

# MANDATE ARCHIVE

## THE QOTAH

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## A PEOPLE FALLEN FROM THE SKY

For six hundred years the power of the Qotah has been chained. These proud, brutal aliens were broken by the might of the Mandate Fleet and forced to swear peace with humanity. Their elders were compelled to draw in their ships and halt their incursions, else their tall-spired cities would have been smashed from orbit and their orbital aeries hurled down the wells of their worlds. The Qotah were bitter at their defeat, but for more than half an eon they have been too proud to break their people's vow.

That pride now grows brittle. Some among the aliens say that enough time has passed, that the humans are weak and scattered and that now is the time to get vengeance for their ancient defeat. Others stubbornly insist that honor demands peace, even with such an inviting carcass to pick. The battles have started within the remaining enclaves of Qotahn space, but it will not be long before they spill over to the fragile worlds of man.

### Born of the Storms

The ancestors of the Qotah were a species not unlike Terran avians, creatures that navigated the thick, hot atmosphere of their homeworld on crystalline wings. They were hunters and fiercely territorial, the jewel-bright alpha males fighting constantly over the attentions of females feathered in the colors of the Qotahn sky.

A near-lethal meteor strike on their world produced a cycle of enormous atmospheric disturbances. Flight became impossible for millions of years as the planet struggled to regain some kind of equilibrium, and much of the lush world's life was extinguished in continent-spanning catastrophes. Only the most adaptable and resilient life forms were able to survive the uncounted eons in which Qotah was scarcely habitable.

Eventually, an uneasy peace was reached on the scarred planet, with stretches of more habitable land between perpetual, roiling "world storms" that slashed the earth with hurricane-force winds. By then, the Qotah's wings had long since evolved into grasping appendages and their social organization had been harshly shaped by the changed world's demands. Dawning sapience found the ancient Qotah connected by bonds of fury and mutual faith.

The limited amount of land that was almost always free of world storms formed the sites of the first cities of the Qotah, but the surrounding land was not sufficient to support a perpetually-expanding population. Each city-flock was thrown into violent competition with their neighbors for control of more marginal land, those stretches of earth and sea that were only occasionally scoured by the great storms. Survival went to the strongest, and only the most warlike and aggressive Qotah survived those early eons.

Yet at the same time, disunion within a city-flock could be fatal to the entire populace. If a city could not respond as a strong and

### *Qotah Physiology*

Physically, Qotah are human-like in appearance, averaging 2 meters in height for males and 1.70 meters for females. Their builds are very slender, with crystalline, mineral-based feathers forming head crests and lightly feathering their limbs. These feathers are naturally a misty opalescent gray on females, while males tend to sport brilliant, jewel-toned colors. Qotah have short talons on each of their five fingered-hands and four-toed, avian-like feet. Their legs are digitigrade and often possess light feathering around the "ankles".

Skin coloring on females tends to be the same opal gray as their feathers, while males often are hued in symmetric colors that complement their plumage. Female eyes are several different shades of gray, while male eyes are more brightly colored. Qotah senses are roughly equivalent to humankind, albeit they tend to have slightly superior distance vision and a somewhat less developed sense of smell.

Qotah are native to an atmosphere similar to that preferred by humans, albeit they are accustomed to a somewhat denser, thicker atmosphere than humans like. They favor temperatures slightly higher than the usual human preference, and especially love hot, heavy-atmosphere worlds that are still human-breathable. Their native gravity is slightly less, equivalent to 0.8 Terran gees.

Qotah reproduce much as mammals do and share many secondary sexual characteristics common to mammals. Females lactate for their young, who are hatched from eggs laid after a six-month gestation and two-month brooding. Females generally lay only one egg at a time, though twins are not unknown. It's common for a Qotah female to lay as many as a dozen eggs during the course of her life. Sometimes as many as a quarter of them never hatch, to the mother's great grief.

