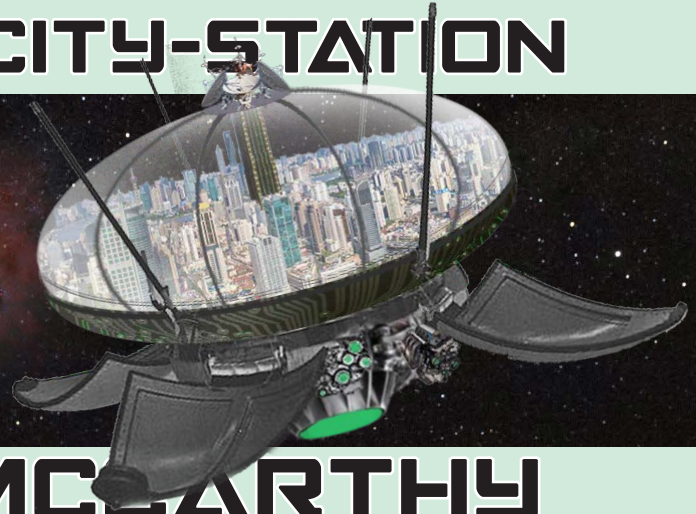


STRAIGHT PATH

ORBI

THE ROVING CITY-STATION



MICHAEL MCCARTHY



ORBI CITY-STATION

PDF version 1.1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The City-station of Orbi	4
A Brief History	6
The Bend Engine	8
Geography of Orbi	9
The Halo	13
The Nomi	15

IT'S EVERYWHERE! THE CITY STATION OF ORBI

Sitting on a disk dozens of miles across is a city of metal and glass. In the center, a black tower of colossal proportions supports a nearly-transparent platform nearly as large as the city itself. Yet, for as intimidating as it appears from a distance the streets are a riot of warm colors and filled the soft sounds of laughter and good cheer. This is the city of Orbi: home to the exotic Nomi and galactic hub of entertainment.

In the air - I did mention the city can fly, right? - The city is even more impressive. The entire city can take to the air without a ripple of air, moving hundreds of thousands of souls from one place to another - and often from world to world. The glass platform and city floor fold together to create a colossal disk, an airtight bubble that weathers the vastness of space as effortlessly as it does the atmospheres of most worlds.

This is because Orbi isn't just a city, but an in-

terstellar ship of prodigious size. It travels all of known space and beyond, exploring, trading and most of all entertaining. It rarely spends even a few months in a single location or even a single world, learning the ways and stories of its people before rising again into the sky to take off for parts unknown: to experience new places, new people, and new stories.

There are many incredible things to experience in Orbi. The size of the ship alone is impressive, and its engine would be considered impossible to many scholars even after being explained how it works. But before experiencing any of those things, one must first experience Orbi's natives: the Nomi. These small, gregarious creatures have an insatiable appetite for new things. It is this curiosity that has made Orbi what it is, a city that is perpetually moving and changing.

Unlike many ships, especially ones of its size, Orbi regularly lands on planet surfaces, enabling and encouraging natives of those places

to trade, partake, inspire and be inspired. What serve as docking ports in open space unfold into sprawling markets, and the dome stretches up like a giant umbrella to allow the fresh breeze to flow through the city. Much of this is thanks to Orbi's incredible engine: a mostly-magical device that displaces space around the ship rather than moving the ship itself. It doesn't allow the ship to move particularly quickly, but it does allow it to pass directly over the heads of bystanders without so much as ruffling their hair.

The population of Orbi rests near six hundred thousand - what the city-ship can most comfortably handle. Five hundred thousand of that are Nomi, and nearly a hundred thousand people from hundreds of races also call the city home. This population is maintained by a loose breeding policy, with Nomi deaths and emigrants counted each year, followed by an open 'procreation season' at the opening of their 256-day calendar year. Once the number of expected children is comfortably above the city's ideal

population, the season ends and inhabitants are requested to limit sexual activities to recreation only. The length of the season differs from year to year, from days to nearly a month long. Non-nomi have no official breeding policy, but any creatures intending on living within for more than a month must apply for one of the 'immigrant passes', which are counted in much the same way.

