

I. Story So Far...

If variety is the spice of life, existence on an interplanetary prison vessel is an exceedingly bland dish. The days pass with so little to distinguish one from another that you're not even sure what year it is anymore. You are staring at the ceiling contemplating the pointlessness of your existence, as you do so often these days, when the ship begins to shudder violently, as if it is being rammed or attacked. Security crews run by your cell, and you think you smell smoke as the ship buckles and rolls. Suddenly, you are flung against the back wall of your cell and pinned in place there by the suffocating G-force. A deafening whirring noise fills the air around you and drowns out your screams as you realize the ship is going down. You can't die like this, you think, not here, not now. That is the last thought that runs through your mind before you lose consciousness...

The sizzle of sparks shooting from exposed wires and the stench of burnt rubber and flesh penetrate the blackness that envelopes you. Every beat of your heart seems to send a fresh wave of pain directly to your head, and your body feels like it has been used as the ball in a particularly intense game of tennis. Slowly, you make your way out of what remains of the prison vessel only to find the mangled bodies of your fellow passengers scattered about the landscape before you.

As you equip yourself with the armor and quad-barrel assault gun of a dead guard at your feet, you hear a crunching sound coming from behind the wrecked ship. Immediately, you rush toward the noise in hope of finding another survivor. There you find one of your buddies from Cell Block 3A—his body hangs limply over the bent knee of a huge beast, who is chewing enthusiastically on your former friend's intestines. Horrified, you blast the monstrosity with all four barrels. Instead of falling, however, the beast merely runs off into the distance, laughing maniacally.

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II. History of the Planet

(Clues placed throughout the game hint at what this history is, but it is not revealed until later on in the game. At no point should the player have to read this, it's for our reference, the player should infer most of this story from the textures, monsters, and areas.)

1. Centuries ago on the planet Gryphon, a peaceful race of creatures known as "Nali" erected gorgeous cities from the materials in the lands around them. They were able to build enormous castles that served as habitat, fortress, and mining colony. Unknown to most, Gryphon was one of the few locations in the known universe where the once-plentiful element Tarydium was in abundance. Huge underground deposits, and possibly the very core of the planet itself, of Tarydium had remained untouched for eons. The powerful electromagnetic properties of Tarydium can wreak havoc with electrical and navigational equipment, making this area of the universe a sort of 'Bermuda Triangle' of space. The planet remained mostly undiscovered because of this.

Tarydium means power- in every sense of the word. It has become the primary source of energy for civilized species everywhere. From teleporters to starships to toasters, Tarydium powers it all- replacing uranium, oil, even gasoline and gunpowder due to the volatile nature of the element. After thousands of years of advanced societies gobbling up energy, the element became increasingly scarce and expensive.

Gryphon was relatively peaceful. Occasionally a ship would crash here and occasionally there would be survivors who might or might not be hostile toward the Nali. Chaos did not reign until the Skaarj crashed into Gryphon. A nomadic band of demon-like hunter aliens, the Skaarj set the standard for brutal warfare everywhere with their tools of mutilation and death. Traders across the universe shudder at the hushed mentioning of the Skaarj, for they are known to pursue and kill any creature they deem worthy sport.

A Skaarj destroyer crash-landed on Gryphon, desperately needing repairs and Tarydium. Though far outnumbered, the Skaarj swiftly hunted and enslaved the Nali, seizing control of the planet through

sheer brutality and tenacity. Any remaining Nali that were kept alive were forced into slave labor in the depths of the Tarydium mines, becoming pale, hollow creatures of the darkness.

Other creatures on Gryphon that managed to evade the Skaarj were hunted for sport and eventually killed or captured and experimented on; the Skaarj used live subjects to test the effectiveness of their warfare skills and devices. The player will eventually discover these hapless victims, as well as the technology and story behind the planet.

2. Story of the Prophet

Centuries before the current conflict, a smaller group of the Skaarj, in a lesser ship, had crash-landed on Gryphon, attempting to gain control of the available work force and Tarydium supplies in order to repair their ship and get back out into space. Because Tarydium is volatile and mining it can be dangerous, then as now, the Skaarj forced the Nali they conquered to mine for them.