Qotah grow quickly. By sixteen standard years, a Qotah is fully-grown and expected to be functioning as an adult. Even with modern medicine, however, few Qotah live past fifty, their feathers growing dull and patchy and their joints becoming painful. Death comes quickly when old age finally overcomes them; a Qotah can be fully active beside other adults in the evening only to die in his sleep that very night. Before the Scream, there were suggestions that certain human medical treatments could be used to greatly prolong a Qotah's life, though details of this research have long since been lost in the general downfall.

united whole to the incursions of its rivals, it faced a grim future. Males and the old would be slaughtered by rival flocks, and females and hatchlings parceled out among the victors. While it was theoretically possible for a Qotah to join a city-flock other than the one

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they had been hatched into, only the most promising and useful members could hope to be received by foreign flocks. Others could expect only a quick death.

In response to this, Qotah society came to prize honor as the chief and best virtue of a citizen. A Qotah was expected to keep its word and do as it promised, dealing honestly and fairly with its flockmates and fulfilling its duties diligently. These cultural mores were enshrined as the “Kri”- the “making calm”. However furiously the winds of Qotah might rage, the Kri would ensure an eye of untouchable calm within the individual.

The Kri allowed for early, tenuous links to form between the ancient flock-cities, with pacts and vows honored between them. They were rarely overarching peace agreements, and skirmishing and regulated struggles between cities remained common, but enough ties and agreements were made to allow for a true planetary culture of Qotah to form. Over thousands of years, the Qotah developed an advanced technological society, and even reached the stars.

Qotah was a harsh world, and the prospect of calmer skies drove the Qotah on. Ancient patterns of war and struggle reasserted themselves regularly, with each new colony maintaining pact-ties with their mother flock but struggling still with their neighbors over resources. Even when it might have been more advantageous to simply push further out into the galaxy, the Qotah instincts were for war and conquest.

Several sapient races were discovered by the Qotah over their centuries of expansion, most of them too young to present a serious technological challenge to the avian conquerors. The Qotah did not intentionally exterminate them, but they showed no concern whatsoever for their interests, and brutally slaughtered any natives that interfered with the expansion of the race. Some client species offered tribute and service in exchange for peace, and in the few cases where the Qotah found this wiser, they accepted these pledges. The terms were hard, but the Qotah kept their pacts.

It wasn't until 2559 that the Qotah finally ran into humanity. The humans had the misfortune of having colonized several planets of interest to the Qotah, and the flock that first encountered them was in need of new land. The Qotah attack was brutal and without warning, the entire human population systematically slaughtered to clean the colony for its new masters. That far out on the frontier, it was more than five years before the Mandate Fleet could find the chance to launch a reprisal.

In the meanwhile, the Qotah gouged away dozens of young human worlds. Most were eradicated, but a few sued for peace, and accepted Qotah mastery in exchange for their service. Many of these humans were taken away as servants and slaves, dispatched far into the depths of the Qotah confederacy of world-flocks and never seen again.

When the Mandate Fleet finally arrived, the turnabout was quick and total. Hundreds of pretech warships manned by elite Terran crews delivered a shocking reverse to the Qotah, driving back their less sophisticated fleets and hamstringing their advance. Qotah technology was quite advanced in certain regards, and their war-

riors were both brave and disciplined, but they could not match the sheer industrial might of the Terran Mandate and the advantage that Terran precognitives gave to the human fleets.

Standard Fleet policy was to drive back troublesome alien polities until no further resistance was offered. Yet each Qotah world fought back with primal ferocity, concerned only with its victory and heedless of the greater good of the confederacy; the humans simply never encountered Qotah that were not ready to fight. Eventually, Qotah itself was threatened by the relentless human advance, the motherworld of the race facing the terrible orbital bombardments and brutal celestial fire of the human ships.

This threat to the homeworld was the only thing that could bring together all the Qotah worlds. All had their ultimate allegiance to the ancient city-flocks of home, and a threat to the whole of the world was enough to demand their united cooperation. In anguish, the leaders of the Qotah confederacy swore a great vow to the human admiral, promising her that their world-flocks and daughter colonies would never again make war upon a human world.

This “Vow of Red Feathers” as it was known was very precise. The Qotah swore that they would never fire first upon a human, nor colonize a world upon which a human had been born, nor forbid humans to go anywhere they chose within space. By that time the fierce sense of honor possessed by the Qotah was plain enough that the Fleet did not find it necessary to leave much more than a few monitoring ships, as much to keep the bitter humans from taking advantage of the peace as to stand watch on the beaten aliens.

