nice little Trojan. Oh! Will you look at that? Bay door number 3 opening up! Heh! I think Rabbit will accept your invitation. You'll be seeing him in a jiffy.” The com-link went dead. Ariko sat paralyzed. What had she done? Thanks to her desire to get near the scientists she had inadvertently given the station's access codes to the leader of the Guristas!

The others had noticed the bay door opening. Ariko listened as if in a trance as they desperately tried to override the docking system, to no avail. Thankfully no one blamed her for what was happening. A small part of her almost wished she would be blamed, sacrificed. She deserved it. When Umailen declared in panic that the Guristas were inside the station, she blushed in shame. She couldn't let the station fall. It would mean Gunaris death had been in vain.

Ariko tried to call an emergency meeting on how to meet the onrushing threat. She knew confronting the Guristas face-to-face was out of the question. Though they had access to some weapons left by the security personnel, they would be no match to the trained ruffians that the Rabbit was leading. But chaos had engulfed the lab. The din made by those shouting to be heard meant that nothing could be heard. Some rushed out of the lab to engage the invaders without even bothering to check if anyone was following. Precious minutes were lost before Ariko managed to calm things down. Touvolle had aided her, Ariko felt it was remarkably that the impulsive researcher managed to keep cool head. But by then Umailen had already left along with a few others and Ariko had no idea where he was.

The only option available to them was to seal the lab and the surrounding living quarters from the rest of the complex. Unfortunately, the station had not been designed with combat purposes in mind, which meant that five corridors had to be closed, along with several bypasses and maintenance tunnels. Time was of the essence, the Rabbit was closing in and Ariko had no idea how long it would be for him to arrive. But she was sure he would take the most direct route, not foreseeing any trouble. So she rushed a team to close the main entrance way into the lab section, hoping this would stall the raiders.

Meanwhile, Touvolle, still watching the sensors, reported that Fatal and his task force had turned the table on the defenders and were closing in on the station again. Undoubtedly, his intentions were to continue harassing the independent pilots to give his comrades inside the station time to complete their mission. It meant that Ariko and the rest were on their own. This only made her more determined to succeed.

Ten agonizing minutes ticked by. More teams had been dispatched to seal off more corridors and entrance ways, but Ariko was waiting anxiously to hear from the first team. Were they quick enough? She had contemplated moving out herself to help out, but someone had to stay behind to coordinate the effort. So instead she tried to calm her frayed nerves by focusing on a large map of the complex, searching for some entrance way she'd missed. Finally, her headset chimed. The main entrance way was closed. There had been no sight of the Rabbit or his henchmen. Ariko allowed herself to breath easier. Now if only they could locate the foolish Umailen, rushing off without so much as taking a communication device with him. Then Ariko's headset chimed again. It was the team leader at the main entrance again. It seemed that the Rabbit had found Umailen first.

It was blackmail, plain and simple, and listening to the Rabbit Ariko was sure it wasn't the first time he'd done something like this. His demands were simple. Open up the lab and give up or Umailen would get it. Ariko told him they would think it over, but she knew there was nothing to think about. None of the crew wanted to be responsible for Taromi Umailen being executed. The death of Gunaris was still too fresh on their mind. Ariko, as the spokesperson for the crew, negotiated with the Rabbit, trying to set at least some conditions on their own. But the Rabbit knew he held all the aces and all he was willing to promise was not to kill anyone.

The Guristas wasted no time once inside the lab to raid it off the few blueprints still remaining. Ariko had imagined the Rabbit to be a haughty, cocky son-of-a-bitch

following their curt negotiations, but he turned out to be quite the opposite, modest, quiet and well-behaved. But he had a mind of steel and when he declared that Umailen and Touvolle would come with them, Ariko knew that all pleas would fall on deaf ears.

It took the crew several minutes to register just what had happened once the Rabbit and his men had left. Taking Taromi Umailen and Henric Touvolle along with them. The lab was in shambles after the pirates' raid, which had resembled more of a tornado. Touvolle and Umailen had become almost like permanent fixtures in the rooms and with them now gone the lab seemed strangely deserted. Not knowing what else to do they fixed the communication equipment, restoring communication with those outside the station.

