WORLD-BUILDING SAMPLE: THE AMBULARI FLEET

This is a world-building sample I wrote when I applied for a writing position at a developer working on a sci-fi strategy game in 2023. I was asked to write a brief profile of a faction that would be added to the game, as well as an enigmatic leader that would represent that faction in-game. I wanted to tell the reader a brief story that conveyed not only the history of the faction, but its philosophy; I love when factions and groups in RTS games have a high-concept idea behind them, so I created a nomad faction that had no home planet, and which would take on a unique role in a strategy game.

The Ambulari Fleet

When the Ambulari chose to trust the kindness of strangers, it destroyed their way of life. Generations ago, a colony ship arrived on Ambulare and promised that, if the locals let them use their ship to tap into a few resource-rich veins on the planet, the natives would reap the rewards. The Ambulari had no need for the minerals, having created an economy based on collective action, sustainable farming, and solar power, but eventually relented to the outsiders' pleas to give them something for nothing. What could they lose?

They lost everything. The "advanced mining processes" relied on blasting corrosive acids into mineral deposits from orbit, vaporizing everything that wasn't valuable. They soon discovered that a number of Ambulare's sedimentary layers contained minerals that were not only poisonous when fulminated, but highly reactive.

The cataclysmic chain reaction turned the hastily built mining outposts into craters and Ambulare into an uninhabitable wasteland. The outsiders abandoned their expedition from the comfort of their spacefaring ships; the handfuls Ambulari that survived did so only by fleeing in the dhows offered to them by the outsiders as bargaining chips.

Through their self-sustaining ingenuity, the Ambulari diaspora cobbled together a small fleet of vagabond ships that now comprise most of their civilization. Swearing they would never let themselves take another bad deal, the Ambulari fleet only trades when they need to, creating "trade names" to both blend in with and keep whatever culture they deal with at arm's length. The Ambulari rarely welcome castoffs from other civilizations and keep their weapons at the ready for the first sign of a deal gone wrong. A common Amublari saying roughly translates to "Every exchange is a sacrifice; no sacrifice without exchange."

Sydney Xiomara

Sydney Xiomara leads the Ambulari at a perilous time. For generations the spacefaring race had been governed by a congress made up of representatives from every ship in the fleet, making decisions by consensus. But after years of congress members using backroom deals with outsiders to line their pockets came to light, the assembly passed a resolution to elect a single leader to represent them in all communications with outsiders.

Elected for their pragmatic demeanor and spotless track record, Sydney is a pillar in several of the fleet's trade unions, having researched numerous cultures in college and studied them in-person as an inter-ship courier. In their early years as a member of congress, Sydney brokered several deals that helped ships negotiate better terms with outsiders, earning Sydney a reputation as someone who knew how to deal with outsiders but had not succumbed to their lures.

Sydney holds the power to either expand the presence of the fleet on the intergalactic sphere or destroy its identity by selling off the fleet in parts. They may not have been alive when the Ambulari lost their home planet, but as a student of history, they hold the lessons of that disastrous event close to their heart. But as their power grows, so does the risk of taking a short-sighted deal that spells doom for them and their fleet.