CHAPTER 2: CRYPTO ALLIANCES

CHILDREN OF THE ATOM
(RADIOACTIVISTS)

“Fear not the tentacle! The gift of mutation demonstrates the Atom’s favor. Embrace your form, and know you are made in God’s perfect image.”

Gamma Terra is awash with radioactivity, and in every place it spills a glorious glow into the night sky, some nut job will worship it. The Children of the Atom is a horde of such nut jobs, bundled together and sold at cost. Members believe that the nuclear wars were a salvation of radioactivity brought to the world by a messiah, leaving behind the endless energy of the Atom as its legacy. To a Radioactivist, being exposed to radioactive materials means basking in holiness, and the mutations that blossom on flesh exposed to radiation are judgments passed by the almighty Atom. Thus, mutants, blessed with great powers, are the Atom’s chosen people.

Slogan: “Cleansed by fire, chosen by the Atom.”

Agenda: The alliance’s plan is to convert everyone to Radioactivism, but this goal isn’t as simple as it sounds. Orthodox doctrine prescribes regular exposure to radioactivity, since the resultant mutations and defects are the judgment of the Atom and considered blessings that bring one’s true self to the surface. The conversion of the unenlightened is only a milepost on the road to the ultimate goal: the complete and irreversible irradiation of Gamma Terra, thus bringing the holy Atom fully into the world. This wondrous achievement will grant every creature oneness with the Atom and with one another, making life into a paradise (assuming you survive the exposure).

Behavior: The Children of the Atom is an evangelical religion. Radioactivists believe that it is their responsibility to spread their beliefs across the irradiated landscape, from one bombed-till-it-glow horizon to the other. The average member is calm and reasonable about this purpose. Radioactivists bring up the Truth when others are in the mood (which is not often), live a good life as an example to the unconverted, and so on.

Those Radioactivists are the face of the group that more serious alliance members want you to see and dismiss. The idea is that while the gentler members of the Children of the Atom are holding your attention, the hard-core Radioactivists will be doing the real work of the group, moving the world toward the final goal of complete irradiation. It doesn’t matter if Average Joe Gamma ignores the teachings of the Atom, because when the nuclear bombs go off and spread the Ancients’ supplies of toxic waste (why did they bury it so far down, anyway?), Gamma Terra will achieve apotheosis.

Of course, that’s easier said than done. The world’s radioactive substances are controlled by many groups, few of which want to turn hazardous materials over to crazies who’ll smear it on people’s bodies or sneak it into the drinking water. Thus do the holy warriors of this cryptic alliance—led by the Atom’s paladins, the Proton Knights—assault fortified locations to reclaim the irradiated aspects of the divine and execute the nonbelievers. Only one form of execution is fitting for enemies of the Children of the Atom: drastic overexposure to radioactivity. Most heathens die horribly within a day, although a few are blessed with mutations—signs that the Atom has judged them redeemable. On rare occasion, a victim manifests mutations that are powerful enough to let him or her turn the tables and deliver the Atom’s judgment to the Proton Knights.
**Background:** When the world changed, brilliant light carried the Atom's message to every corner of the land. Those who were unworthy suffered in the light's scorching heat, their bodies burned and twisted, saddled with obscene corruptions that devoured them from the inside out. The blessed had nothing to fear, for the light awakened them in ways that the Atom had intended. Those chosen few, known as the Elect, found they could do things others couldn't do and see things others couldn't see. They displayed the holy marks of the Atom's blessings openly and became the first priests of the Children of the Atom.

**Organization:** The Radioactivists observe a hierarchical organization that some of them thought they remembered reading about once in a book about religion. The lowliest members are the congregants, who attend weekly meetings and participate in rituals, vague theological discussions, half-baked evangelizing, and fund raising. They attend services led by a pastor, who becomes the head of the local community by demonstrating enough personality to keep the congregants coming back.

Guiding the pastors' efforts in a given region are the master chiefs. Publicly, they facilitate communication between pastors' districts, encouraging an exchange of ideas for the betterment of the congregants and their communities. Secretly, the master chiefs either dispatch Proton Knights to eliminate obstructionists or carry out such tasks themselves. They report to the archbishop prelates, of which only three or four exist at any given time.

**Conflict:** The Children of the Atom and the Brotherhood of Thought often clash. The Radioactivists glorify obvious physical mutations that are vilified by the Brotherhood, which celebrates more subtle mental alterations. The Children of the Atom considers this heresy the worst sort of sacrilege and strikes back out of pride and protection of its holy men and women. The rivalry ensures that when the Children of the Atom and the Brotherhood set their sights on similar goals, a cascade of escalating violence follows.

**Sample Member: Sister Mercy**

Of all the people named Mercy in the world (there are very few), Sister Mercy is perhaps the least likely to bear the name. A hideous creature swollen by the radioactive fluids she drinks like water, Mercy cannot bear to walk, relying on a dozen penitents to bear her ponderous bulk as she moves about the Radioactivists' holy lands. She is as abhorrent on the inside as she is on the outside. Behind her pigish appearance, her calculating mind plots and connives against her peers as she seeks to advance her position in the cult's hierarchy. She is also a sadist and enjoys testing the congregation by exposing them to toxic chemicals and radioactive pools. She justifies such cruelties with a pious expression on her face and offhand remarks about how the Atom will sort out the Elect from the dregs.

Sister Mercy, for all her warts and blemishes (and she has many), remains an important figure to the Children of the Atom. Among the devout, she is a saint, bestowing her blessings and favors onto the fawning masses that pay her homage. Her following is quite large, compelling the higher-ups to at least listen to, if not act on, her advice.