

BY THE BLUE

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Story

Following in her father's footsteps, Ada is an electrician – a fixer by nature. But on ORE many things are broken beyond repair. Under the ownership of Cutworth's Collective, the people of ORE spend their lives toiling for the rare metal known as Tolm. In the distance, the giant planet Qintron hungrily awaits this precious resource and in return offers a meagre lifeline to the impoverished asteroids trapped in its orbit.

Ada longs for freedom. An admirer of the open sky since childhood, she imagines crossing The Blue to explore its vastness. So, when a space creature ends up trapped in a bundle of electrical wires, it comes as no dilemma for Ada to set free what was once wild. But cutting the wires endangers the job that assures her livelihood. Moreover, the creature is not alone. Several of these herd animals have gotten lost across the asteroid, their distress calls going unheard by the rest of their kind.

Ada finds the source of the creatures' distress: a Tolm sonar tower that she must shut off in order to allow the creatures to find their way back to The Blue. Interacting with the creatures brings her brief moments of relief, but the bleak reality of her life always pulls her back.

World

Geography

Planetary system

- ☾ Qintron [adj. Qintronian] - main planet
- 🪨 ORE [adj. Orenian] - asteroid orbiting Qintron
- ☼ Faint and cold sun



Qintron is a huge planet surrounded by a ring of asteroids and moons. However, as huge as it is, its resources have been depleted by its inhabitants.

Asteroid 710 ORE, commonly called **ORE**, is trapped in Qintron's ring system. Alongside other orbiting bodies, ORE has been colonized and used to extract resources that are then shipped to Qintron. ORE is at the edge of the ring system, quite far from the main planet.

ORE is neighboured by small uninhabited asteroids. ORE used to be neighboured by **822 ICE**, the furthest and poorest inhabited asteroid in the ring system. However, operations were closed for unclear reasons, and the asteroid now lies depleted and presumably uninhabited.

Qintron and its adjacent colonies orbit around a **red dwarf**, a faint star [10% of our Sun's luminosity and 40% lower temperature]. Light levels are low to begin with, but Qintron also casts a shadow over the bodies orbiting it, rendering almost perpetual darkness unto ORE. ORE orbits slowly around Qintron. Exiting its shadow is a reason of both joy and fear [see [Culture](#)].

Environment

- ☄ dark and cold
- 🪨 rocky and barren
- ⚙ metal rich

ORE's surface is rocky and mountainous. Jagged peaks make construction and expansion difficult. The asteroid has a **poor structural integrity**. Collapses are common, often injuring/killing workers.

Most of the asteroid is barren due to poor soil, low light, and low temperatures. Majority of fauna is migratory. Flora consists of seasonal mushrooms and not much else.

ORE is rich in various types of metal, including the rare Tolmium, commonly called **Tolm**. ORE operates as a mining rig that extracts and processes metal ore. As a result, its surface is littered with mines, pits, quarries etc.

Economy

Cutworth's Collective

- Slogans: *"Are you worth your cut?"*; *"We do not cut corners!"*

Cutworth's Collective was founded by **Cuthbert Cutworth**, an industrialist fat-cat who has risen to wealth and power through questionable dealings. On the heavily industrialized Qintron, Cutworth struggled to be acknowledged as a legitimate entrepreneur and competitor among the big corporations.

Since Qintron was stripped of anything of value, the economy and society were collapsing. Cutworth turned his gaze towards Qintron's ring system. Being a self-proclaimed visionary, he commissioned spaceships that were totally unsuitable for long distance travel and heavy transport. The first flights were a failure and came at a great human cost. His endeavours were widely criticized on Qintron. However, once he managed to set up the first few colonies, people realized that expansion is possible. Subsequently, Cutworth was in a rush to acquire as many asteroids as possible before his competitors. This resulted in **colonies with no real infrastructure or**

administration. [*“I don’t think Cutworth knew what ‘collective’ means. Maybe he just meant to say they collect things...”*]

There are currently **3 orbital extraction corporations**: Cutworth’s Collective, which owns 90% of all settled asteroids and moons; **Qintron Orbital** - 7%, state owned by Qintron; and **Ingrid Industries** - 3%, owned by the Ingrid Idley Trust.