The Qotah turned inward after their great defeat. While human expansion had taken up almost all of the viable worlds around the confederacy, they retained the right to their old worlds. Some Qotah world-flocks turned to brooding introspection and isolation, but most set upon each other in a murderous zero-sum game of conquest, each trying to take as much of each others' territory as was possible. Within a few generations, the Qotah were broken as a great power. Only burnt-out worlds and fortress planets remained, and the scattered flocks that fled burning cities.

The Scream extinguished human power in the region, but the Qotah were in no position to take immediate advantage of it. Few Qotah worlds retained the infrastructure necessary for building spike drives, and most world-flocks had been reduced to laborious subsistence. It was centuries before the few remaining worlds with functional industrial bases were able to form the cores of a dozen different Qotah polities that controlled the carcass of the old confederacy.

At present, Qotah ships and merchants have spread far through the surrounding sectors. Some are scouts, looking for “clean” worlds which the Qotah may claim for their own. Others seek to take advantage of the wealth and power of those human worlds that have yet retained their shipyards. The Qotah travel far for their world-flocks and families.

Yet there is a division deep within the heart of Qotah society, and one that threatens to grow by the day. Some among the Qotah insist that the Vow of Red Feathers no longer holds. Their reasoning varies

widely, each world-flock choosing the rationale that suits them best. Some insist that the vow was to the Mandate, and the Mandate is gone. Others say that the humans have broken the peace and are honorless *hool* who need no longer be respected. And a tiny few, the most radical, say that Kri itself is no longer necessary in the wealth of a wide-open universe.

These Qotah are despised as oathbreaking *hool* by their brethren, but such is their power that few faithful Qotah worlds dare confront them directly. The Oathbreakers are already launching attacks on poorly-defended human worlds and claiming rule of planets that have lost the ability to fend off interstellar attacks. The Faithful fight back, launching raids and sometimes open war against their brethren, but they lack the easy resources gained by their plundering kindred.

The human polities around Qotahn space are weak and divided, and many prefer to let the Qotah deal with their own troublemakers rather than face the prospect of having to arm for impending war. Most choose to simply deal with Qotah raiders and fend off the increasingly vigorous incursions until matters calm down once more. They may not have the luxury of such idleness for much longer.

## Qotah Psychology

The Qotah are violent, aggressive humanoids with passions tempered only by an unbending insistence upon personal honor. Qotah simply have no natural aversion to violence. They don't experience intense stress in the face of impending combat, and they are not subject to the same emotional and mental scarring that can afflict a human who has been overexposed to warfare. Qotah can feel fear as readily as any other species, but the simple prospect of combat just doesn't ignite the human neural cocktail of adrenaline and fight-or-flight chemicals that usually goes with impending bloodshed.

As such, violence is a tool for Qotah, and one they use as quickly as any other. Against members of other world-flocks, they'll trade or kill with equal alacrity, and they expect others to do the same. The world is presents a constant struggle to the Qotah and they intend to be the last ones standing.

Against this ready violence is the Qotah sense of honor, their "Kri". Qotah have enough intelligence to understand the inevitable destruction that would come from a universal war of all against all, and the Kri is their bulwark against this chaos. Qotah will keep their word in the spirit in which it was given, even if it is given under duress. Keeping such forced vows honorably and well is considered exceptionally glorious and a sign of deep dedication to one's own honor. Qotah will even prefer self-destruction to oathbreaking. To die in the service of an oath is to "die in making a calm", and the service and example such a Qotah offers is universally honored. Breaking such a vow renders the criminal *hool*, or honorless, and no existing Kri to such a creature need be honored. The only way to redeem such a sin is to win the forgiveness of the wronged party, which may or may not be cheaply forthcoming.

Exercise of the Kri does require some clarity, however, and so a Qotah will not consider himself bound by casual statements of intention or provisional promises. "Making a Kri" requires an explicit

## *The Faithful and the Oathbreakers*

To the Qotah, maintaining their Kri is the purpose of their existence. Even those world-flocks that have decided to abandon the Vow of Red Feathers are convinced that they do so with honorable reasons. While those that stand by the Vow refer to their hostile brethren as "Oathbreakers", such renegades take murderous exception to the term.

