

# MYTHS OF THE FAR FUTURE PLAYER'S GUIDE

## THE BALLAD OF BLACK ORPHEUS

**B**lack Orpheus has immortalized many colorful individuals by writing them into his epic ballad. Most on the Inner Frontier are familiar with at least a few verses; inclusion in the ballad - for good or ill - makes your reputation across thousands of worlds. Here are a few of the famous or infamous characters you may run into while you adventure throughout the galaxy.

### Altair of Altair

*Come if you dare, come but beware,  
Come to the lair of Altair of Altair.  
Offer a prayer for the men foul and fair,  
Trapped in the snare of Altair of Altair.*

A lot of people tell a lot of stories about Altair of Altair out on the Frontier.

In his quest to tell the best story, Black Orpheus went directly to the source, as always. It took him almost a month to track her down after he'd reached the Altair system, and then he had to wait another week before she would agree to see him. When they finally met face to face, he took one look at her and decided that she was the most beautiful woman he had seen since the death of his beloved Eurydice.

By the time he left some twenty minutes later, he wasn't even sure that she was a woman—but he knew that she was the most formidable killer he had ever encountered.

### The Angel

*They call him the Angel, the Angel of Death,  
If ever you've seen him, you've drawn your last  
breath.  
He's got cold lifeless eyes, he's got brains, he's got  
skill,  
He's got weapons galore, and a yearning to kill.*

Assassin. Bounty Hunter. Some call him the most dangerous man alive. Orpheus met The Angel only once, out by Barbizon, the gateway to the Inner Frontier. They spoke for only ten minutes, which was more than enough for Orpheus. His audience had expected him to give the Angel no less than a dozen verses—after all, he had given three to Cain and nine to Giles Sans Pitié—but with the insight that had established him as the Bard of the Inner Frontier, Orpheus wrote only a single stanza. When asked for an explanation, he simply smiled and replied that those four lines said everything there was to say about the Angel.

### Father William

*His name is Father William,  
His aim is hard to ken:  
His game is saving sinners;  
His fame is killing men.*

The first time Orpheus ever saw him was in the Corvus system, preaching hellfire and damnation from a pulpit, and daring anyone in his audience—which included some pretty notorious characters—not to make a donation to his personalized, monogrammed poorbox. It had been love at first sight. Not a physical or personal love, but the kind of love a landscape artist feels toward a beautiful sunset. Black Orpheus painted his word pictures on a very broad canvas, and even so, Father William was almost too big to fit.

Whenever people would sit around talking with Black Orpheus, sooner or later the question would come up: Who did he think was the most memorable character he had met during his wanderings? He'd lean back, sipping his wine and staring off into the distance, enjoying the moment and the memories, and then, just when his listeners began to think that they weren't going to get an answer, he'd smile and say that he'd seen a lot of men and women on the Inner Frontier, but not a one of them held a candle to Father William.

### Giles Sans Pitié

*Giles Sans Pitié is a spinning wheel,  
With the eye of a hawk and a fist made  
of steel.  
He'll drink a whole gallon while  
holding his breath,  
And wherever he goes his companion  
is Death.*

Giles Sans Pitié made quite an impression on Black Orpheus, because he appears in nine different verses, which is an awful lot when you're being the Homer for five hundred worlds. Probably it was the steel hand that did it. No one knew how he'd lost his real one, but he showed up on the Frontier one day with a polished steel fist at the end of his left arm, announced that he was the best bounty hunter ever born, foaled, whelped, or hatched, and proceeded to prove that he wasn't too far from wrong. Like most bounty hunters, he only touches down on outpost worlds when he isn't working, and like most bounty hunters, he has a pretty regular route that he follows.