The Guristas were getting away, Fatal and his men shielding the Rabbit and his marauders with their valuable cargo. But the defense forces, bigger than ever, were giving the Guristas everything they got. The pirates fled towards the Olettiers system, with the defense forces snapping at their heels. Finally, one of the puppies managed to bite into Fatal. The pirate's ship slowly disintegrated as his comrades sped away, none willing to share their leader's fate. Fatal, in his pod, made a futile attempt to reach the stargate jumping him to Olettiers and safety, but Doc Brown was having none of it and promptly obliterated the pod. The rest of the Guristas got away, but they had paid a heavy price for their wild foray into the Crielere system.

Ariko rejoiced over the death of Fatal, hating the man for his betrayal. Yet his death paled in comparison to that of Gunaris. And the scientists, whose work Ariko had pinned her hopes and dreams on with Gunaris gone and all bridges to the past burnt; now they were gone too. Continuing their visionary work without them was impossible. Ariko felt lower than she had ever done in her entire life. And to top it all off, the station had finally had enough of the battering it had received over the last few days and was slowly disintegrating. The awe Ariko had initially felt for the majestic place had now been replaced by nothing but loathing. It now held too many bad memories; of Fatal and the Rabbit, the racial disputes destroying peace and harmony and last but not the least, the greenhouse where Gunaris had died. It was time to leave the crumbling Crielere station for good.

Several old shuttles nestled in the docking bays, leftovers from the hurried exodus of the last few weeks. Ariko entered the passenger cabin of one along with a few other Caldari heading home. 'Home,' she thought. 'This was my home, do I still have one at Wyrkomi?' She knew that even if they let her back in, she'd be reduced in rank, probably forced forever to toil away her entire life as a lowly clerk, serving as a warning to others. The thought didn't please her at all. Fidgeting in her seat, she pondered her destination. The Crielere system was directly on the borders of Federation and State space. The shuttle was heading for the Kubinen system, on the Caldari side of the border. Once inside there might be no turning back. The thought frightened her. She realized it was not because of the fate that awaited her. She feared it would be the final nail in the coffin of the late Crielere project.

Ariko hadn't let her thoughts linger too much on the fate of Umailen and Touvolle, but it was undoubtedly much worse than what awaited her. But now that the hectic departure from the station was over and she had time to reflect upon the situation, she felt ashamed for abandoning the scientists in their terrible predicament, and to abandon the vision of the Crielere project. She realized that the spirit of the project could only be kept alive if the scientists were free to continue their work, for the good of all mankind. Yet there was nothing she could do. The scientists were gone with the Guristas deep into the outer region. Retrieving them would be impossible. Still, Ariko had a nagging feeling she should wait.

Just as the pilot was about to activate the shuttle's warp drive to make the short jump to the gate leading to Kubinen, Ariko made up her mind; she would stay and see how things panned out. The shuttle changed course at Ariko's insistence, much to the chagrin of her fellow passengers. But she was only taking a short detour; her destination was the Artisine system close by. The Scope had a development studio there and a reporter Ariko had met some weeks earlier was working there. The reporter, Jinette Pandour, was an experienced investigative reporter that had covered the Crielere project from the start. Ariko considered her to be little more than an acquaintance, but Pandour had interviewed her and had struck Ariko as a sensible person passionate about her work. Not knowing anyone else in the region, it was the only place Ariko could think of while waiting to hear of the fate of her two scientist friends.

The Scope station was a low profile station that didn't see many visitors outside those that had some business with the huge media conglomerate. Nevertheless, Ariko received a warm welcome there. Pandour was eager to hear all about the events of recent days, as news from the faltering Crielere station had been little more than rumors since the empires pulled out. The energetic reporter felt the events warranted more coverage and managed to convince her editors to get an exclusive on the goings-on in the Crielere complex in its last few days of operation. The daring Guristas raid and brave resistance of the independent pilots would surely merit the attention of the Scope.

So Ariko found herself having agreed to provide Pandour with all the nitty-gritty details of everything that had transpired in the station since her arrival. Naturally, Ariko left out the covert ops parts, but otherwise remained cooperative. After all, being on an all-expense account paid by the Scope was nothing to sneeze at.

