

GAMEMASTERS BOOK



FADING SUNS



Credits:

Game Design and Book Development: Bill Bridges

Authors: Jacqueline Bryk, Brian Campbell, Vidar Edland, James Estes, Andrew Greenberg, Andy Harmon, Christopher Howard, Sam Inabinet, Ian Lemke, Chris Lites, James Maliszewski, Bill Maxwell, Rustin Quaide, Sascha Schnitzer, and Bill Bridges

Editing: Brian Campbell

Art Direction and Book Design: Maik Schmidt

Cover Artist: Nathaniel Park

Artists: Yasemin Asik, Carlos Diaz, Benjamin Giletti, Carl Hassler, Larissa Kaatz, Katharina Niko, Nathaniel Park, Maik Schmidt, Sebastian Watzlawek

Jumpweb Map: Steffen Brand

Fading Suns™ created by Bill Bridges and Andrew Greenberg

Playtesters:

Thanks to: Tobias Amann, Timothy Brown, Tim Byrd, Lydia Macedo Byrd, Alexander Fauser, Andrew Greenberg, Darrell Hayhurst, Ian Lemke, David Millians, Carsten Moos, Heiko Nowak, Eric Rex Peterson, Nikolas Pietrzik, Markus Plotz, Sascha Schnitzer, Eric Simon, Leonardo Ellis Soto, Ross Watson; and everybody who playtested a very early version of the rules at Gen Con 2018.

Dedication:

To all the writers and artists who helped reveal the far-flung worlds of **Fading Suns** in all its previous editions and books. You are all saints and true servants of the Pancreator.

And to Greg Stafford (1948-2018), mythmaker. **Fading Suns** wouldn't exist without the immeasurable influence of Greg's worlds and games.

Pilgrims:

It is truly the end of history, it seems. Judgment is near. Yet, I cannot accept that we are to be rewarded for sitting still and waiting for death. If that were so, why did the Prophet say: "A sun must burn to birth light. When your passion burns, you give off light." Perhaps the suns die because we lack passion. Passion for life, for the struggle necessary to unlock the Mystery. We are bored with everything, having accomplished all. History has returned to the point at which it began.

Or perhaps the answer still waits for us. Perhaps the dying suns are our spur to greatness, a necessary quest on which we will finally understand ourselves and our place in the universe.

— Guiseppe Alustro, *My Time Among the Stars*

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Administration Christian Elsässer, Carsten Moos, Sven Paff, Stefanie Peuser, Marlies Plötz

Marketing Jens Ballerstädt, Philipp Jerulank, Derya Öcalan, Katharina Wagner

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Publishing Team USA Robert Adducci, Timothy Brown, Darrell Hayhurst, Eric Simon, Ross Watson

Distribution & Customer Support Florian Hering, Jan Hulverscheidt, Saskia Steltner, Stefan Tannert, Sven Timm, Anke Zimmermann