Among themselves, they consider themselves "conquerors", and their peace-accepting brethren as the contemptible "craven". The Great Eyes of the Oathbreakers have laid out unimpeachable reasons why it was permissible to consider the Vow of Red Feathers as void, so the only possible reason for the restraint of the Faithful must be their personal cowardice.

Unsurprisingly, meetings between Faithful and Oathbreaker often degenerate into brutal violence. Both consider each other to example the worst of possible sins; the Oathbreakers as honorless *hool* and the Faithful as gutless cowards.

and publicly-recognized vow, though these vows are common to trade and warfare alike. Failure in a Kri is forgiven if it is due to physical inability or the vow turns out to be impossible, though even then the Qotah will suffer shame.

Qotah of the Faithful world-flocks remember their promise to humanity, and despite their naturally violent natures, they will never be the first to offer violence to a human. They will defend themselves, but they will be highly reluctant to take the first shot even in the face of obvious impending violence. Faithful Qotah do consider violence offered to their companions to be justification for retaliatory attack, however, and so firing at a comrade will bring them to battle.

Oathbreaker Qotah, on the other hand, have justified the renunciation of the Vow of Red Feathers, and are perhaps even more aggressive toward humans than they are toward other species.

## Qotah Social Structure

Qotah all belong to the world-flock of their homeworld, or the homeworld of their mother if born in space or while sojourning on a foreign world. While it is theoretically possible for a Qotah to change allegiance, very few world-flocks will accept outsiders for membership. Even those few accomplished enough to merit inclusion are kept apart until they have sired a hatchling on that world. Once the ties are so confirmed, both hatchling and parents are permitted to join the flock.

A given world-flock is divided into cities or other settlements, each of which is overseen by an elected male leader. Only female Qotah belonging to that settlement have the right to vote. Males win social status by appealing to the females with their accomplishments in war, trade, and Kri-keeping, and are elected accordingly. The rulers of a world are invariably a council of the most accomplished and popular males, elected for terms of several years.

The “Great Eyes” of a world-flock are its appointed Kri-mediators, charged with using their wisdom to discern the proper meaning of a disputed Kri. Such Great Eyes form the closest thing the Qotah have to religious leaders. Each is a very old Qotah of unimpeachable honor and judgment, and they are recognized by societal acclaim rather than any formal process.

Most Qotah daily life is structured by the traditions and necessities of their particular city or settlement. The peace is maintained by appointed city guardsmen, and serious crimes or Kri-disputes are judged by the local Great Eyes. Punishment usually consists of fines, beatings, or feather-pluckings. Exceptionally grave crimes such as the killing of mates or unfeathered hatchlings or treachery towards one to whom they owe a Kri are punished with public execution. Occasionally a great criminal is permitted to expiate his sin in some suicidal mission for the sake of his flock.

Qotah marry and maintain family households. Divorce is almost unknown, as even when it is mutually desired it implies a failure of vows that is highly socially embarrassing. Female Qotah who lay eggs outside of a marriage bond are deplored as failing their responsibility to their hatchlings and suffer substantial social shame, as does the male involved. Casual sexual relations are not condoned by Qotah culture, though modern technology and isolation from the flock increasingly allow for liaisons that have no offspring or flockmates to show them up.

As a point of custom, the Qotah participate in a tradition known as the “high song”. Each world-flock has at least one messenger charged with sharing tales of great honor and valor among the other flocks. These “singers” journey from their homes through a circuit of other worlds, gathering tales of distant glory to bring home and sharing the mighty deeds of their own people. Such singers are sacred in their persons; to insult or kill them is to insult the Kri of an entire world-flock. Singers cannot always travel as far as they would like, so sometimes they are obliged to rely on other Qotah, or even aliens, to bring back stories and particulars of some Qotah’s heroic nobility.

Occasionally, a Qotah male prefers to avoid the vigorous warfare and mercantile pursuits of his brethren, or a female wishes to attain direct political power or participate in the military. In such cases, the Qotah ritually adopts the plumage and skin coloration of the opposite gender through dyes and pigments and is treated as such by other Qotah. While unusual, such adoption of different gender roles is an accepted outlet for the dissatisfied and brings no shame.