Ariko was certain she had a long, anxious wait ahead of her before hearing anything from the scientists. But less than a week after her arrival in Artisine, Pandour burst into her room one morning shouting:

"They're being sold! The Guristas have put them up for ransom!" Pandour was pacing the room in her excitement, her mind racing at the possibilities these news opened up. Ariko finally managed to get the whole story out of her. The Guristas, now led by the Rabbit after the fall of Fatal, were in disarray and wanted to offload Umailen and Touvolle to the highest bidder to get some heat off themselves. Ariko was glad to hear that Fatal, in his typically arrogant manner, had refrained from buying a quality clone of himself and thus found himself with severe memory loss and reduced motor functions, once he was revived after being podded. In his weakened state he had been ousted out of the Guristas and gone into hiding. 'What goes around, comes around,' Ariko thought.

Ariko found the idea of her friends and mentors being sold like cattle to be totally repugnant, but at least it would mean they'd escape from the clutches of the Guristas. Once more she wished she had the opportunity to talk to them, instead of being forced to fret in total darkness. Pandour was kept busy over the next few days keeping track of those in secret or not so secret negotiations with the Guristas. Ariko routed with an effort launched by the same independent pilots that had helped defend the station during the last few dark days of the project. But though they managed to collect an impressive sum, their financial strength was still too weak for them to compete effectively. Still, Ariko was confident that she would soon be able to see her friends again, free at last.

Then Fate dealt her another blow, as if to scorn the visionary efforts she was part of along with Umailen and Touvolle. Ariko Kor-Azor was the highest bidder, by a large

margin from what Ariko gathered from Pandour. It seemed the man had no qualm about plundering the estates that his father, the current emperor of the Amarr Empire, had so carefully cultivated over the decades. The royal heir intended for the two scientists to head a new research lab he was constructing. Ariko didn't know what they were supposed to research but was certain it had nothing to do with their previous work. Ariko Kor-Azor was not known for his benevolent nature.

Now that Ariko knew Umailen and Touvolle were to be released by the Guristas in mere hours she grew even more restless than before. She couldn't wait to speak to them again. She got just that opportunity later in the day, thanks to Pandour using her media links as leverage. When Ariko finally saw the haggard face of Touvolle on the screen, she felt she would cry from joy. The two chit-chatted for a few minutes, Ariko was so overwhelmed she hardly noticed what she said. She barely registered what Touvolle said. He and Umailen were being held in an Amarrian station at the outskirts of empire space, he didn't know the name of it. The Guristas had released him and Umailen at dawn, seemingly glad to be rid of the pair.

"We will be transported later today to the research lab," Touvolle said wearily.

"Do you know what it is you will be working on?" Ariko inquired.

"No, we've been told nothing. I'm just hoping that getting back into a lab will at least allow us to keep our pet projects alive, even if we can't work on them except periodically." Touvolle replied and sounded a little more upbeat when the discussion turned to the work they'd been engaged in on Crielere. "The little I've been told," he continued, "is that this new research facility is only just completed and it hasn't even been properly staffed yet. In fact, the only thing the Amarr officials said to me after we were taken into their custody was to order us to recruit other scientists to join the lab. They're obviously putting much stock in our reputation, hoping to use it to attract others."

"Oh?" Ariko hadn't considered that. Now it made her wonder. The possibility of working again with Umailen and Touvolle, even if it was on some nefarious research for the loathsome Articio Kor-Azor, excited her no end. "I'd love to have the opportunity to work with you again," she'd blurted out without really thinking about it, but she didn't regret it.

"That's fabulous news, Ariko," Touvolle replied, the relief visible in his eyes. "I was afraid to ask, after all we may have to work on something despicable for this man, but I'm really happy to have you aboard. It makes all this so much easier to bear."

The two chatted for a little while longer, Touvolle much more upbeat than he was at first. Finally, the Amarrians grew impatient and terminated the communication link, hardly giving them time to bid farewell.

Afterwards, Ariko was in really high spirits. Even the thought of traveling into Amarr space and working in some potentially hostile place didn't put her off. This was what she had been waiting for all those long days here at Artisine. She had no home in the State, she would not be welcome there. It was a remarkable easy decision to make.

She had allowed Pandour to listen in on her conversation with Touvolle, as part of their arrangement. Now, with Ariko leaving soon, Pandour had to decide whether to wrap up her story or follow it through all the way. It was also an easy decision for her. She would accompany Ariko into the Amarr Empire and witness the happy reunion.