### Halfpenny Terwilliger

*Halfpenny Terwilliger, the boldest gambler yet;  
Halfpenny Terwilliger will cover any bet;  
Halfpenny Terwilliger, a rowdy martinet;  
Halfpenny Terwilliger is now one soul in debt.*

Black Orpheus decided to write up Terwilliger after playing several hands of poker with him. He almost cleaned the cunning young man out before losing everything he'd brought to the table that day. When the last hand had been played, Orpheus sat back and complimented Halfpenny on his skill, then got up and walked away before the card player could ask his name. The next week, when Terwilliger's table was packed with players, all of which told him they'd come to beat the boldest gambler yet, he realized exactly what he'd won that day, as well as what he'd lost.

### The Jolly Swagman

*Up pops the Swagman, out pops his gun,  
Down comes the money, away he does run;  
There goes the posse, seeking his den—  
Then up pops the Swagman, at it again!*

When Black Orpheus hunted up the Swagman and sat down to talk with him, the conversation wasn't half a minute old before Orpheus knew that he'd been raised by aliens.

The Swagman never denied it, but he wouldn't be coaxed into giving out any of the details. He liked the creatures who'd brought him up too much to want them to be studied and exploited by the creatures of his own race, and he knew that that was exactly what would happen if Black Orpheus incorporated them into his song.

Regardless, Orpheus stayed on Goldenrod for a week or two, and some people say that the Swagman even took the bard on a raid with him, just to show him what it was like. They became friends, because in spite of his penchant for lawbreaking, the Swagman was a pretty friendly person. He saw Black Orpheus a few years later and didn't even mention that Orpheus had hurt his feelings by giving him only a single verse; and Black Orpheus was so impressed that he was still on the loose that, without the Swagman's requesting it, he sat right down and added another couple of stanzas, including one about the bandit's fortress (which he



insisted on calling a schloss in order to create a rhyme).

### Jonathan Jeremy Jacobar Stern

*He's Jonathan Jeremy Jacobar Stern,  
He's got lust in his heart, and money to burn;  
He's too old to change, and too wild to learn,  
Is Jonathan Jeremy Jacobar Stern.*

They say that Black Orpheus caught Stern on an off day. That, in point of fact, Stern never stopped changing and learning, until he'd changed so much that nobody knew him any longer. He began life as the son of a miner and a whore, and before he was done he'd set himself up as king of the Bellermaine system. In between, he learned how to gamble and did a pretty fair job of it; he learned how to steal and became more than proficient; he learned how to kill and did a bit of bounty hunting on the side; and somewhere along the way he learned the most important lesson of all, which was that a king with no heirs had better never turn his back on anybody.

### ManMountain Bates

*He's bigger than big, he's taller than tall,  
He's meaner than mean, and that isn't all—  
He drinks straight from morning right through to the  
night,  
He's ManMountain Bates, and he's anxious to fight.*

He was close to thirty years old the first time that Black Orpheus saw him. He was sitting in a poker game in the back room of a bar on Binder X, surrounded by five rugged miners. He'd been losing pretty heavily, and he was none too happy about it. Finally he glared around the table and announced in a loud, belligerent voice that his luck had just changed and he intended to win the next few hands.

The pot reached six thousand credits on the ensuing hand when Bates finally slammed his cards down on the table. He had a pair of sixes. Two of his opponents had flushes and one had a full house; all tossed their cards into the middle of the table, face down, and opined that they had nothing that could beat him. In a manner of speaking, they were right.

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## Moonripple

*Moonripple, Moonripple, touring the stars,  
Has polished the wax on a thousand bars,  
Has trod on the soil of a hundred worlds,  
Has found only pebbles while searching for pearls.*

She fascinated Black Orpheus, this waif with a future that seemed no more promising than her past. Where did she come from? How many worlds had she been to? What was she searching for? Had she no higher aspiration than to be a barmaid to the galaxy? She tried to help him, but she truly didn't know any of the answers.

She was nineteen years old, and she had already met Black Orpheus four times. He even began joking that he'd wander into the least likely bar on the least likely planet he could think of, and there would be Moonripple, scrubbing floors, cleaning tables, or washing dishes. The highlight of her brief life was the single verse he created about her one evening on Voorhite XIV, when he was playing his lute and singing his ballad to keep his mind off the storm that was raging through the chlorine atmosphere just beyond the human colony's domed enclosure.