## Qotah Adventurers

Qotah PCs are rolled as normal, but all Qotah gain a +1 modifier bonus to their Dexterity due to their nimble avian ancestry and instinctive spatial grasp and a -1 modifier penalty to their Strength due to their low-gee origins and light frames. These modifiers are applied directly to the attribute’s base modifier- so a Qotah that rolled 14 for Strength would have a final modifier of (+1 -1) = 0. This modifier cannot increase a bonus above +2 or below -2.

Qotah can belong to either the Warrior or Expert classes. There are no known Qotah psychics.

Most Qotah adventurers are freebooters in search of glory and wealth, the better to gain status in their home flock. Females might chafe at the strict gender roles of their homeworld and put on the male role to find adventure in the stars. Other Qotah might have been forced out of their flocks for crimes they may or may not have committed, or a Qotah might find themselves isolated from a flock turned Oathbreaker when they refused to abandon their Faithful beliefs.

Qotah are close enough in biology to humans to take advantage of human-made Lazarus patches and other medical treatment. A medic with no experience in dealing with Qotah and no chance to study the differences suffers a -1 penalty on any medical skill rolls applied to them. Qotah can wear and use most equipment designed for humans, but hard-shell armors and vacc suits must be specifically designed to fit them. Most such items cost anywhere from five to ten times as much as normal if they must be custom-ordered.

Both male and female Qotah are violent by nature, but players should also remember the Vow of Red Feathers. Faithful Qotah will refuse to take the first shot at a human, and will fight only in self-defense. For those sticky situations when the rest of the group decides to apply a little violence, most Faithful Qotah can rationalize participating once the fighting has actually started. For male Qotah, it seems honestly logical not to blame the Qotah for being part of the decision, as males do not normally participate in a group’s decision-making unless they are elected by the females.

Oathbreakers might deny the Vow of Red Feathers, but even they are fiercely protective of their Kri. PC Qotah who reject the entire concept can expect to be loathed and shunned by their brethren, and viewed with extreme mistrust by humans familiar with the importance of Kri to the Qotah. Those humans unaware of the PCs’ unreliability can end up paying for it when the “honorable Qotah” suddenly turns out to be more morally flexible than was imagined.

### Qotah Warrior

|              |                 |               |     |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|-----|
| Armor Class  | 6 (Light armor) | No. Appearing | 2-8 |
| Hit Dice     | 1               | Saving Throw  | 15+ |
| Attack Bonus | +2              | Movement      | 30' |
| Damage       | 1d8/Slugthrower | Morale        | 9   |
| Skill Bonus  | +1              |               |     |

Most male Qotah have the training and attitude necessary to make excellent warriors, and even an untrained female is usually more than a match for an ordinary human. Qotah warriors favor a light, unrestrictive armor of scale-like overlapping plates and fight with two-handed chemical slugthrowers that have a normal range of 100 meters and a long range of 300 meters. Each slugthrower can fire six times before it requires reloading. When such weaponry is inappropriate, Qotah carry slender monoblade knives, sometimes hiding small ones in their luxuriant head plumage. Very few Qotah willingly go unarmed.

# QOTAH GM RESOURCES

| 1d12 | MALE NAMES | FEMALE NAMES | FLOCK NAMES | PLACE NAMES |
|------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1    | Chikkat    | Brii         | Eeloo       | Chihu       |
| 2    | Feen       | Chiri        | Huatu       | Heela       |
| 3    | Hau        | Huli         | Hwee        | Hulila      |
| 4    | Hoon       | Kiti         | Kurrik      | Kinneree    |
| 5    | Hulit      | Lae          | Owree       | Loolit      |
| 6    | Kuan       | Lii          | Reelu       | Olittu      |
| 7    | Kwirr      | Loor         | Shuhao      | Pollow      |
| 8    | Oolt       | Oola         | Tooyi       | Rettu       |
| 9    | Tikkit     | Ree          | Trill       | Sichitik    |
| 10   | Tuwhi      | Tuha         | Waoun       | Tikkati     |
| 11   | Vreet      | Voree        | Weerit      | Twihulow    |
| 12   | Waru       | Yii          | Yisoo       | Vreetwi     |