Ariko finally felt at ease. The last few days she had been in a limbo, with no clear future ahead of her. Now she had a plan, something to aim for. She would travel into

the Amarr Empire and become a full fledged researcher, working alongside Umailen and Touvolle. It was like a dream come true for her.

For the first time in awhile she allowed herself to think about Gunaris. Every time she'd thought of him, she felt sorrow threatening to wash over her, engulfing her. She thought of him when she saw something beautiful or remarkable. It always made her think how unfair, how tragic, it was that he couldn't be here to see or experience the same. That he would never get the chance to experience beauty or awe ever again. Now she wondered whether he would have approved of her decision.

Early the next morning Ariko and Pandour left the station on a Vexor cruiser owned and operated by the Scope. Their destination was a system in the Kor-Azor region, named Nebian in the Jatari constellation. There they would rendezvous with another Scope reporter, a veteran of the intricate political structure of the Empire. As Ariko was not yet officially an employee of the Kor-Azor's new research lab, she had not been told the whereabouts of this highly secret place. But she saw no reason to lope around in Artisine waiting for her employment status to come through. Pandour also wanted to cover this new twist in the story of Umailen and Touvolle from early on, so she had arranged for the transportation. They expected a dull and uneventful voyage, but while they were still in Federation space they received the news that president Foiritan was working behind the scenes to get the scientists released.

In light of the new information they decided to halt on the border of Federation space, before heading into the Genesis region. Ariko was unsure what to make of the news, so many unexpected twists and turns had happened in the last few days that she was becoming quite confused. Pandour, who was no great fan of Foiritan, was certain that there was something fishy about the whole thing. Was Foiritan's reasons purely humanitarian in nature, did he want to thwart Kor-Azor's research scheme or did the scientists possess some secret knowledge that Foiritan didn't want to fall into the wrong hands? All these speculations came up as the hours ticked by. Ariko was pretty sure that the last conspiracy theory was untrue, but then she remembered the private talk between Foiritan and the scientists the day he visited Crielere and wondered. The Senate was livid that Foiritan was negotiating with Articio, which it considered to be immoral and dangerous to the interests of the Federation.

As evening drew near it became evident that the matter would not be settled any time soon, so they decided to camp out at the border. Ariko was confident that matter would be settled overnight, but she had to wait three whole days before a settlement was finally reached. Articio would give up the scientists, but what he was getting in exchange was kept secret. Ariko didn't care, she hadn't really hoped this would happen and now that it had she was overcome with joy. She even began making plans on how the scientists could continue their work once they were back in Federation space.

Pandour was clamoring to be present when the scientists were handed over, but everywhere she turned she hit a dead end. It seemed no one wanted a reporter anywhere near the place where Articio was giving the scientists into Federal custody. Pandour was quite agitated by this, and claimed Foiritan was holding a grudge against her after she had released a story last year that didn't paint him in a favorable light. Ariko only half-heartedly listened to her prattle; her mind was already with her impending rendezvous with Touvolle and Umailen.

Again, Ariko was forced to stew in her own anxiety for several days before the paperwork for the release of the scientists could be cleared up. She had no opportunity to speak with the scientists, as they were already on the secret research lab and outside communication was not allowed. Finally the word arrived: Federal

officials had arrived to take the pair into their custody. But once they did, they immediately saw that something was amiss. The two persons the Amarrians handed them were Minmatars.

Ariko was in shock. Fortunately, Pandour was at hand to gather information on what had happened. It was almost beyond belief. Articio Kor-Azor, in his arrogance, had shipped the two famed scientists on a common slave transporter to the research lab. Somehow, two of the slaves managed to steal their ID chips and pose themselves as the scientists. As the research station was only occupied by construction workers and security personnel, who had no idea whom to expect, the ruse only came into light when Federal officials arrived at the station.

Pandour was investigating what had happened to the scientists and her findings were disturbing. They had been shipped, along with the rest of the slaves on the transporter, to a slave colony in the Inis-Ilix system. Presumably, they were then dumped there with the other slaves. Ariko was sure she was going to faint when she realized that for several days the two old men, accustomed to life in a peace and quiet in a lab, had been working in a hard labor camp. A hard labor camp where ground condition where terrible, to boot. Inis-Ilix IV was little more than a blasted rock with a barely breathable atmosphere. Ariko shuddered at the thought what it would do to the two old men.

