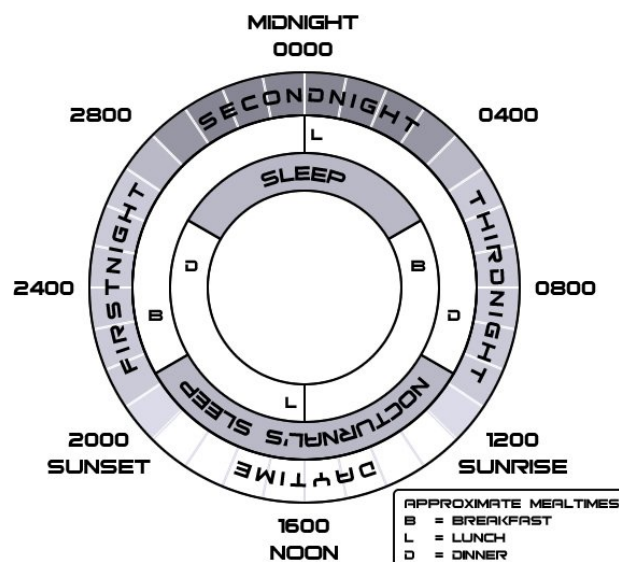


2015

Glossary

Cult of the Silver Flower: a quasi-religious organisation of entertainers commonly referred to as 'the Cult'. The Cult doesn't worship a deity. Entertainment, frivolity, creativity, and all related concepts to the cult are part of a singular abstract force without consciousness, personality, intent, or will. The cult believes that this force can be tapped into when creating or simply being carefree.

Firstnight, Secondnight, Thirdnight: designations for the three night-time periods experienced by the inhabitants of the planet (see illustration). Each period is roughly equivalent to the length of the day, or 8 hours (based on the timekeeping system used by the ancient colonists).



Seven lounged on his bed staring at the ceiling of his small apartment. The room was silent, but the noises of the Chimera colony outside could clearly be heard. And while it too bad, it was an annoyance when he wanted to be alone with his thoughts. He rolled over onto his side and grabbed his phone to see what the time was. It took his eyes a few moments to focus on the holographic projection. It was 0700 hours, Thirdnight. No wonder he was starting to feel hungry!

Seven stretched as he got up from his bed. He ran his hand through the fur and hair on his head. It felt fine, but he was starting to smell a little too musky than was socially acceptable. So he had a quick but refreshing shower and then looked through his cupboards to see what rations he had left from the Cult of the Silver Flower. Fortunately he still had several packets of freeze dried meals. All were specially made for Chimeras so ensure a healthy diet. But best of all was that they were quick and easy to prepare. All he had to do was boil a pot of water, add the contents of one of the "rat-packs" and simmer until cooked. While he was waiting for the pot to boil he looked through his remaining rations.

'Not in the mood for curry or meatballs... and I have had lamb a lot lately...' thought the young Chimera as he tossed those packets aside.

'Beef casserole... That sounds good for a change!'

By the time his meal was ready his stomach was growling loudly. He took his time to enjoy the meal, which he ate with unbuttered bread.

After he finished he counted the remaining rat-packs. He had five left, and if he wanted more he would need to go down to one of the Cults local halls to find some work to do as an entertainer. He couldn't really complain about his lot as a professional entertainer and re-enactor. He enjoyed what he did, and even if

they payed him with ration packs most of the time he did get real money from time to time. It all depended on how much money he brought into the Cult's coffers.

But he would worry about work later. For now he had something he considered much more important to do. He was going to try out some of the hand to hand combat techniques he had found in a couple of ancient documents he had printed out from the Cult's vast digital archives. Mostly he wanted to get out of his apartment, but it would also be good exercise, and he hoped that it would help him if he ever got into a 'tight' situation. If he became skilled enough in the "O'Neill System" he might even be able to convince the Cult to recognise it for his résumé. Non standard qualifications were tricky but not impossible to get, but getting recognition in such an obscure combat system would be an uphill battle. Regardless, that would be for another day.

Seven fetches his well used backpack and started packing for a trip to the nearby gym. He had been there several times before. It was a small, somewhat out of the way venue that was rumoured to be an underground fight club with pit fighting for those "in the know". He didn't know if the rumours were true, and he didn't really care that much.

'I probably should take the books with me' he thought. *'It's a shame I don't have the memory of the military quality Chimeras. I better wear my flower and mantle just in case'* he thought.