The majority of Orbi is given over to entertainment of every kind imaginable. Art, music, and performance of all kinds are popular across the city, with other kinds of unusual media (from sensory-deprivation tanks to books to competitive combat) flourishing in individual districts. The popularity of individual styles waxes and wanes depending on the season and the sector of space the city is in, with few styles remaining in popularity longer than a year or two as the perpetually fickle Nomi move on to the next new thing.

THEY RAN AWAY A BRIEF HISTORY OF ORBI

Orbi began its life just over two hundred years ago as Orbital-ship-station-27, a settlement ship created by the overpopulated world of Nommu: homeworld of the Nomi. The 27th ship of its kind, it was to travel for a year and a day before making landfall on a distant new world and establishing a new colony there as part of a growing Nomi empire.

Unlike most Nomi city-ships, by the time Orbi had arrived on the planet they had been assigned, it had developed a budding culture of its own. Rather than settling down, they decided to launch themselves out into the blackness of space once more in search of new worlds to explore and new forms of entertainment to consume. The Nomi back on their homeworld aren't particularly happy with this, but they aren't willing to expend the resources it would take to round up the stray city-ship and force it to settle down.

Since most Nomi aren't particularly inclined to planning, Orbi is run by an ancient, four-armed android known as **The Boss** (LG Male Android Soldier 5/Technomancer 3). The Boss claims to have once been a Nomi himself, who had eventually replaced every part of himself with machine to reach his current, effectively immortal state. Many believe that **The Boss** is actually the city-ship's original captain - and they are nearly right: **The Boss** was actually the original ship's first mate, who took over in name and responsibility after the original captain vanished without a trace the day after the ship turned away from the world it had been assigned.

The ship has undergone uncountable renovations in its two-century life, the biggest of which was the replacement of its original engine with a newly invented "Bend Engine", which would allow the ship to land on and take off from the surface of any world - rather than simply orbiting. Other updates that have survived the test of time include the everblossom trees, which are

perpetually in bloom with fresh fruits (although so far, this only extends to the exceptionally bitter 'fruits' native to Nommu) and the unfurling markets, which allows entire city blocks to be collapsed when not in use, greatly expanding the city's open space.

The most recent notable event was forty-seven years ago, when the city made the decision to allow outsiders to settle in the city permanently. A ship-wide debate raged for months, before ultimately coming to a vote. Once the vote was tallied, a staggering ninety percent of Nomi had voted in favor of alien settlers. - the only city-wide vote that had actually come to a clear majority one way or another. Most such votes remain hotly debated for years.

The dissenters ultimately had to cave to the overwhelming pressure, but one caveat was made: the issue would be put to a second vote in fifty years - a full generation away.

And while the city has continued to grow and develop since then, the isolationists have done everything they can to spread support for their side, subtly subverting popular media and aggressively teaching Nomi youth. With the next vote only a few years away, they have begun the end-phase of their plan: the aggressive vilinization of the most populous aliens who call Orbi home, under the guidance of their leader, the massive **Nananom** (NE Male Nomi Soldier 9/Operative 2).

Yet, for all their planning the plan might come to naught. Nine years ago, nothera historic vote was passed, allowing the first human to hold official office in Orbi. This woman, Chell Ma had proven her popularity many times over, but was assassinated after only two short years in office, making her a martyr for non-nomi activists across the station.

GATEWAY TO THE UNIVERSE THE BEND ENGINE

Although Orbi has a faster than light drive, and uses it for interstellar travel, when travelling from planet to planet it relies on its Bend Engine - a magically driven engine that displaces space around Orbi to move without technically passing through any of the space around it.

This engine allows the massive bulk of Orbi to maneuver precisely - although not quickly - and without affecting its surroundings, relying on a slightly higher-than-average artificial gravity to keep inhabitants in place, whether on the surface of a planet or in the depths of space.