| 1d6 | PLOT SEED   |
|-----|---|
| 1   | Oathbreakers have discovered the location of a long-mothballed Qotahn warship. They plan to use the PCs to get the access tablet for it, which is kept as a seemingly useless trinket in a Qotahn museum, hopefully inciting a bloodbath between the humans and the Faithful that keep the museum.  |
| 2   | A Qotah flees to the PCs for help against a mob of enraged humans who are convinced he or she is a pirate. The Qotah offers to pledge a Kri of service if the PCs help- but a real Oathbreaker would consider humans <i>hool</i> to whom no honor is owed.  |
| 3   | A Qotah wants the PCs help in investigating a local crime boss. He leaves unmentioned his intention to get the PCs and the boss in a killing situation in order to avenge the death of a Kri-pledged friend.  |
| 4   | A Great Eye desires the PCs' help to sort out a Kri-dispute between a human and an arrogant Qotah elder. Unbeknownst to the Great Eye, the dispute touches on an old, hidden crime in his past that would destroy him were it made public. The Qotah elder intends to use it that way, while the human totally fails to understand the Qotah. |
| 5   | A murderous Oathbreaker warlord launches a raid against the settlement in which the PCs are staying, seemingly at random. In truth, his mate has fled his growing madness and is hiding in the settlement. He will pay well for her safe return.  |
| 6   | A grizzled Qotah warrior leads the defense of a remote human outpost against raiders when his son or daughter is kidnapped. Honor demands he continue to fight, but he knows a hideous fate awaits his child if he does so. The PCs might be able to infiltrate the raiders and rescue the young Qotah, but time is running out.              |

| 1d8 | QOTAH NPC  |
|-----|--|
| 1   | <i>Vilet Tubu</i> , a sardonic male merchant with brilliant green and ochre patterns. He loudly proclaims the certainty that every human breathing is going to try to cheat him, but deals with unflinching honesty all the same. Any attempt to peel him brings the wrath of his many, many local mercantile friends.   |
| 2   | <i>Tulee "Sparrow" Weerit</i> , a surgically-augmented female with patterns of diamond and smoke-gray. She works as a "dancer" at a busy starport bar, and considers herself hopelessly <i>hool</i> for her disgraceful work. She made a foolish Kri to the bar's owner that he arranged for her to accidentally break, and the only way she has any hope of earning his "forgiveness" is to work for him. Secretly the daughter of a Great Eye; she lives in mortal terror of her father discovering what she's been doing. |
| 3   | <i>Krakkak Lool</i> , a wiry-muscled male with dull red and orange plumage. Former mercenary combat medic; never carried a weapon, but saved hundreds of lives under fire. Lives quietly in town, but is deeply honored by the local Qotah, and his word is enough to make or break a proposal to them.  |
| 4   | <i>Lii Hulow</i> , an elderly female with brightly-dyed crimson and gold plumage. A veteran of countless intercene Qotah wars, she knows more ways to kill a man than a hatchling has pinfeathers. Not quite an Oathbreaker, but remarkably perceptive about preemptively noticing attacks.  |
| 5   | <i>Shubu Oolba</i> , a brash young male with bright yellow and blue feathers, barely out of adolescence. Apprentice to a merchant house and a surprisingly good haggler, though he privately yearns to do great deeds of war and adventure.  |
| 6   | <i>Yoola Trill</i> , a grim-faced female with plumage of silver and opal. She is the wife of an important local merchant, and is convinced that the local human government is hopelessly <i>hool</i> . Whether or not that's actually the case, she works behind the scenes to coordinate other malcontents in strikes against the authorities.  |
| 7   | <i>Kawat Shult</i> , a sallow male with plumage of lustrous azure and royal purple. A brilliant bioscientist with poor impulse control; responsible for several weaponized pathogens. Also rumored to have solved the DNA copy-lock on several high-yield strains of metawheat. Wanted on several worlds for several different reasons.  |
| 8   | <i>Viree Toolow</i> , a one-eyed young female with mist-gray and white patterns. Superb tech and repairwoman with an addiction to dangerous situations; lost her eye while repairing a sentry gun in a badlands settlement under attack by raiders. Very likely to sign on to perilous expeditions. Rambunctious and with a liking for humans, but reluctant to act on such deplorable urges.  |