## One-Time Charlie

*One-Time Charlie makes mistakes,  
But never makes them twice.  
His heart is black as anthracite,  
His blood is cold as ice.*

Orpheus wasn't concerned with the origin of One-Time Charlie's name, but only with the fascinating images it evoked; and since he caught him on a bad day, when he had been drinking pretty heavily and wasn't in one of his friendlier moods, the verse came out the way it did.

The verse is a recent addition to the canon, and as a result very few people have heard it—which was probably all for the best, since sooner or later someone who had heard the song and the stories would start asking him about Flat-Nosed Sal, and as

often as not he and his questioner would both wake up in the local jail or the local hospital.

## Poor Yorick

*Alas, Poor Yorick, I knew him well:  
He can't climb down from the carousel.  
He began with dreams, with hope and trust;  
Alas, Poor Yorick, they turned to dust.*

It took Black Orpheus almost a year to find Poor Yorick, who was living in a ramshackle hotel on Hildegard, spending every credit he made to feed his addiction to Alphanel seeds. Orpheus tried to convince him to travel the spaceways with him and illustrate his saga, but Yorick cared more for his next connection than for posterity, and finally the Bard of the Inner Frontier admitted defeat, bought the remainder of Yorick's paintings, commissioned a painting of his Eurydice which would never be finished, and went away forever.

## Socrates

*Socrates is hard to please:  
He lives in the shade of the gallows-trees;  
He prays for life on bended knees—  
But he's bound for hell, is Socrates.*

There weren't a lot of people on the Inner Frontier that Black Orpheus didn't like, but Socrates was one of them. You'd think that cutthroats and bandits and gamblers would have bothered him more, but for the most part they were pretty honest and aboveboard about what they did, and if there was one thing Black Orpheus couldn't abide, it was a hypocrite. Still, his job, as he saw it, was to write up the folks that he met and leave it to others to judge them.

## Santiago

*A riddle inside an enigma,  
Wrapped up in a puzzle or two.  
What man fits these specifications?  
The King of the Outlaws—that's who!*

An even forty verses: that's what Black Orpheus gave him.

Nobody else ever got more than a dozen—but then, nobody else was Santiago.

Orpheus was faced with a moral and artistic dilemma when he finally confronted the subject of Santiago, for all of his verbal portraits were based on firsthand knowledge, and he had never seen the notorious outlaw. (In point of fact, he had seen him on five separate occasions over the years, and spoken to him twice, but he didn't know it, then or ever.)

On the other hand, he knew that any ballad that aspired to describe the men and events that had shaped the Inner Frontier would be laughably incomplete if it didn't include a major section on Santiago.

So he compromised. He gave him forty verses, but he never once referred to him by name. It was his way of saying that the Santiago stanzas were somehow incomplete.

## The Sargasso Rose

*She lives in a graveyard of shattered ships.  
She floats through the void with her broken dreams;  
But though she may long for a lover's lips,  
The Sargasso Rose isn't what she seems.*

Black Orpheus took one look at the Sargasso Rose and knew there was more to her than met the eye.

How he found her in the first place is a mystery, since he wasn't likely to have had any business up there, six thousand miles above Bella Donna. Probably it was the ships that attracted him, strung out in space like glittering fish on a line, some dying and some already dead.

He spent a couple of days up there, talking to the Sargasso Rose, jotting down her story the way he did with everyone he met. She took the trouble to show Deadly Nightshade off to him and some people say he even slept with her, but they were wrong; Black Orpheus never slept with anyone after his Eurydice died. Besides, the Sargasso Rose wasn't the type of woman who'd jump into bed with just anybody.

## Schussler the Cyborg

*He aches for the touch of flesh upon flesh,  
He wonders why Fate had to end his beguine,  
He longs for a woman, all virginal fresh:  
Schussler the Cyborg, unhappy machine.*

Black Orpheus met many unique characters during his wanderings on the Inner Frontier, but not one of them measured up to Schussler the Cyborg, whose tragedy was that he didn't want to be unique at all.

