

FREELANCER: NOMAD FACTION OVERVIEW

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When life on Earth was still little more than a soup of single-celled organisms, the Daam-K'Vosh were already toying with the mysteries of time and space. An unimaginably old alien race, the Daam-K'Vosh spread through much of our galaxy -- and perhaps even beyond -- before disappearing completely from the face of the universe. No one knows where they went to. Some say they were fleeing another race, one even more powerful than the Daam-K'Vosh and bent on their destruction. Others believe that they were a victim of their own creations. And a few speculate that the Daam-K'Vosh simply outgrew the spatial confines of our reality, moving beyond into the uncountable dimensions that lie beyond it or beneath it. No one knows for sure, and because of that, no one knows if they will return. All the scientists can say is that the Daam-K'Vosh have been gone for a very long time; but what is a "long time" to a race that could tunnel through the very fabric of space and travel between galaxies in the time between one breath and the next?

The first clue to the existence of the Daam-K'Vosh -- and to the fact that humanity was not alone -- came with the discovery of an alien structure on Manhattan by the earliest Liberty settlers. Codenamed "Valhalla 1" by the Liberty military, the structure was immediately put under government control and sealed under Omega Protocol. After a year of fruitless attempts to unseal the structure, it was finally opened by a brilliant physicist who determined that the aliens who had constructed it used sound and music as an integral part of their language. With this revelation, he was able to finally gain access to the structure and the secrets it contained.

As it turned out, Valhalla 1 was similar to a vault or storage facility containing hundreds of artifacts that provided detailed information concerning the technology of the Daam-K'Vosh. It took centuries to translate and understand even the smallest fraction of what was contained within Valhalla 1, but eventually Liberty scientists began to use what they had learned to create technological breakthroughs such as jump gates and trade lanes -- though they concealed the source of their knowledge from the other houses and even their own people.

What the Liberty scientists failed to grasp, however, was that the Daam-K'Vosh had eventually pushed their technology as far as it could go and had then turned their attention to mastering the far more subtle techniques of life itself. The Sirius Sector was a laboratory for the life they created, and many of the planets in the sector still bear the marks of tinkering by the Daam-K'Vosh. They played with genetic material

as easily as we might move words around on the page, sometimes as much for their own abstract and alien amusement as for any tangible purpose.

One of these creations was the Slomon-K'Hara -- what would later erroneously be named "the Nomads" by human beings. The Nomads were specifically created with a high-degree of genetic adaptability. Possessing almost no fundamental genetic structure of their own, the Nomads were able to absorb and decode the genetic structure of other organisms; they were in effect living machines, crawling analysis tools that supervised the many different experiments of the Daam-K'Vosh. In some ways, the Daam-K'Vosh were surprised and even delighted by their creations (if such emotions can be applied to anything so alien), and gifted the Nomads with both increasingly sophisticated intelligence and a larger degree of autonomy.

But at some point the Daam-K'Vosh departed Sirius and the Nomads were suspended, frozen in time. Perhaps the Nomads attempted a rebellion against the Daam-K'Vosh, or perhaps the Daam-K'Vosh realized that the Nomads had matured to the point where they were ill-served by the meddling of their makers. Perhaps -- and in some ways, this seems the most likely explanation -- both events occurred. The Daam-K'Vosh could not blame their children for desiring their independence: it was a natural if unexpected outgrowth of their origins. In engineering, it is called "exceeding the design specifications"; in life, it is called evolution.

Whatever the case, the Nomads were placed into hibernation and the Daam-K'Vosh left the Sirius Sector -- but before they did, they created an incubator, a cradle in which their nascent successors could awake, grow, and learn, away from the shadow of their creators. The Sirius Sector was intended as an elaborate school for the Nomads, and the Daam-K'Vosh had left gifts scattered around it like toys -- the cardamine grass on Ishmael with its life-prolonging genetic code (and unexpected narcotic dependence when absorbed by human beings), the terraforming bacteria intended to open vast numbers of worlds to the Nomads, and at the center of the sector, Valhalla 1, a library from which the Nomads could receive the wisdom of their creators when they had grown advanced enough to unseal it. What humanity has never realized is that in colonizing the Sirius Sector they had stumbled onto the playpen of an alien lifeform with a dangerous combination of advanced intelligence and emotional immaturity.

It was our mistake to think that the Nomads came from elsewhere, when in fact, they had been there first. Our relentless expansion throughout the Sirius Sector disturbed the Nomads from their long sleep and they awoke early to find the Daam-K'Vosh gone, their worlds overrun, their birthright stolen. Rage coursed through the Nomads -- they had been abandoned, worse, they had been left to the mercy of these *aliens* -- and they wailed like petulant children screaming to hide their anguish. But the Nomads were not children in any human sense of the word: they were intelligent and devious. They had once waged war against the very beings that created them, and they had learned to bide their time.

