

The Light-girded Orrery

Description: A small, folded cube of metal, plastic, and other substances not immediately identifiable by a regular scan. When unfolded, it reveals an orrery (a physical representation of a solar system) of an unknown star system: the display is three-dimensional, and uses colored force fields, cunningly arranged, to represent the planetary objects and (yellow) star. When each planetary object in the Light-girded Orrery is touched, the touched object flashes to grey, and text in an unknown language (and, in many cases, stylized pictures of what appear to be sapient lifeforms) flashes on its surface.

As for the planets themselves: there are two Earth-sized planets in the inner system, both represented as what appears to be two standard oxy-nitrogen life-bearing worlds with extensive oceans, and nine gas giants of steadily-increasing size. Intriguingly, each gas giant has five Earth-sized moons orbiting it, all of which are **also** depicted as oxy-nitrogen, life-bearing worlds. The star in the middle and five of the gas giants are almost hot to the touch; this is apparently deliberate, as the inner planet and innermost gas giant is not.

The Light-girded Orrery appeared in a starport pawn shop about five years ago, and has so far gotten about ten or so people killed over trying to possess it. It's not so much because of the technology, although it's a little bit beyond humanity's current state of the art when it comes to force fields; it's the implicit promise of the Orrery itself. If it's real, it's a map to a star system with up to forty seven inhabitable planets. Or inhabited ones. There could be up to half a **trillion** sapients living in that one star system alone.

This news *interests* people. It interests canny traders looking for the ultimate planetary market, megalomaniacs looking for the ultimate pocket star empire, explorers, Precursor researchers (there's no possible way that star system is natural), adventurers of all sorts, and even people looking for a very large haystack to hide their needles in. Of course, there's no way to figure out where the star system **is**, assuming it even exists; but people try to grab the Light-girded Orrery anyway, on the principle that there may be clues in the artifact itself. Nobody's found one yet, although that sort of thing has never stopped the professionally hopeful before, and it's not stopping them now, either.

And then there are the people who just want to buy it for looking at. Those people are probably the sensible ones, because they only get robbed over the Orrery eventually, and not murdered. And those people are usually also rich, which is nice when the players need to find a buyer for the Light-girded Orrery when it ends up in their hands somehow. Assuming, of course, that the item ends up being a larceny Macguffin instead of a travel one.

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