The Cutworths:

- Cuthbert Cutworth, Founder of the Collective. CEO between 2760-2811
- Celandine Cutworth, CEO 2811-2845
- Clovis Cutworth, CEO 2845-2891
- Cuthbert Cutworth II, CEO 2891-2893 [resigned]
- Calla Cutworth, CEO 2893-present (2910)

Work and Social Hierarchy

 **Poor** - miners, labourers, smelters, porters, greasers, fabricators, machinists. Every day is a struggle. Most have scars and injuries, missing teeth, missing fingers/limbs. They are seen as easily replaceable, that’s why they go to extreme lengths to keep their job.

 **Lower Middle-class** - electricians, blacksmiths, doctors, engineers, mechanics. Since this is ‘skilled’ labour, there are fewer people available to teach and do the job, so they have more security. Work is still hazardous.

 **Upper Middle-class** - foreman, taskmaster, supervisor. They oversee various departments and facilities. Have minor decision-making powers.

 **Rich** - overseer, administrator, inspector, executive. They act as governors. They have direct liaison with the Collective and make all the big decisions. Mostly appointed from Qintron rather than local.

Production on ORE

When it was discovered, ORE was generically named because, while a high metallic composition was detected, people could not identify what type of metal it was. Once it was settled, a rare new **metal** was discovered: Tolmium, commonly referred to as Tolm.

Tolm is extracted from a **powdery black ore**. Many health issues are related to it, as the powder is very **harmful when inhaled**. Once processed, Tolm turns into a super **strong and versatile material that is highly valued**. Most people on ORE don’t actually know the real value of this metal. The ones who do, often try to **smuggle** it. Since ORE is the primary source for this metal, quota must be reached at all costs. It’s not uncommon for overseers and executives to falsify reports and make everything look better than it actually is.

A great concern is that **deposits are depleting** rapidly. This affects people in more than one way: firstly, a general concern for losing their job. Secondly, they have to move where there is work, so districts around closed mines are being abandoned. But not everyone is being afforded new housing – this ends in situations where families are separated, people live in ghost towns, they must travel over great distances to get to work, etc.

Some think operations on ORE might be shut down entirely, especially now that **another asteroid with the same resource has been discovered** [see [Notable Events](#)]. It’s unclear what the fate of the inhabitants will be in that scenario. [*“We’re gonna end up like 822” “Dead?” “Closed down!”*]

Society

City

There is **one city** sprawling on a vast portion of the asteroid. It's split into **several circular districts**, most formed around the opening of mining pits. Buildings are made from scrap metal, pipes, beams etc. Effectively a huge **shanty town**. No urban planning. The city grows and dies according to people's movements and needs [abandoned districts next to abandoned quarries, new construction next to new pits].



- 💧 Mines: sweltering heat, machines, fire, molten ore. You feel it on your skin, it stings.
- 🔥 Lower City: hot and humid, a stifling heat from steam generators. You feel it in your lungs, it's hard to breathe.
- 🌬️ Upper City: a cool breeze touches your cheek. It feels like the caress of someone you've lost long ago.

Since ORE is a small asteroid, it has no gravitational pull. The gravity is artificial: at the core of the asteroid is a huge **gravity generator** that was built on site. The city is built above it, but as the city expands, building becomes problematic at the **periphery where the gravitational field is weaker**. Keeping the generator in good shape is pivotal.

The **Collective provides and builds housing complexes for their workers**. Workers apply to get housing and it must be approved by executives.

🏠 The poor live in tenement/communal housing, usually underground. Some have never seen the sky. Squalid conditions. Communal living in cramped spaces with communal "lavatories."

🏡 Middle-class people live on the surface, on the lower floors of makeshift tower blocks. They can afford a little apartment of their own, maybe even with a tiny kitchenette and toilet!

🏡 Rich people live at the top of tower blocks. They may have studio apartments or multiple rooms and balconies.

Food

There is **close to 0 food production** on ORE. All **resources are imported from Qintron**. Supply ships bearing rations arrive from time to time, but there is overall a food shortage on ORE.

Local food sources:

- few weird mushrooms during the Bright Months [see [Culture](#)]
- space animals - trapped in wires, fallen carcasses, poaching [people create makeshift weapons to shoot them down]
- You may very rarely find a little vegetable plant in someone's kitchen, under carefully placed lights. It's the most precious thing in their house, imported from Qintron.

Rations are distributed by the Collective according to people's "needs".

