

CAIAS WARD

# Promised Land

SERIES PITCH OF THE MONTH





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# Promised Land

—Caias Ward

## Nutshell

Squad comes before all as genetically engineered cadets take on the universe.

## Characters

You play young cadets aboard a Baruktakii monastery ship. Your living vessel, spanning a dozen kilometers or more, enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the thousands of beings who live aboard.

- apprentice of the Tombs of the Honored Dead
- artist in demand
- bully
- the clown
- crybaby
- demerit machine
- fighter pilot-to-be
- future first navigator
- gravsled racer
- healer
- henchman
- historian
- holder of a dark secret
- littlest bioengineer
- man-child
- officer's proxy weapon
- one who seeks to meet the Ten a second time
- the one with the plan
- physical adept
- preternatural seer
- psychic prodigy
- recent convert to the order
- scion of the First Warrior
- scrounger
- squad leader
- survivor of a terrible tragedy
- transfer from another ship
- troublemaker

- unluckiest cadet alive
- unknowing spy for the Inquisitors
- voice of reason
- weapons expert

## Setting

Over one thousand years ago, the 314th Hierarchy Marine Battalion was sent to investigate an insurgency in Sector YK449. Over five hundred soldiers entered the sector and vanished without a trace.

Three years later, ten of them returned, at first unrecognized by the Hierarchy. Changed beyond all comprehension, these Ten displayed great physical and psychic powers. They bore a new message of enlightenment through genetic engineering and their own brand of monasticism. Claiming to have returned from the Void, the place between the dimensions of the universe, they taught others how to be the change they wish to see in the universe. Their followers became the Baruktakii, which in paradoxical fashion typical of the movement means "Those Who Would Challenge the Ten."

As the order grew and the names of the Ten reached Hierarchy intelligence organizations, the Hierarchy identified them as their missing soldiers. It first sought contact, then demanded that the soldiers turn themselves over for questioning. The Ten answered by rejecting the Hierarchy and defending their new way of life.

The Hierarchy responded swiftly, treating the Baruktakii as any criminal organization, aiming to capture or kill its members. Only the incredible technological advances the Ten brought saved the faithful from extermination. These included enormous self-repairing organic ships, FoldJump engines capable of point-to-point teleportation, and symbiotic body armor.

The Ten knew this war was not the way to



enlightenment. They offered to return to the Void in exchange for allowing the young order to exist. The Hierarchy accepted, as the attacks on widespread and evasive Baruktakii were more trouble than they were worth. It did not help that the Ten themselves could travel through space and time at will, striking as they pleased against the Hierarchy.

And now, over a thousand years later, monastery ships travel through Hierarchy space, encountering others as they live apart from the rest of the universe. The members of the order grow in science and faith, reflecting on the lessons of the Ten and hoping one day to join them in the promised land of the Void.

- Four leaders - the First Navigator, First Warrior, First Healer, and First Seeker - jointly command your vessel. Collectively you call them the Firsts.

**Who leads the Order as a whole? Do you regard these leaders as benevolent and in touch with the needs of the faithful, or as disengaged, lofty figures whose attention brings trouble and menace?**

**Or is each ship all but autonomous, answerable only to the Inquisitors, who themselves mete out correction in the absence of centralized authority?**

All Baruktakii technologies are comprised of living, biological materials; some items qualify as autonomous beings. Vast vat-grown brains perform complex computational tasks. Anti-gravity platforms grumble and sniff their way down ribbed corridors. Doorlids wink open and to let people through, then close behind them. The ship's foul-smelling digestive system doubles as jail for those who stray a bit too far from the path.

Among the Baruktakii dwell three species:

- Humans (including individuals who still look mostly human)
- the Mahatnaboran, a humanoid race of greater size and bearing bull-like features including an elongated snout and horns
- the Chos'ketthi, a scaly mammalian race equipped with sharp teeth and claws

Outside the world of the Order, these cultures differ considerably. Here, among their squad, they are all cadets regardless of species.

As a cadet, you are as likely the product of

in vitro fertilization as of natural conception.

Officers often carry the children of others to term, with recognition given to those who birth a "Tenful" of cadets. You regard your squad as your family, your order as parent, and your parents as but two of many who raised you.

Before age eight, you split your time between your parents and care in the ship's Nursery. Then you were separated from your parents and assigned to squads, as determined by psychological profiling. In your squads, you went through programs of study called evolutions, covering such diverse topics as philosophy, history, and unarmed combat. You also learned to use your bioengineered Gifts of the Ten, whatever they may be. Key mutations include telekinesis, remote sensing, and pain resistance; see "Additional Elements," below.

You may possess an extraordinary mutation, or simply have had the standard faculties of your species heightened. Those receiving the greatest gifts can trace their DNA back through many generations of Order membership.

**Do you want to wait until an early episode to choose your gifts, if any?** Your character has had them all along, but you reveal them only when she first makes use of them.

During your evolutions you permanently bonded with the *Ava'te* data retrieval and heads-up system, which allows you to wear the removable symbiotic body armor called the *Arha'vaat*.

As the series opens, you recently reached your thirteenth birthdays. You have been out of Nursery for a number of years and are growing in power, skill, and faith. You enjoy greater freedom than younger cadets but also more responsibilities as your education and Evolutions continue for several more years.