They met only once, on Altair III. Orpheus stayed with him for a day and a night, while Schussler poured out his strange, unhappy story. They parted the next morning, Orpheus to continue his journey among the stars, Schussler to serve his mistress and wait, without hope, for the release of death.

## Sebastian Nightingale Cain

*The Songbird stalks, the Songbird kills,  
The Songbird works to pay his bills.  
So, friend, beware the Songbird's glance:  
If you're his prey, you'll have no chance.*

When Sebastian met Black Orpheus, he didn't think much of him. He knew that everybody deified the man because of his Ballad, but he just didn't see the splendor. In any case, Orpheus appreciated that Sebastian was honest in his assessment of him. It spoke volumes to his character.

They talked for a while, mostly about Sebastian's middle name and how he'd rather the bard not use it in his song, until Cain saw somebody pass by the





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window of the bar they were in and excused himself without so much as a warning. Orpheus nodded and turned to watch as the bounty hunter walked outside and around the corner. A few seconds later, a gunshot could be heard from behind the building. While everybody was still wondering what happened, Cain returned through the back door and explained that he would need to cut their conversation short, then left to claim his reward for the outlaw he'd just killed.

### Simple Simon

*Simple Simon met a pieman going to the fair;  
Simple Simon killed the pieman on the thoroughfare.  
Simple Simon likes the taste of his new outlaw life:  
It's not for pies that Simon needs his shining steel knife.*

When Simon left a career as a professor in the Democracy to become a professional killer, his new profession forced a certain degree of modesty upon him, so much so that he took on the protective coloration of the scientific illiterate. Orpheus saw right through him, of course—seeing through facades was one of the things he did best—and named him Simple Simon as a private joke. The name stuck, and before long Simple Simon's holograph was gracing the walls of the Inner Frontier's postal stations.

### Silent Annie

*Silent Annie never speaks,  
Never murmurs, never shrieks,  
Doesn't whisper, doesn't call—  
But someday, someday, she'll tell all.*

Orpheus had a feeling about her.

There was an indefinable something—a look, an attitude, a way of carrying herself—that made him think she carried some enormous secret within her. All anyone knew about her was that something pretty bad had happened when she was eleven or twelve and living on Raxar II. She spent two years in the hospital, and when she emerged she was physically recovered—but she never spoke again. She was capable of speech, her doctors said; but the experience she had undergone had traumatized her, possibly forever.

### Virtue MacKenzie

*She can drink, she can swear, can the Virgin Queen,  
And she isn't a stranger to sin.  
She knows what she wants, doesn't care where she's been,  
And she'll do what she has to to win.*

The name was Black Orpheus' idea of a joke, because while Virtue MacKenzie was a lot of things good and bad, virginal wasn't one of them.

He met her just once, out by the Delphini system—which was as close to the worlds of the Democracy as he ever tended to go—and she made quite an impression on him. She was drinking and playing cards at the time, and she wasn't even aware of his presence; but when she accused a fellow

journalist of cheating and backed it up with a couple of swift kicks to his groin and a whiskey bottle slammed down on top of his head, she guaranteed herself a couple of verses in his ongoing epic.

### The Great Sioux Nation

*Along the road to Mother Lode  
Dwells the Great Sioux Nation,  
Which justifies its crimes and lies  
As predestination.*

While Orpheus wasn't especially interested in aliens, he had nothing against putting them in his poem if they were really unique—not in physical terms, since all species are physically unique; but unique in their relationship to Man. And in that regard, the Great Sioux Nation was a little more unique than most.

It wasn't really a nation at all. It possessed only eighty-four members, and only twice since its inception had all of them been on the same planet at the same time. They were outlaws and thieves, cutthroats and smugglers, playing Man's game on Man's turf—the Inner Frontier. But unlike their less enlightened brothers, they went directly to the source for their indoctrination. Each of them had served time as a member of some human band of desperadoes, and each had realized that if one was to play in Man's ballpark, he/she/it had better learn Man's ground rules.