The original specifications for the Bend Engine have been long since locked away, but every few years a group of enterprising Nomi attempt an upgrade. Most of these have little effect, although these attempted changes have been known to leave the city stranded for months if unsuccessful. None of the current generation

know who actually created the Bend Engine, with many attributing it to the divine inspiration in the same way faster than light travel was.

Rumors of what exactly the Bend Engine is capable of remain a source of inspiration among Nomi engineers and scientists to this day. Some seek to find ways to improve upon the city's primary means of transportation, while others aim to weaponize it - creating missiles that can pass through protective shields or sturdy hulls.

Although Orbi has not done so, most of its engineers suspect that they could fly the city through a planet without leaving a hole, if they had enough power. However, extraplanar energy source the engine currently uses is very precisely balanced, and no engineer to date has presented a strong enough case to be allowed to modify it lest the city lose power entirely.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ORBI

Like any large city, Orbi is not one distinct place, but many connected locations. The city overall is divided into two distinct rings: a relatively simple Outer Ring, which surrounds the city and contains no visible signs of advanced technology, and a thriving Inner Ring. This separation allows the city to land on less advanced worlds without causing undue harm to any less-than-open-minded inhabitants.

THE OUTER RING

Only a few blocks deep, the outer ring of the city is built mostly of historical materials - wood, brick and metal. With strict limits on what can and cannot be displayed openly, most Nomi choose to avoid this district except when they wish to express purely mundane artistry.

Because many Nomi are restricted from entering the district due to their visible cybernetic technology, a thriving market in disguises exists on

the border of the Inner and Outer Rings, with elaborate costumes, makeup, and even prosthetics can allow Nomi to take all sorts of appearances. One of the most skilled costumers, **Nysteto Papupao** (CN Genderless nomi Operative 3/Mystic 3) is said to be able to transform anyone into anyone, and enjoys practicing zir talents by impersonating (and then defrauding) those who doubt zir talents.

The other visible industry in the outer ring is that of architecture. Lacking in materials even as modern as tempered steel, many Nomi challenge themselves to create the most impressive structures they can within very strict limits, creating uncanny leaning towers, beautiful soaring arches... or collapsed ruins when their creations prove that the laws of physics are more powerful than their grasp of engineering.

Sometimes, the corpses of these failed architects rise at night and stalk the streets of the outer ring, working together to raze other more

successful buildings. Rumors have it that something other than raw jealousy drives them, for they often only destroy buildings whose architects are overconfident or still within after night falls.

The Fence is the perimeter between the outer and inner rings of Orbi, a retractable wall that can extend over fifty feet high. Although the fence is made of reinforced glass, allowing inhabitants in the city to see out even when they can't partake, when raised it appears to the outside as a fortress-like wall of five-foot stone cubes. This wall has several sealed doors, which can open only when no living non-nomi can be detected by scanners within the doors themselves.

THE INNER RING

The Inner Ring of Orbi occupies the vast majority of the city, and is a place where art has gone wild. Rarely are there two consecutive walls that haven't been used as canvas, and every rooftop and intersection are decorated with sculpture. Although this public artwork is constantly changing, it shows the life of the city itself. When illustrations are bright and colorful, the city is happy and healthy - and when they are drab or get erased, the city is suffering.

The **Grand, Great, Glorious Archives** are a series of buildings all connected through a network of underground warehouses. The **GGG** is theoretically a museum of Orbi's history, and contains the vast majority of the city's masterpieces. More practically, it is a combination storage facility and auction house. Although it maintains and displays its most famous works, it has only a limited space in a city that is ever producing grander and more incredible things.

It isn't unusual for the GGG to have an auction as Orbi prepares to leave a new planet, selling off old Orbi pieces in exchange for local works.