Evolutions covering mission protocol have prepared you to deal with cadets and officers from other ships—usually your allies, but sometimes your foes. You've been trained in missions of diplomacy and outreach, in which you'll travel to Hierarchy settlements and learn to understand others. You'll explore the far-flung Gadethkar Confederation. You might be left for weeks to fend for yourselves on a primitive planet. On occasion you may get a visit from an Inquisitor ship, whose crews ensure that your

ship neither forces the faith on others nor strays too far from the path.

Cadets may even develop a reputation as great artisans, as certain cultures consider Baruktakaii sculpture and song to be the pinnacle of artistic endeavor.

### Themes

- Squad vs. Order
- Faith vs. Truth
- Love vs. Duty
- Popularity vs. Integrity
- Childhood vs. Discipline
- Success vs. Honor
- Bravery vs. Survival
- Squad vs. Squad
- Happiness vs. Ambition
- Will You Become the Officers You Despise?

### Tightening the Screws

- The First Warrior takes a personal dislike to the Squad Leader PC. Do you ease your suffering by naming a replacement, or fight back?
- An Inquisition ship arrives and demands that one of the squad be transferred to them. Should you say goodbye, stall, or rally other squads until you can get the support of the Firsts.
- One of you learns that you have a direct lineage to the Hundred, the first members of the order trained by the Ten. How do you handle the hero worship and jealousy?
- One of the Ten appears to you from the Void, imparting heretical new revelations. Do you reveal this wisdom or keep the peace?
- A bullying cadet kills herself, for reasons unknown. The officers refuse to investigate this self-murder, the first they personally have ever seen in the order. Should you be thankful for the removal of this terror or seek out the reason that officers don't want others to know?
- During an attack by Hierarchy forces, a boarding needle crashes into a section of the ship and traps you with a single survivor, a severely injured synthetic

being. Telepathy indicates it is a sentient being with a mission, hopes, and fears. Do you attempt to take it captive, destroy it, or negotiate a peace?

- Dropped on a planet for a training exercise, you find yourselves feted by rival town factions. Do you pick a side, try to stay clear, or take on all comers until your retrieval ship returns in three weeks?
- One of you made a life form, which has gotten loose in the hidden parts of the ship. As it grows it could be dangerous. Do you attempt to stop it on your own or risk the wrath of the officers by warning them?
- An officer seeks to mentor you and your squad. Do you accept, thrusting yourselves into the wider world of officer politics, or find a way to keep clear?

### Antagonists

- Any of **the Firsts** may take a personal interest in your affairs, becoming obstacles to your Desire.
- **The Battlemaster:** a master of ritual combat aboard the monastery ship and keeper of the Tombs of the Honored Dead, the Battlemaster has the psychic ability to tell when conflict is imminent. A cadet may find the Battlemaster's attention upon her and then wonder when the hammer will drop.
- **The Instructor Corps** cares more about overall results than the individual welfare of their students. They push and stress you to your limits, then put you back together, if you live.
- **Parents:** Despite cadets being separated from their parents at a young age, some connection still exists. This presents more threat than blessing, as cadets must be wary of parents using cadets as proxies in battles against their enemies.
- **Rival Squads:** while cadets must stand together against officers, squads must stand against squads. Be it direct competition for ranking and privileges to surviving the harassment of upperclassmen, some of the greatest dangers to a cadet are his fellows.
- **Rival Fleets:** in the thousand years since

the Ten left the universe, the doctrines of faith of the Baruktakaii have evolved... or degenerated. Despite the tenet 'no one may be pushed through the door to faith,' some fleets wish to do nothing more than paint the universe in blood and bring all to their way of thinking, willing or not. Even if they do not follow this wild path, other monastery ships may have strange customs which can cause no end of conflict.

- Outer Threats: even as the truce between the Baruktakaii and the Hierarchy still exists on paper, the enforcement of that truce has varied through the years. Some sectors of space are more accepting than others. A sector's hostility toward you might be unjustified, or a fitting response to the depredations of fanatical rival fleets.

### Additional Elements

For an alternate series set in this universe, you might play higher ranking shipboard authorities, including the Firsts, the Battlemaster and other senior staff. You contend with external threats and each other, grooming cadets to serve as minions.

We've included a new custom Action Type for the setting: Gifts of the Ten, the incredible psychic powers present in all Baruktakaii in one form or another. A brief list of common abilities present includes, but isn't limited to:

- The Invisible Fist (telekinesis)
- Remote Sensing
- Telepathy
- The Gifts of Pain (ability to mitigate or intensify pain in yourself and others)
- Battle Prescience (brief precognition to aid in battle)
- The Glow (empathic healing)
- Longstrider (supernatural endurance and speed)
- Good Idea (unreliable precognition)
- The Voice (limited mental control based on voiced commands)
- Best Friend (a low-level psychic field causes others to give you the benefit of the doubt)
- Hard-Headed (resistant to psychic abilities)

While all Baruktakaii officers wield all of these to some degree, cadets only exhibit one at any appreciable strength.

### Names

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Paul Vandermeer  
 Hathar Ber-Tolek  
 Karen Zavodsky  
 James Anderson  
 Den'sshor Rrys  
 Chris Markinson  
 Ran'nos Grenlitar  
 Demar Jos-Wamith  
 Corbin Holmeri  
 Sarah McGintal