# QOTAH PLAYER HANDOUT

The Qotah are a humanoid avian species that once formed a powerful interstellar polity in the waning years before the Scream. These warlike, proudly honorable aliens attacked the human frontier colonies almost as soon as contact was made, and made substantial inroads into nearby sectors before the Mandate Fleet crushed them. As a condition of the surrender, the Qotah swore the “Vow of Red Feathers”. Forever after, they pledged that they would never fire first upon a human, nor colonize a world upon which a human had been born, nor forbid humans to go anywhere they chose within space.

This pledge was a “Kri”- a public and formal vow the Qotah use to affirm their absolute conviction. Kri are used for many consequential matters, from significant mercantile trades to pledges of loyal service, and they are absolutely crucial to the Qotah. If a Kri is broken, either intentionally or accidentally, the Qotah is *hool*, honorless and undeserving of any respect or Kri. The only possible redemption is in the forgiveness of the person they have wronged. To be *hool* is a fate worse than death to a Qotah.

Since the Vow of Red Feathers, the Qotah have largely turned inward, and fighting among the various world-flocks to which the aliens are born have left their numbers few and scattered. Still six hundred years after their defeat, some are beginning to argue that the Vow of Red Feathers has been superseded, and no longer applies. The “Great Eyes” that adjudicate the questions of Kri on each world have sometimes produced judgments that proclaim the nullity of the Vow, and these “Oathbreaker” Qotah are beginning to attack human worlds.

Qotah adventurers are often freebooters in search of wealth and glory with which to earn the favor of a mate back in their native world-flock. Others seek redemption for some terrible Kri-failure, while some are simply curious about life beyond the martial discipline of their home flock.

## Qotah Adventurers

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## Qotah Physiology

Physically, Qotah are human-like in appearance, averaging 2 meters in height for males and 1.70 meters for females. Their builds are very slender, with crystalline, mineral-based feathers forming head crests and lightly feathering their limbs. These feathers are naturally a misty opalescent gray on females, while males tend to sport brilliant, jewel-toned colors. Qotah have short talons on each of their five fingered-hands and four-toed, avian-like feet. Their legs are digitigrade and often possess light feathering around the “ankles”.

Skin coloring on females tends to be the same opal gray as their feathers, while males often are hued in symmetric colors that complement their plumage. Female eyes are several different shades of gray, while male eyes are more brightly colored. Qotah senses are roughly equivalent to humankind, albeit they tend to have slightly superior distance vision and a somewhat less developed sense of smell.

Qotah are native to an atmosphere similar to that preferred by humans, albeit they are accustomed to a somewhat denser, thicker atmosphere than humans like. They favor temperatures slightly higher than the usual human preference, and especially love hot, heavy-atmosphere worlds that are still human-breathable. Their native gravity is slightly less, equivalent to 0.8 Terran gees.

Qotah reproduce much as mammals do and share many secondary sexual characteristics common to mammals. Females lactate for their young, who are hatched from eggs laid after a six-month gestation and two-month brooding. Females generally lay only one egg at a time, though twins are not unknown. It's common for a Qotah female to lay as many as a dozen eggs during the course of her life. Sometimes as many as a quarter of them never hatch, to the mother's great grief.

Qotah grow quickly. By sixteen standard years, a Qotah is fully-grown and expected to be functioning as an adult. Even with modern medicine, however, few Qotah live past fifty, their feathers growing dull and patchy and their joints becoming painful. Death comes quickly when old age finally overcomes them.

As a Qotah PC, you should remember the Vow of Red Feathers. “Faithful” Qotah will never be the first to offer violence to a human, though lethal self-defense is permitted, and attacks on your companions qualify as attacks on you personally. While not every promise you make is a Kri, publicly-pronounced vows that you acknowledge to be Kri should be kept even in the face of certain death. Even Kri extorted by force are inviolate. If your PC breaks a Kri, they will almost certainly suffer enormous demoralization at their reprehensible new *hool* state, even if no one else ever discovers their treachery. Some Qotah may handle the prospect better than others.