Visitors are rarely aware, but the GGG's finest pieces are all reproductions, sold time and again on every new planet that the ship visits. A dedicated band of counterfeiters led by D'lago Rih (CN Female nomi Operative 5) uses high-precision manufacturing gear to produce replicas that cannot be distinguished from the originals without the aid of magic.

Nowhere is the Nomi's desire for novelty more clear than Innovation Corner. The Corner is a hub for intellectual pursuits in Orbi, and is surrounded by libraries and two competing universities. The heart of The Corner is a charred and heavily reinforced intersection where Orbi's inventors will come daily to show off newest prototypes or give improvised lectures on their theories. Of course, since the competition for time on this corner is high, and discoveries don't hap-

pen on schedule - accidents happen frequently. Crowds gather as much to hear about strange new things and see actual working demonstrations as they do to see the catastrophic failures of new devices that weren't quite ready when it came their turn to be showed off.

Broadcast is the richest and most desirable district in Orbi. It is here that performances, art, and other media of all kinds are captured, edited, judged and ultimately shared throughout the entirety of the station. Although Broadcast has its own recording studios, at least as often its critics, reporters and filmmakers scour the city in search of the best and newest works.

The people of Broadcast have their finger on the pulse of current events throughout Orbi, and the city is always watching. It not only serves as a hub of entertainment media, but also as the city's source of news. Putting a spin on the news is always popular, but several independent reporting agencies spend their time and ener-

gy ensuring that people have access to clear and accurate news, instead of only news that is entertaining or opinionated. **The Green Brothers**, **Jadai (LG Male Nomi Envoy 4)** and **Hadiei (N Male Nomi Envoy 3 / technomancer 2)** are among the foremost of these, popularizing easy to digest video news chunks.

Three Rings is a district home to the grandest and oldest and most prestigious theater of Orbi, the **Three Golden Rings**, for which the district is named. The district specializes in on-stage entertainment of all kinds. While 'traditional' plays are recurringly the most popular, other forms of entertainment from circuses to blood-sport have their days - or years - in the sun.

The **Three Golden Rings** has a long and storied history, with countless dramas playing forth on- and off-stage. More than once, performances have gone dramatically wrong, causing a lead perish unexpectedly, more than once during a performance. Some attribute this to the ghosts

of the first such accident, on the theater's opening night - although no two stories of the original accident share any of the same details.

The Gallery was the original **GGG**, until one day an arson managed to level the building and set the ruins ablaze. The amount of culture lost on this day struck the city hard - thousands of famous works were lost forever. The people left the original gallery as a ruin, circling it with memorials for works lost within, and eventually lost work of all kinds.

Although the monument is touching, the sprawling burnt out structure in the middle of the station immediately lead to trouble. Thieves used the darkness for illegal deals, homeless took shelter within, and strange creatures made lairs in the crumbling halls. Recently, one of these alien creatures emerged from the ruin with a painting long thought lost, leading to a surge of interest in exploring or excavating the ruin to find what else might have survived within.

A FLEET OF SHIPS THE HALO

Like any massive ship, a small fleet of tagalong ships follow Orbi, providing it with the speed and maneuverability it otherwise lacks. Collectively, these ships are known as The Halo, and while their number rises and swells as mercenaries are hired or ships are destroyed or decommissioned, they most often number about fifty ships.

Like the buildings of Orbi, every Nomi ship is unique, featuring elaborate decorations, bright colors, and customized layouts and hardware. Most also feature exotic or prototype technology, leading to a relatively short lifespan for most such ships as the limits of new technology are rapidly discovered. Few ships exist long enough in the Halo to make a name for themselves.

The Knife is a small ship, with a helm reinforced by adamantine, and a prototype variant of Orbi's Bend Engine that makes it possible to fly

the ship at impossible speeds for short distances - generally into the engines or cockpits of attacking ships. Its crew of eight, personally chosen by the ship's owner Illuwun Ladasi (LN Male nomi mechanic 8), are perhaps the most bloodthirsty Nomi in Orbi, and when the ramming power of their ship alone isn't enough to cripple their target, they are more than happy to burst out and cut down anything that's left.