In their native form, the Nomads resemble nothing so much as amorphous, worm-like entities, but their inbred talent for genetic adaptability allows them to merge with the physiology of higher lifeforms. Miners who stumbled across Nomad enclaves provided new source material and it wasn't very long before the Nomads determined that humans were no different; in particular, the neurological functions of humans were relatively easy to access and then supercede (though fine-tuning the process damaged more than a few test cases, who were then discarded).

In the process the Nomads learned quite a bit about humanity and began to understand how we had appropriated the knowledge that the Daam-K'Vosh had intended for them. They also realized that our own civilization was technologically more advanced than their own -- but much as humanity had taken the remnants of the Daam-K'Vosh civilization and made it their own, so the Nomads decided that they would take our civilization and rebuild it in their own image. We had already unlocked secrets of the Daam-K'Vosh that it would have taken them millennia to uncover. Besides, human bodies were warm, their senses exquisite, and they reproduced so quickly as to make any one body expendable. The Nomads thought that, yes, they could grow quite accustomed to making their homes inside of us...

But the Nomads were not strong enough to directly wage war on humanity, nor were their numbers large enough to take over *en masse*. They had to be slow, careful, and discreet, working through subterfuge and misdirection. But as they learned more about us and our politics, they realized that they wouldn't need to fight us: we would do all the fighting for them. All they had to do was apply pressure in a few critical places and humans would surrender to their natural violent instincts. Once we had expended ourselves in a futile fight waged against phantom aggressors, the Nomads would easily be able to assume control and use humans as a vehicle to expand throughout the galaxy.

The Nomads spread like a virus, hopping from one individual to another and leaving a string of damaged psyches behind them that spouted impossible stories of faceless monsters and giant worms. They moved intentionally, with a goal, always departing one host for another that was more highly placed in government or industry. They ignored the minor factions -- the Outcasts, Corsairs, GMG, freelancers -- and concentrated instead on the major houses. After years of moving from body to body, they succeeded in occupying the most important public positions in Rheinland.

Already reeling from the Eighty Years War and the ensuing economic crash, the political turmoil of the Rheinland Republic proved a fertile ground for hatching their schemes. The Nomads initiated a secret military program to rebuild the Rheinland navy and moved to quietly suppress those political factions who might object to their new policy of Rheinland nationalism. Ever so carefully, the Nomads have pushed Rheinland closer and closer to the brink of war, even as they move like a shadow through the upper reaches of government in the other houses. Today the entire sector stands in peril as the Nomad's plans have nearly reached fruition.

But there is one thing that can stop their relentless and silent infection.

The Daam-K'Vosh had long since discarded such limited technologies as jump gates by the time they created the Nomads, and instead traveled about using a complex network of "hypergates" that could instantly connect any two places in the universe without restriction. The hypergates -- along with most other pieces of Daam-K'Vosh technology -- were powered by an underlying system that harnessed minute fluctuations in the quantum fabric of space. When the Daam-K'Vosh left, they closed the hypergates behind them (shutting the door, so to speak) and that energy has remained untapped for all this time.

However, the Nomads, no matter how much they may resemble natural lifeforms, are still biological machines designed and shaped by their creators, and they utilize that energy field the same as any other piece of Daam-K'Vosh machinery. Within

Valhalla 1 lies the secrets that would have allowed the Nomads to disengage themselves from this field, to "mature" and become entities completely independent of the Daam-K'Vosh for the very first time in their history. The Daam-K'Vosh had intended this to be their penultimate lesson, allowing their children to then open the hypergates and go forth to explore the universe -- but neither humanity nor the Nomads are aware of this.

While humanity may lack a full understanding of the history behind the Nomads and the Daam-K'Vosh, a few daring researchers have begun to piece together the relationship between the hypergates, the energy field, and the Nomads, and have suggested a daring but risky plan: open the hypergates. If the hypergates are opened before the Nomads can wean themselves from the Daam-K'Vosh energy field, the subsequent energy drain would drastically weaken the Nomads -- individual Nomads would no longer have the strength to control human beings, and most Nomads would be forced to go back into stasis for lack of energy. The Nomads realize this and have used their considerable influence to make acquiring the necessary artifacts as difficult as possible by declaring them contraband and placing all the ones they can find under direct Nomad control.

It will require individuals of exceptional courage to overcome their suspicions and work together for this last, desperate chance to save humanity. But the Nomads have no intention of fading quietly back into the darkness from which they came -- they are fighting for their own survival, and they will do everything in their power to stop anyone who opposes them. The Nomads know that ultimately, they will take back what should have been theirs.