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4	Weird Monstrosities.....	62
Mastering the Game.....	5	Husks.....	62
Inspirations	5	Monsters.....	64
Chapter 1: Drama	6	Creature Creation.....	65
Rules for Gamemasters	8	Golems	69
NPCs (Non-Player Characters)	9	Surviving Golems	70
NPC Cards.....	10	Beyond the Borders	71
Gauging Challenges.....	10	The Vau	72
The Troupe Coffer.....	10	Symbiots.....	73
Character Development.....	12	Anunnaki Artifacts	74
Full Advance and Partial Advances	12	Gargoyles	74
Setting the Pace.....	12	Soul Shards	75
How to Run a Fading Suns Game	13	Philosophers Stones.....	75
Step 1: Gathering the Troupe	13	Myths and Legends	75
Step 2: Developing the Arc	17	The Fading Suns	76
Step 3: Prepping for Opening Night	19	The Dark Between the Stars.....	76
Step 4: Chart the Run.....	22	Chapter 3: Places	78
Dramatic Structure	23	All the Worlds are Stages.....	80
Dramas.....	23	The Role of Place.....	80
Epics	27	Environments.....	81
Dramaturgy.....	28	Traits	82
Axiom 1: We're all in this together.....	28	Getting Around.....	82
Axiom 2: We're here to have fun	29	Sample Setting: Hargard	82
Axiom 3: Fun walks hand in hand with mean- ingful stories	30	Encountering Hargard	83
Axiom 4: The journey is the key	30	Hargard Traits	83
Axiom 5: Problems are a chance to move for- ward	31	Continents	84
Inspiration	31	History	85
Astro-Divinity Cards.....	32	Present Conflicts	88
Signs and Wonders.....	35	Chapter 4: Playing the Game	92
Chapter 2: People	36	Example of Play	94
NPC Types	38	Dramatis Personae.....	94
Headliners.....	38	Setting	94
Agents.....	39	Let's Begin	94
Extras	40	Drama: Nightmare in Yngmark	101
Sample NPCs	42	Player Info.....	101
Known Worlders	42	GM Info	101
Nobles	42	Act 1: A Hinterland Hamlet.....	101
Priests	44	Scene 1: The Grateful Lord	102
Merchants	46	Scene 2: Priestly Scolding	105
Yeomen	47	Scene 3: Village Gossip (Optional)	105
Barbarians	49	Act 2: Suspects & Denizens	105
Vuldrok	50	Scene 4: Through Dwimmerwood	105
Occultists.....	51	Scene 5: Jarl Agnar Iron-Leg.....	106
Psychic Covens.....	51	Scene 6: Nightmare by Day.....	107
Theurgist.....	54	Scene 7: Trouble Brewing.....	107
Heretics	55	Scene 8: Peasants of Yngmark	107
Republicans.....	55	Scene 9: The "Blacksmith"	107
Antinomists (Warlocks)	56	Act 3: Enemy Within.....	108
Gangs.....	57	Scene 10: Priest and Apprentice	108
Physical Threats.....	57	Scene 11: Nightmare on the Loose.....	108
Social Threats	59	Scene 12: The Moorgaunt's Den.....	109
Creatures	59	Scene 13: Aftermath	110
		Appendix: Tech Level	110



INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Introduction

Welcome to the **Fading Suns Gamemaster Book**. It's one of three Core Books. The other two are the **Universe Book**, introducing the setting and background of **Fading Suns**, and the **Character Book**, providing the rules of play for the game, character creation, details on the traits that describe characters in rules terms, technology, and finally, occult powers.

You'll need all three books to play **Fading Suns**. This book provides the special rules of play used by the gamemaster. We describe the three types of NPCs, along with a host of example NPCs. You'll find everything from nobles, priests, and merchants to alien creatures and actual monsters. You'll also find a sample planetary setting — Hargard — and a beginning drama to run for your players in that setting.

If you haven't read the **Universe Book**, you might want to start there. This book, as well as the **Character Book**, assumes you know the setting and its people and places.

Note: In the other Core Books, when we used the second-person address — “you” — we were speaking mainly to the players. In this book, the word “you” refers to the gamemaster.

Mastering the Game

Gamemastering is a very satisfying experience. Where the players each get to try out a single important role, you, as the gamemaster, get a chance to dive into the world itself, shaping its stories and watching what happens when the players encounter the world. Typically, some games have portrayed gamemastering as a chance to play the divine author, but **Fading Suns** encourages you to work more as a combination of director and interested observer. You can incite events that spark the players' actions, but you also serve as an audience that eagerly wants to be impressed.

Building a game always starts with a few common steps. First, focus in on an idea. You can find quick inspiration for a game in a variety of books, movies, t.v. shows, and comics (see below) or from other **Fading Suns** sourcebooks. Space vikings? Try the Vuldrok. Cyberpunk dystopia? Set a game on Leagueheim. Horror? Try Stigmata or the haunted wastes of Nowhere. Next, read up on the background info and rules that are vital to bringing your specific idea to life. Then get some players together, feed and water them — an important, but often neglected step — and prepare yourself mentally for the challenge of your well-laid plans possibly going completely off the rails.