Biobubble is somewhere of a cross between a dump and a farm; a perceptual experiment in the mixture of exotic, alien or engineered plants and animals. Only marginally faster than Orbi itself, it has its own fleet of smaller shuttles that ferry supplies in and successful experiments out. Since the Biobubble is constantly introducing new forms of alien life, it has a standing 'quarantine response' procedure, which will lock the bubble down while mercenary teams breach it to identify, subdue, or destroy the offending specimens.

Rofuku's Left is the surviving member of a pair of ships, and one of Orbi's most dangerous weapons. Rofuku's Right had served as a spotter and targeting system, and without it, Rofuku's Left is a long-gun that has to fire halfway blind. Still, its original crew, including Rofuku's daughter **Karetu Rofuku** (LN Female Nomi Engineer 8), maintain the gun which serves as a strong deterrent for more conventional vessels that are unable to devote the entirety of their vessels towards supermassive firepower.

In **The Blank Market**, memories and identities themselves are for sale. Frowned upon, but not strictly outlawed in Orbi proper, it's proprietor **Nathony** (CE Male Nomi Technomancer 5/Mystic 6) and crew of blank-faced assistants are capable of removing, storing or altering the memories of their customers. Nathony thrives on the fringes of legal activity, and only he knows exactly what memories he has altered beyond the original subject's recollection. Rumors persist that he never truly destroys a memory, but

simply wipes it from a person's mind and stores it in a secret database only he has access to.

The **Sweeper** is not truly a single ship, but the way its ablative drones cluster together into a large shiplike shape give it the honor of The Halo's oldest ship. The Sweeper is a cluster of over a thousand small drones, and a shuttle-sized control pod. Any time that Orbi encounters unusually dense debris, or missile fire, The Sweeper breaks apart into its drones to redirect damage away from Orbi proper.

No Nomi can think of the halo without considering the **Black Ship**. As black as the void of space, this enigmatic vessel answers no hails and appears on no scans. Yet any time Orbi is attacked, it springs into action, cutting through the station's enemies with extreme prejudice. Some consider the ship to be a ghost ship, while others suspect it is some sort of AI-controlled ship. Until someone can survive boarding it, nobody will know for sure.

A RACE OF WILD EXPLORERS THE NOMI

Having evolved on a relatively resource-rich planet with few predators, the Nomi as a race have a carefree and optimistic attitude. They are quick to adapt to new situations and eager to learn new things. Most of all, they are eager explorers, even into the wildness of space or the strangeness of distant alien cultures.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Nomi are shaped roughly like small humanoids, but with an extra set of limbs protruding from just above their hips called lurms. These versatile limbs can be used as either arms or legs as a particular task calls, giving the Nomi great advantage when they need a little bit more leverage than they would normally have available.. Each of their limbs has only three fingers and a thumb, for a total of 16 fingers across all four hands (and accordingly they use a base 8 numbering system).

NOMI: RACIAL TRAITS

+2 Charisma, +2 Intelligence, -2 Strength
3 Hit Points

Size and Type: Nomi are Small humanoids with the Nomi subtype.

Versatile Limbs: Nomi have one pair of arms, and one pair of legs, and a pair of limbs that can be used as either. As a swift action, they can use these as either arms (allowing them to wield and hold up to four hands' worth of weapons and equipment, but not make any additional attacks in combat), or as legs (increasing their base speed by 10 feet).

Good Short Term Memory: Nomi are curious, but rarely focus on details for long. They gain Skill Focus as a bonus feat. Once per day, by spending an hour in study, they can retrain the skill this feat applies to any skill they have ranks in.

Tool Adaptation: Nomi quickly learn and understand new concepts, and have little trouble understanding even the most alien devices. They gain a +2 racial bonus on checks made with tools, and on checks made to activate or make use of unknown technology.