Most of the Nali had, in evolving on a planet rich with Tarydium, developed a degree of natural immunity to its presence--a trait now useful in surviving the mines. However, occasional recessive genes left a percentage of the Nali with varying degrees of sensitivity to the element, which meant that proximity to it would inflict on them difficulties ranging from rashes and arthritis to blinding migraines and respiratory/autonomic failure. For these individuals, life in the mines was an even greater torture (if more brief).

However, to the surprise and displeasure of the Skaarj, their initial strikes failed to secure complete domination of the planet. There were a number of reasons for this failure, including the fact that this earlier group of Skaarj was smaller and had fewer technical resources (this was earlier in their own technological evolution as well). But one factor in particular contributed to their failure. The Skaarj dependence even then on Tarydium power meant that virtually all of them produced a relatively intense infrared signature, which the more sensitive members of the Nali population could detect, sounding alarms. This made typical Skaarj camouflage and hunting tactics significantly less effective, and enabled some of the Nali to escape capture and form a resistance effort.

For decades these Nali managed to prevent the enslavement of their entire population. Eventually, though, several months of intense Skaarj hunting led to the capture of one of the rebels' primary leaders. This native was an older male whose Tarydium-sensitivity had been unusually acute since birth. He had as a result spent a great deal of time away from established Nali society, seeking out wilderness areas where Tarydium use was less common and Tarydium deposits were located farther underground (causing him less pain). His survival skills and knowledge of the terrain made him a natural leader for the refugees. During his years of mountain ramblings he had come upon a cave created by the crash of yet another spacecraft.

Deep within the cave, amid the wreckage, this (non-Tarydium-powered) ship's AI guidance system was still partially functioning. It attempted to communicate with him, but achieved only limited success, not only because it was damaged but because its creators had senses that extended outside linear time. Its user interface therefore provided data in a format which the Nali wanderer could only perceive as a series of distorted visions. Nonetheless, it managed to get across a warning that fire would descend from the sky and blast a hole in the earth [a Skaarj ship was about to crash on the planet], from which savage demons would emerge to plague Gryphon. The Prophet's marathon journey back to warn his people nearly killed him, but provided the Nali with enough lead time to avoid total capture once Skaarj attacks began. He continued to make periodic contact with the Cave Oracle during the resistance, helping the rebels to last as long as they did against the Skaarj; this made him a prophet in the eyes of the Nali. It was a mixed blessing, however, for he was plagued by recurrent, insistent visions of himself in agony, tied with burning ivy to a flaming cross, fiery demons howling around him.

And so it had come to pass. Having captured the spiritual leader of the resistance, the Skaarj intended to smash both the leader and the resistance once and for all. They immediately moved the Prophet and all the other captives to their largest mine/slave complex, where they brought all their slaves out under guard to see the humiliation and slow death of the symbol of their hopes. The Skaarj had not failed to note the Prophet's weakness in proximity to all their Tarydium, and decided to exploit it in his torture. Hastily constructing a cross, they fired chips of Tarydium into it, then ripped brambles out of the ground nearby and bound him to the frame with them, slipping yet more Tarydium underneath the thorns.

However, as fate would have it, this malicious cruelty on the part of the Skaarj backfired on them. The extreme agony the Prophet was experiencing activated an ability latent in him and all those sensitive to Tarydium. His duress provoked a psionic redirection of the Tarydium particles flowing through and around him, enabling him to rupture the fields of the Skaarj massed about him, detonating their internal energy sources and roasting them where they stood. The Prophet also died in the conflagration, but he had, with just one apparently miraculous invocation of divine power, cleansed the planet of most of its demons.

The Tarydium-sensitive Nali who had witnessed their savior's death practiced doing what they had felt him doing, and were able to employ their newfound abilities to locate and destroy any remaining Skaarj packs. The Prophet's warnings, leadership and heroic death elevated him swiftly from legend to martyr to demigod. His legacy of psionic power was developed by subsequent generations to produce quasi-magical marvels like the floating sky-city where his ashes were entombed. But on the morning before his death, he passed on to his followers his last prophecy-- that the demons would return, and this time, the Nali would not be able to hold them back. However, a beautiful yet crippled angel who had the ability to shoot fire from her hands would come down from the heavens to defeat them.

Meanwhile, in the years following Kantis' death, all traces of the Skaarj, their bodies, their technology etc. were entombed in special crypts, specially sealed against the return prophesied by the Prophet.