Ariko was certain that an immediate rescue effort would be launched by all parties involved, but she was sorely disappointed when all that happened over the next day or so was silly bickering between Articio Kor-Azor and president Foiritan regarding the fate of the two Minmatar imposters. Articio wanted the two executed, while Foiritan claimed that Kor-Azor had handed the pair over to the Federation, thus it was up to the Federation to decide their fate. Finally, Articio grew tired of the whole matter, not wanting to further his embarrassment by engaging in an international dispute over some inconsequential Minmatars. Ariko for her part couldn't care less about their fate. She wanted the scientists found. She couldn't sleep, every time she closed her eyes all she could see in her mind's eye was an image of Umailen and Touvolle toiling away in some filthy sulfur-mine, sweat pouring of their frail bodies as the brutal ultra-violent sunrays blistered their skin. She had to find them.

Fortunately, Foiritan's involvement had Pandour all fired up and she was more than willing to go the extra mile to get to the bottom of the story. She was just as keen as Ariko in finding the two scientists, though for different reasons. She wanted to interview them to see how deep Foiritan's involvement really was. The Vexor was still parked in the docking bay ready to go and since their permission from Amarr authorities to land on planets within the Empire was still valid, Ariko and Pandour simply decided to assemble a rescue team of their own. Again Pandour managed to get the Scope to foot the bill. The company's money made it easy for Pandour to attract people to their cause and in less than a day they were ready.

The team Pandour had assembled in record time wasn't professional by any stretch of the word, but to Ariko they seemed up to the task. Or at least she hoped so, as she was pinning her future hopes on them. Only in the recent few days, which had given her ample time to contemplate, had Ariko finally come to grips with her decisions. Her path was that of Umailen and Touvolle, aiding them along the way to human enlightenment in science. Only her fear of cutting all ties with her past had held her back in realizing this sooner. It was a big mental step for her to wrench her foot from the doorway leading to the State, but she had to do it. Now all she had to do was to find Umailen and Touvolle and she could begin building her life anew. When they finally departed and headed into Amarr space, it wasn't a moment to soon for her.

The journey, as usual, was uneventful. On the way they learnt that Articio Kor-Azor had finally handed the two Minmatar impostors over the Federation, grudgingly. Foiritan had also acted quickly and had assembled a rescue team of his own, which was also heading to the Inis-Ilix system. In his typically blunt manner he had simply put a huge bounty on the heads of the two scientists, thus sparking the interest of every bounty hunter in the area. Of course, the bounty would only be paid out if the scientists were brought back alive and well. Ariko silently thanked the energetic president for his efforts; the more people searching for the scientists, the sooner they would be found. But she didn't voice her feelings to Pandour, who sarcastically called this a mere 'token gestures' to make up for his earlier blunders. Ariko didn't ask what these supposed blunders were. It was irrelevant.

They arrived at Inis-Ilix IV at dusk, docking at an Amarr Construction foundry station orbiting the planet's only moon. The bounty hunters hired by Foiritan were already there, unloading their gear in the docking area and preparing to descend to the planet. A handful of Amarr officials hovered nearby bewildered by this sudden invasion of dozens of tough-looking bounty hunters, most of them of Caldari or Gallentean origin. Ariko herself quickly became floundered in the chaos, but fortunately Pandour was used to such hectic rush and not before long Ariko, Pandour and the rest of the team were onboard a shuttle heading for the surface.

It was nighttime when they arrived. The night air was chilly, but Ariko could feel the heat rising from the ground, indicating how hot it had been during the day. The air was thin and had a rank sulfuric taste that clung to the tongue. The team set out erecting a base camp; the search would begin at dawn. Despite the terrible condition, Ariko was feeling very optimistic that she would be reunited with Umailen and Touvolle sooner rather than later. She was already planning in her head what she would say to them and how they could get back on track with their work. Lying there in the make-shift tent, she played these fantasy conversations again and again through her mind.