The rest of their bodies are similar to those of most humanoid races, and their faces are eerily human, although their eyes are small and beady. Rather than hair, they grow a short coat of fur all across their body that normally ranges from greens through blues, although pale yellow fur isn't unheard of.

But all of this assumes a Nomi hasn't undergone any sort of body modification - which is unlikely. As their natural curiosity leads many of them to new experiences of all kinds, from dying patterns into their fur, to piercings, and particularly cyberware and implants, which open up to them entire new fields of experience.

NOMI HOMEWORLD

The Nomi originate from the world of Nommu, deep in the vast reaches of space. This homeworld is heavily populated, and sends out "city-ships" like Orbi every decade or so to maintain its population and at the same time slowly build an empire that might eventually span the gal-

axy. Nommu is smaller than many worlds, but resource rich, with a dense metal core and a large moon that gives them strong tides and keeps life bountiful on its many shores. Other than the Nomi themselves, the life on Nommu is extremely alien to what galactically-connected worlds are used to. Most plants are vibrant blue and extremely bitter. Serpentine and hexapod creatures are by far the dominant forms of life, with car-sized 'fatworms' being the world's main meat source. Insects, oddly, are entirely absent from Nommu's natural ecosystem, replaced instead by an incredibly diverse range of tiny four-winged birds.

SOCIETY AND ALIGNMENT

Nomi are gregarious and curious, always seeking out what is beyond the next hill or around the next corner. Few few Nomi have a tendency towards structure, but those that do are highly valued in Nomi society, being instantly heralded as leaders among their people. The Nomi people have little tolerance for cruelty, and when

one of these leaders turns to a dictator they are swiftly (and often violently) removed from their position. Although nomi fare poorly in isolation, they care little as to who this association is with. They occasionally form bonds with groups of individuals for long periods of time, but more often a Nomi will spend a few weeks or months with a particular group or doing a particular thing before moving on. The average nomi alignment is chaotic good, with little care for practicality so long as good fun and new experiences are being had by all.

RELATIONS

Nomi are quick to accept outsiders into their midst, but most other races simply abide the Nomi's curious pestering rather than seeing it as friendly. They have a particular affection with Ysoki, getting along excellently with the similarly-sized and creatively-inclined race. Nomi also get along well with humans, citing their "Nomi-like faces" as an endless source of amusement, but also respecting the larger race's versatility.

PLAYING A NOMI

If you're a Nomi, you likely...

Are a quick thinker, easily dissecting every problem and circumstance to its root cause.

Prefer action, making plans or waiting only when absolutely required.

Enjoy company of all sorts, whether natural, artificial or even non-sentient.

Other races probably...

Get frustrated with your endless questions.

Want you to slow down, giving them time to think.

Look down on you, literally and figuratively, due to your smaller size.

ADVENTURERS

Nomi explorers are common, but few of them can truly call themselves adventurers. Even though Nomi love the thrill of new sights, sounds and cultures, few of them have the stomach for more than simply travelling and seeing the sights.

Those rare few who are brave enough to actually delve into strange and exotic locations can rarely settle back into a more passive life - the exotic thrill of discovery and adrenaline-rush of combat being something few other experiences can even compare to.

Their natural friendliness makes them excellent envoys, although many also excel at technomancy or at the less subtle aspects of being an operative.

NAMES

Nomi names are as unpredictable as nomi themselves. Yet most often they follow a simple three-beat structure, with each beat being a consonant-starting, vowel-ending syllable. Surnames often follow the same structure, and are traditionally the name of a family's most notable figure. A nomi with only one name generally considers themselves the most notable individual in their family - whether others agree with them or not.

Avg. Height	3 ft. 8 in.
Avg. Weight	60-80 lbs.
Age of Maturity	8 yrs.
Maximum Age	50+3d10 yrs.

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STRAIGHT
PATH

A green arrow with a yellow outline, pointing to the right. The arrow is positioned behind the text 'STRAIGHT PATH', passing through the middle of the words. The text is in a brown, stylized font with a yellow outline.