
The Prophecy

Virtuism has a doomsday prophecy, which as a devout practitioner, you are well familiar. It is not just for the pastors, but rather all practitioners to be observant of the world around them and recognize the signs of doomsday.

*You will know the end of the world to be nigh when much of the world ceases to exist. Many will be lost, but you must not grieve.
Else miss your chance, And all is lost.*

*You will not trust your senses, and strange aberrations will infest your beloved spaces. Take care that you do not become
corrupted by chaos.*

*You will find the saviors of the world by their persistence in the shrunken world. Whether previously intended or not, now they
must become, Husband and wife.*

*You will learn that time is short, because no wedding may occur in darkness. Succeed in this most sacred ritual of Virtuism, and
all Shall be made right.*

The Tenants of Virtuism

As a practitioner of Virtuism, you are familiar with its basic tenets. They are listed below, as they appear in a contemporary work by Reverend Cornelius.

- Markrox is great, and can do many things for you. He will do nothing for you however, if you do not strive to help yourself first. When you have done all you can, Markrox will do the rest.
- Markrox has given us all the power to affect change. We should never squander that power.
- All are expected to look for the signs of the doomsday, and be prepared to do their part to prevent it.
- Generosity is crucial to the maintenance of our community of devotees. We must not fixate on worldly possessions, or selfish uses of our time. However, one must never look to the needs of others without first meeting his or her own needs.
- Worshipers of technology are the enemy of Markrox. Atheists worship technology and seek to subvert our devotion to Markrox for their own, selfish ends. Use technology if you must, but do not bow to it, and do not allow it to control you.
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Virtuism has been through several schools of thought on the state of suffering of its people. These have included periods of time where there was much agitation for creating a Utopian society, and pacifism was widely embraced. Currently, most of Virtuism rejects pacifism but counsels caution in conflict, particularly when technology is involved.

Virtuism has always had an uneasy relationship with technology. Some early texts indicate that at one time, Virtuism embraced technology, but when scientists and engineers turned their back on the Tenets of Virtuism, the church rejected them and their new machines. For many years, Virtuism has shifted between outright opposition, which led to several bloody riots at leading research universities, and ambivalence, with many practitioners of Virtuism openly supporting technology companies. Modern Virtuism acknowledges that many technologies are critical to our day to day lives, but counsels that we should never be ruled by it.

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The Xenid Race

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Biology

Xenids reproduce sexually but do not have a concept of gender and do not resemble human males or females — like many plants, all Xenids have both reproductive mechanisms. Xenids give birth to live young and raise them in “extended family” groups. Xenids have conscious control over many systems in their bodies, such as emotions, memory, and pain, and they consequently do not suffer from human problems such as painful childbirth. Xenids do not have emotions in the same way humans do. To Xenids, emotions are not reflexive responses to external stimuli, but are consciously decided upon to achieve a certain effect. They might choose to release a chemical similar to adrenaline if they perceive a high-stress situation is happening, or they might induce chemical changes similar to human anger if they want to appear and act more intimidating in a confrontation. Some Xenids choose to rarely use these emotional states and remain cool and logical, while others find these states extremely beneficial and preemptively active them, preferring to always be in the state they find most appropriate for each situation.

Most Xenid enhancements came about through directed genetic re-engineering of the species, but this was a very long time ago and most consider their predecessors to be a totally different species, similar to how many humans perceive early primates. All Xenids are quite intelligent although not necessarily moreso than exceptional humans. Although Xenids have encountered many other races, because of their aversion to interacting with others, even the more scholarly Xenids often forget that many species do not know how to re-engineer themselves. They are often surprised to learn that other species still suffer from all manner of biological problems (unwanted pregnancies, painful childbirth, and so on).

Contact

This is a special organization within the Xenid hierarchy in charge of all non-warfare interaction with other species. For the two-person scouting missions like the one you are involved with, both members are considered equal rank and neither has direct authority over the other. It is almost unheard of for there to be physical conflict between the partners, and any interpersonal conflict should be conducted out of the view of others — the Xenid race tries to present itself to others as having a unified consensus. Contact has a set of first-contact principles to be followed when interacting with new species for the first time:

1. Avoid physically harming others unless attacked.
2. **Negotiate fairly. Do not renege on a deal made in good faith. There is a famous incident a century ago, where failure to comply with this principle led to a two-decade war.**
3. Think carefully before divulging specifics about Xenids.
4. Do not interfere with local political or religious beliefs.
5. You can participate in rituals and ceremonies if asked to do so, but only after asserting that you fully understand the specifics being asked of you.

The Xenid Empire and the Idrian War

The Xenids have large populations in approximately 50 star systems, with an additional 50 border star systems with small military or scientific outposts. The Idrian race is much smaller (spanning 11 stars) but their technology, especially their AIs, are more sophisticated. Although the Xenids have won several confrontations, their victories have usually only come about because of superior numbers, and their losses have also been considerably higher than the Idrians. Idrians rely almost entirely upon machines to wage their wars and members of the species are almost never seen. The cause of the war was a minor conflict known as “The Idrian Incident” where an Idrian robotic scouting squad wandered into a Xenid encampment and started carting away heavy metals. The Xenids responded by destroying the robots and the situation escalated into the current war; it turns out the Idrians consider their robot AIs to be full citizens. Unfortunately, you and the Idrians both thrive best in argon-rich atmospheres, which is a relatively rare atmosphere type and likely one reason your species are still in conflict. There are currently no active diplomatic channels between the two races.

The human ship you have just encountered is approximately ten light years away from one of your border star systems (although it happens to be on the opposite side of the Idrian conflict’s front). It would take your scout ship approximately one month to return to the nearest Xenid outpost.

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