But she had to wait four days before getting a chance to act these conversations out for real, and by then she had all but forgotten them in her fatigue and frustration. Dealing with the Amarr authorities on the planet was an exercise in futility. They seemed to have no understanding of the notion of individuality of slaves. Slaves were labeled for inter-stellar transportation, but once on a slave colony they lost all identity. There was no need for the slave masters to know their name; to think of them as unique or special in any way was totally alien to them. Time and again Ariko and her team spent hours trying to make stubborn, narrow-minded officials understand, often to no avail.

Then on the fourth day they received the news that the bounty hunters sent by president Foiritan had found the scientists, in a cave outside one of the slave camps. The news was vague and failed to mention the condition of the pair. Pandour rushed them to the hover cars she'd rented for the team, herself taking control of one. Sitting next to her, Ariko noticed the strange gleam in her eye as she commanded her media crew to get their equipment ready. This was her big break.

It took two hours for them to reach the cave, even if they traveled the whole way at breakneck speeds. There was already considerable activity around the cave, kicking up dust clouds that triggered coughs and watery eyes, but at least shielded them from the worst of the sun. Yet despite all the people already on the scene when she arrived, she was surprised at the lack of urgency or even some token show of joy. Instead, the burly bounty hunters looked sour while scrawny Amarrian officials wandered aimlessly around. Then she saw the stretchers being carried out of the cave, white cloth covering what lay beneath. Even without actually seeing their faces,

she knew they were dead. Somehow she had always known since she heard where they were, she had just embraced the soothing illusion of denial, convincing herself otherwise. She was on her knees now as she watched the stretch-bearers entering a tent a short distance from where she was; she didn't remember falling on her knees.

"No!" she wanted to shout to the world, but it only came out as a croak, barely audible. Tears cleared shiny paths down her dirty cheeks and soon she was raked with sobs.

She felt she cried for hours, but it was only a couple of minutes. She had to see them. One last time. With a renewed resolution she stood up and set out for the tent. She was vaguely aware that Pandour was following her every footstep, making sure the holo-cameras hovering around were aligned correctly. Two grim-faced bounty hunters stood either side of the entrance to the tent, but they barely registered with Ariko. Only when one of them grabbed her as she was about to enter did she come out of her daze. An Intaki man appeared from inside the tent. He was clad immaculately and seemed the only one around not affected by the dust that permeated everything. Ariko found him familiar and when he looked her in the eye she remembered him as one of Foiritan's entourage when he visited the Crielere station. She saw recognition in his eyes too and when he smiled it was the first comfort she felt since she saw the stretchers.

"She can come in," he said softly, indicating Ariko. "But keep the others out." Pandour protested loudly, then when this didn't have any visible effect pleaded with Ariko to speak on their behalf. But Ariko didn't have any patience for the prattling Scope woman now.

The tent was dimly lit and it took her eyes some time to adjust. The bodies of Henric Touvolle and Taromi Umailen were lying on narrow tables in the middle of the tent. The white cloth still covered them from the waist down, revealing their thin, shrunken chests. A doctor and a nurse were setting up field gear to conduct an autopsy. Ariko felt oddly relieved they hadn't started the gruesome operation. The Intaki man, introducing himself as Endt Strovare, escorted her to the tables. The doctor, taking Ariko for someone important, started yammering something about respiratory problems and malnutrition, but he quickly shut up when he noticed that nobody was listening.

Apart from Gunaris, this was the first time Ariko saw bodies close up, though whether she should blame or thank her sheltered upbringing she was uncertain about at the moment. With Gunaris her grief had been too overwhelming for her to notice the small details and she was too distraught to partake in preparing him for his funeral. She had heard all the stories about how serene someone looked that had just died peacefully, and to an extent she saw they were true. But she also saw red-rimmed eyes that stared into oblivion and bluish lips that no breath passed between. She saw their destroyed bodies and smelled the foul stench of their feces disposed from their loosened bowels. Death might be peaceful, but it certainly wasn't pretty.

Ariko had seen enough here. But she also wanted to see the cave where they were found. Strovare, who seemed to be the man in charge, approved quickly, but for her alone. He escorted her from the tent and followed her to the cave, keeping a respectful distance. Ariko had heard that the Intakis had great empathy for the feelings of others and this certainly seemed true of Strovare. Thinking about the Intaki she couldn't help but wonder what one of the top aides of president Foiritan was doing here. And why he was in charge, and not the Amarrians. But then they were at the cave and she let it go.