He fetched and donned his mantle before leaving for the gym. The knee length, silver grey mantle was lined with emerald green fabric, and had a deep hood. Seven didn't like wearing the hood that much as it robbed him of his peripheral vision. The silver flower, from which the Cult took its name, was on the left breast of the mantle. It was a three dimensional flower was made from various fabrics. Green stripes down the middle of the long, thin petals signified that Seven was a re-enactor, and the golden edged petals and 'tongue' in the centre of the flower signified that he was a journeyman. It gave him a measure of freedom that most Chimera's didn't have, and a plausible reason to having what would have otherwise been contraband literature for a Chimera.

Seven left his apartment and melted into the hustle and bustle of the Chimera colony. Few took any notice of the journeyman Vulpes. Cult members were a common sight, even in a Chimera colony. A few disparaging looks from a handful of Chimeras made Seven feel nervous and anxious. They probably thought he had an undeservedly easy life. Seven didn't want to find out if it was true, or to take the time to explain to them what the life of a Cultist was really like. He quickened his pace and made his way down to the gym. When he entered, he saw several other Chimeras working out on various machines, and saw to Chimeras sparring with each other in a large, hexagonal shaped cage made from chain link fence. Most of the Chimeras were stone hued Marders. A few of them had white spots on their backs, arms, and legs. The ones in the cage were earth toned Latrans. Seven was the only Vulpes in the gym. His two toned coat made him stand out as much as his Cultist's mantle. Burnt red fur covered most of his body, but white fur covered his front, throat and under his chin. There was also a white tip on his tail tip. Only one or two of the other Chimeras paid any attention to him as he went into the change room to put on his gym clothes.

After he came out from the cubicle like "change rooms", Seven looked around the gym again. This time he was taking note of what equipment they had. The gym had a lot of weights and benches, several humanoid shaped boxing mannequins attached to robotic arms, and the usual cardio machines that all gyms seemed to have.

'Perfect!' thought Seven as he walked over to the mannequins.

Before doing anything Seven looked at the material he had on the O'Neill system one last time before placing the small books on the floor next to his drink bottle. As he did so the mannequin automatically adjusted its height to suit its current user. Seven chose to have the mannequin stationary for this workout, but opted to have the mannequin respond in a realistic way to his strikes. He started with two moves that formed the basis of the O'Neill system – jabbing the fingers into the eyes, and kicking. He stood in the guard position shown in the manuals, slightly bladed to the boxing bag, with his hands held up near his head, fingers extended. He jabbed the boxing bag with his extended fingers, turning his hand over so that his palm was facing down to the floor when his fingers struck the boxing bag. The strike didn't hurt his fingers at all, and the mannequin rocked backwards, bringing its groin area towards Seven. He snarled as he kicked the mannequin, making sure to keep his hands up to protect his head while he did so.

Seven continued to strike the mannequin again and again. After a while he started to get the hang of it, and started relaxing his fingers rather than keeping them extended at all times. It was more comfortable. He also started keeping his arms in closer to his head, and started facing the mannequin so that his hips were squared onto his target. His blows seemed to have more power when he did this. After a short break he did the same attacks again, but this time using his right hand for the eye jabs and his left leg for the kicks. Seven finished off his training session with a push kick. He chose this over the 'pivot kick' of the O'Neill system as the roundhouse like 'pivot kick' wasn't really suited to his digitigrade legs.

Seven was happy with the training he had done, but he was very aware of how much he still needed to do. He still needed to learn the elbow strikes, the strikes with the edge of the hand, and the knee strikes, not to mention the various defence's adversaries trying to strike him, grab him, or holding onto him. The most important thing he had learned was how much he didn't know, and how much he still had to learn. He continued to think about this as he collected his books, changed back into his regular clothes and donned his Cult mantle. Seven thought about having another shower to cool off, but it wouldn't be good for his skin to have two showers so close together.

Seven started to feel tired and started to slow down soon after leaving the gym. He knew that once he sat down and stopped moving that would be the end of it. Not that it mattered. It was 1056 hours Thirddnight. In a few hours it would be Daytime, and he as a nocturnal would be asleep in his apartment. By the time he was outside the apartment complex where he lived the sky was becoming uncomfortably bright and he was relieved to get inside. Once in his apartment he dropped his backpack down outside his bedroom and put his mantle back in the wardrobe before changing to go to bed. After lying down on his bed he closed his eyes and thought about nothing and was soon asleep.