Physics and fate have conspired to confine humanity to the solar system. The Universe has remained persistently silent and there is no hope for faster-than-light travel. Fleeing a warming and overcrowded Earth, wealthy families have constructed extravagant floating arcologies high in the clouds of Venus and domed cities across the slowly greening valleys of Mars. The asteroid belt is an annulus of hopes and dreams, of partially-constructed mining colonies and divergent ideologies, in which the large metal asteroid Psyche is the cultural and financial center. And here, tension is brewing.

Humans are, as of yet, the only arguably-intelligent species in the known galaxy.

Pirates are a plague upon Psyche and the belt. Like most of their kind, they start as miners, but their greed and lust for power leads them to take what they want. Many a miner has lost their ship to a pirate who will then use it to raid other vessels.

Pilots are a rare breed of daredevil, they are the best that the solar system has to offer. Pilots are licensed to operate the most advanced starships.

Life is tough in the solar system, but there are always opportunities for those willing to take a chance. Colonists are brave individuals who have dared to strike out into the black, living with the constant threat of malfunction, air leak, or pirate attack.

Commerce has become the lifeblood of humanity. Alliances are forged, wars are waged by proxy, and fortunes are made by the shrewd and the daring Merchant Class.

Mercenaries are soldiers for hire. They are fearless and their loyalty is always to the highest bidder. Mercenaries are experts in all forms of warfare, and their dangerous and beautiful tactics are legendary throughout the solar system.

Union of Independent Asteroid Colonies - The Union is the main political force in the asteroid belt. It is a collection of independent asteroid colonies that banded together to form a government to collectively bargain with corporations of Venus and Earth, and to deal with the problems of communication, trade, and defense against pirates. The Union has no one leader and instead has a council that makes decisions. The Union has a tense relationship with the inner planets and maintains a small military force.

The Outcasts were born out of a failed mining colony and the dream of independence. They are comprised of the miners and laborers that were once employed by the now defunct mining operation. The Outcasts are an honorable, if disrespectful, people and have their own set of laws and traditions.

The Plutocracy is the richest and most powerful faction of inner-planet elite. While not technically the Venusian government, it might as well be. Its capital is on the largest and most luxurious of the Venusian arcologies. Through its ownership of most of the solar system's corporations, it has more money and influence than any other faction in Maelstrom and has for centuries ruled over the other factions via a balance of power and threats.

Mars Central Authority - The MCA is the official government of Mars. While not as powerful as the Plutocracy on Venus or even Earth's aging government, the abundant resources and ambitions of Mars make them a quickly rising presence.

Old Earth - While historically powerful, the unified government of Earth is forced to spend most of its resources feeding and appeasing the planet's massive populace. While Earth is the birthplace of humanity, its relevance is quickly fading.

New Haven - The half-finished colony ship New Haven was originally a joint venture between a mining company and a wealthy industrialist looking to expand operations to the unexplored planetesimals of the Kuiper Belt, but now it lays abandoned in orbit near Ceres. Members of The Outcast have been refitting it in secret for an unknown project.

The Great Reef is a vast collection of interconnected hollowed-out asteroids that have been tethered together and festooned with tubes and passages. The assemblage orbits in the asteroid belt on the opposite side of the Sun from Psyche. Far from the political control of the Union, it is a haven for wandering Outcast. The Great Reef is an open port and welcomes all as long as business is conducted in a mostly-lawful and mostly-peaceful manner.

Hell's Keep is a large metal hauler docked at the asteroid Psyche. Its crew and itinerant passengers form a small, tight-knit community.

The Wide Skies is one of many small mining towns on the scared surface of Psyche. The sparse amenities include a small bar and hotel for visitors, who are usually the family members of local miners.

The Rusty Rake is a rough-and-tumble space saloon located in one of the spires of New New York. It serves as a reliable place for miners and merchants to meet and conduct business. The Rake's proprietor, a man named Lester, loves his customers but has to deal with frequent fights breaking out in his establishment.

New New York - Named somewhat in jest, New New York is the largest port on Psyche, and the organizational center for the Union of Independent Asteroid Colonies. Immigrants from many worlds frequent its bars and stores. The city has a reputation amongst the inner planets as a haven for pirates and a refuge for oppressed peoples. The major exports are precious metals mined from Psyche's almost endless mines.

Ceres is the largest asteroid in the belt. Owned and operated by The Plutocracy, its mines and farms produce much of the The Plutocracy's wealth. Ceres is often at odds with the independent colonies of the Union, especially Psyche.

Sunchild - An old mining town in a deep valley, this place hasn't seen much activity in years. There is a small population of miners, prospectors, and scavengers that live in the region. The nearby Sunchild cave system is filled with valuable precipitated minerals. In years past, the cave system was used as a shelter for early settlers.

Ridge City is the capital of Mars and is a cultural melting pot of the diverse population of the planet. Located near the planet's north pole and half buried under methane ice, the city's primary exports are water and methane-based fuel.

The Orbital is the largest station in Low Earth Orbit. It consists of a series of spokes and hubs the grew over many years from the old International Space Station. It is now the central shipping hub for the Earth-Moon system.

Humanity's birthplace, Earth's surface is now a near-continuous sprawl of city and industry. Most of the planet's 15 billion people have the desire, but not the means, to migrate to space.