It was not a big cave, perhaps 15 meters deep and 4 meters wide. The floor was sandy, the rock wall was brown with a yellowish tint. A few items indicating human inhabitation littered the floor, but they didn't interest Ariko. The walls did. They were covered with scribblings, painted on the wall with anything the scientists had laid their hands on, juice from berries, soot, even dung if her nose wasn't deceiving her. Everywhere her head turned she could see intricate formulas and advanced theories, written by men on the brink of death possessed with ideas they had to get out, lest they died with them.

A few workmen entered the cave, clad in body-covering suits with breathing masks. Strovare indicated to her that they had to leave, gently taking her by the arm. Ariko didn't resist at first, but then she realized what these men were doing here. They were going to wash the walls clean, eradicate the last message Umailen and Touvolle had for the world. She tried to wrestle out of Strovare's grip, but he had anticipated her reaction and held fast. He had to drag her from the cave, as the workmen fired up their powerful hoses and started hosing the walls.

It was the next day. Ariko, Pandour and the team were back on the space station orbiting Inis-Ilix IV's lonely moon. They had been told gently, but firmly, that they were no longer welcome on the planet now that the scientists were found. Pandour was still seething at the treatment she had received, but her nose for news was also as strong as ever and she could easily smell the story here. Some sort of a cover up was taking place, but she had no idea what. President Foiritan might be involved, or maybe it was just the stubborn Amarrians. She had been intrigued by Ariko's account of events in the cave. The scribblings themselves didn't interest her that much, but the hint of conspiracy did.

It was the opposite for Ariko. She didn't care for conspiracy theories or corrupt politicians or imperialists. The ideas of Umailen and Touvolle did. With them gone, these ideas of theirs were all that was left. It was their legacy, and she was the only one that could appreciate it. But already Ariko could feel her memories of the cave scribblings fading. She had only had a chance to look at them for a few seconds before being ushered out. Although she had scanned all the walls, it was only for the briefest of moments, much too short for her to get a clear picture of what was being written.

But this knowledge couldn't be lost. She couldn't let it happen. She had burned all the bridges linking her to the past, pinning all her hopes and dreams on the two scientists and their wild but wonderful schemes. She had jumped aboard and taking a ride to the heavens and now there was no way back. In a sense, she was the only thing that remained of the great pioneering spirit that had roamed the halls of Crielere for few short weeks and shifted the world. But she wasn't a pioneer herself. The most she could hope for was to be a spectator.

Or a courier. This new thought flashed in her mind and physically jolted her. Of course. She could never hope to revive the spirit all by herself. But she could be the vessel for which to bring the message to the world. What she saw in the cave was still in her mind. She couldn't recall it herself. But she knew somebody that could. The Jovians.

It was a wild idea. It wasn't even a longshot. It was borderline lunacy. But in a way it made sense. The Jovians were wonderfully advanced, they possessed the technology to extract the cave memory from her mind. And they would most surely agree to do it once they knew what was in her head. She didn't know much about Jovians, but she knew they craved new knowledge above everything else. So she would bring it to them. And enlighten the world.

A week later a Caldari Navy frigate on a patrol on the border of Caldari space noticed a small shuttle cruising to a stargate that would take it deep into the outer regions. It wasn't really his business, but the captain felt obliged to warn the occupant of the shuttle of the dangers it was heading into. The only reply he got before the shuttle disappeared into deep space:

“Fate won't kill the Messenger.”

About this Book

This Book includes all currently available Scientific Articles, Chronicles and Short Story's.

The two EVE Online Novellas Theodicy and Ruthless are not included.

They are available at:

<http://www.eve-online.com/races/theodicy/>

<http://www.eve-online.com/races/ruthless/>

I'm not planning to add the Novellas since they are already available as .pdf file.

Many thanks to CCP who gave me permission to create this document and for the best MMORPG Ever.

About Myself

I started playing EVE Online about 8 Months ago and I did not had time to read all the Backstory on the www.eve-online.com page yet. I do not like to read stuff on my Monitor and I did not want to print out every page separately so I decided to make this book.

Since I knew I'm not the only one who would love to have the hole EVE Online Backstory in one handy book, I did my best to create this document and make it available to the public.

I hope you all have fun reading this book.



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