 Worker's rations: canned stuff. Pre-made and packed with protein, but low quality. Courtesy of Cutworth's Collective, workers get one meal/day at a cantina – liquidy and meant to fill you up.

 Craftsman's rations: mostly canned but also some flour, lentils, rice and other non-perishables. The canned stuff is a bit higher quality and more nutritionally balanced. They may get a lunchbox/day from the Collective – nothing super tasty but good to stave off hunger.

 Overseer's rations: higher quality canned stuff, non-perishables, some frozen meat and vegetables.

Welfare

Income is the only form of social security. No government, no welfare, no hospitals, no insurance [no gods, only masters]. Any form of aid comes from Cutworth's Collective. They pay a wage and rations to the workers. **If you don't work for the Collective, you have no means of living.**

Injured in the line of work? Get paid a meagre stipend and some extra rations and be on your way. Need a doctor? Your factory has one, but you'll get a fee deducted from your salary if you visit them [so you don't visit them until it's too late].

Education? Apprenticeship from whenever your parents want you to start working [yes, child labour]. Apprenticeships are set by Collective executives [who you can bribe to get your kid a better apprenticeship].

Peer-to-peer aid: Foremen cutting you some slack, doctors visiting you in their free time. Little things that make life more bearable for each other.

Culture

Celebrations:

 **The Bright Months:** ORE lies in the shadow of Qintron most of the year, but once it passes Qintron, it's exposed to the faint light of the sun. This period is known as the Bright Months. It's characterized by an overall feeling of hopefulness. You are out of Qintron's leering presence and you're facing the sun – things can grow, you can see ahead. However, it also induces fear: Qintron is ORE's only lifeline. Are you getting too far from it? Myths say that one Bright Month ORE will be pulled away from the ring system. This myth is partly influenced by Qintronian propaganda who wants its colonies to be dependent on it.

🍄 **Mushroom harvest:** during the Bright Months, local mushrooms grow scarcely outside the city. There is a great drive to forage them since they provide a precious food source. In a show of “support,” the Collective drives a mushroom picking initiative [they know people will want to pick them, so they go like: “of course, we *allow* you to pick them,” after all nothing can happen without the Collective’s approval, not even spore spawning.]

🛖 **Rest day:** Once every 2 months, everyone in the Collective gets a day off. What a treat!

🏛️ **Collective Day:** A 3-day festival celebrating the Cutworths, the Collective, and their ~~crimes~~ achievements. During this time, the Cutworths organize official visits to the colonies.

Religion:

There is **no prevalent religion**. Most don't have the time and energy to think about spirituality anyway.

In recent years, some workers have created a spiritual congregation, **The Blue**. They gather outside mines for comfort and camaraderie and seek solace from The Blue [sky/space]. Practices include: watching the sky, meditating, moment of silence, storytelling, sharing food. These gatherings are not forbidden, but they are not approved by Collective higher-ups [*“If you have time to meditate, you have time to work!”*]

For some, **the Cutworths** [and especially Cuthberth Cutworth] **have reached an almost divine status**. They revere the Cutworths and the Collective as their only source of comfort [*“We wouldn’t have anything without the Collective!” “Boy, you don’t have anything because of the Collective!”*]. These beliefs are more common among the higher-ups who have a blind loyalty and sense of membership to the Collective.

Notable Events

- 2760 – The Collective was founded by Cuthbert Cutworth [can put “Since 2760” on labels/posters].
- 2838 - Celandine Cutworth makes an official visit to ORE on Collective Day. There are rumours it wasn’t really her but a lookalike since people from 822 ICE are also said to have received a visit from her at the same time.
- 2840 - 822 ICE is closed down suddenly and for unknown reasons [mutiny?]. Some people were sent to other asteroids. The rest were left to their own devices. As the Collective ended all activity on ICE, no transport/connection is linked to the asteroid anymore, so no one knows what happened to its people. Without incoming resources like food or clothes, it’s assumed they all eventually died.
- 2905 - another asteroid with Tolm deposits was discovered and is in the process of being settled. There are ownership disputes between Cutworth’s Collective and Qintron Orbital.
- 2910 - News that Calla Cutworth is a candidate in the Qintron parliamentary elections. She’s running for Chancellor [prime minister] [*“They own everything in orbit. Why not own the planet itself?”*]