Inspirations

What are *you* going to do with **Fading Suns**? The three Core Books should spur your imagination

and give you countless hours of play. Your own imagination will bring in ideas and stories all your own. Imagination works best when the pump has been primed by encountering other stories. Below is a list of some inspirational sources you can search for ideas to build into your **Fading Suns** dramas.

BOOKS

Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun*

George RR Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* book series, as well as the *Game of Thrones* t.v. series

Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series

E.E. “Doc” Smith's *Lensmen* series — In many ways, *Lensmen* is sci-fi's ur-text, launching many tropes that have been told and retold in different forms: psychic powers, advanced good-and-evil aliens playing chess with human pawns, and even personal energy shields (before *Dune* used them).

Frank Herbert's *Dune* (and David Lynch's movie adaption)

The works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, especially his Mars (Barsoom) stories

The works of Cordwainer Smith

Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* (and its sequels) and *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

James S.A. Corey's *The Expanse* books and t.v. series

John C. Wright's *The Golden Age* trilogy

Andre Norton *The Beast Master* and *Lord of Thunder*

Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and sci-fi “juveniles”

John Scalzi's *The Interdependency* series

Alan Dean Foster's Humanx Commonwealth stories

Pohl Anderson's Technic histories

M.A.R. Barker's world of Tekúmel, as seen in the roleplaying game *Empire of the Petal Throne* and his novels *Man of Gold* and *Flamesong*

TV SHOWS

Babylon 5

Firefly

MOVIES

Event Horizon

Jupiter Ascending

The Chronicles of Riddick

Judge Dredd

COMICS

2000 A.D. (home to Judge Dredd)

Elaine Lee and Michael William Kaluta's *Starstruck*

J.M. DeMatteis and Jon Jay Muth's *Moonshadow*

Mike Baron and Steve Rude's *Nexus*

Jack Kirby's *2001: A Space Odyssey*



CHAPTER 1: DRAMA



SAINT CARDANO THE SHIELD OF THE PROPHET

Hail Cardano, most faithful of us all. Pilgrim, it is to Cardano that we pray when our faith falters, when we have sinned egregiously and seek salvation, or when we are most bereft and yearning for the Beloved.

Once the “Red Demon” of the Li Halan, Cardano is now known for his fabled conversion to the Church, serving as an example to all sinners. The Pancreator’s Light can transform the greatest of evils, even at the final hour, if one is willing to do as the Empyrean Voice commanded of Cardano: “Empty your vessel!”

Cardano loved only one person: Amorita, his mistress, who joined the Amaltheans. Some say his love for her compelled him to forsake his past. He surrendered his war campaign so he could give his all to the Church, changing the course of history and his entire house. Choirs across the Known Worlds sing the lay of his descent into cruelty and his restoration through Light and love.

He bears the Shattered Sword, the sight of which brings sinners to their knees in repentance. Hidden in his breast pocket is the Amor Aeternus, the mythical love letter from Amorita that romantics say caused his conversion, the reading of which cleanses one’s soul mirror of all its stains.

— Charioteer Captain Zelina Hamid-Sandor, *The Pilgrim’s Path: How to Read the Omega Gospels*

RULES FOR GAMEMASTERS

The light barely illuminated the elevator shaft.

Of course, the light was coming from an overloading reactor in the room above, so that wasn’t a good thing.

Jayce could hear his Avestite “partner” holding back the things in the darkness below, and he could identify the stutter that came from the flameweb running out of fuel. Without that trademark weapon, it wouldn’t be long before the things lurking down there would devour his partner whole. Not a good thought.

The rest of the group, including Jayce’s own unrequited love, Dame Allison Mere, struggled above him, trying to reason out how to power down the damned reactor without killing everyone. And here he was, their only hope. The lonely Scraver with a heart of gold — at least that’s what he kept telling them — stuck between here and there, barely hanging on from becoming monster food. Gallows humor aside, it wasn’t a good position to be in. He couldn’t help getting out a laugh, but there were tears too. He was going to die.

Something shimmered in the periphery of his vision. He needed a moment to realize that it wasn’t just the glare through his tears. Something metal glittered in the uneven light of the fusion flames above him: a spanner. Long lost, it stuck to the muck of the walls. If it worked and if Jayce could get to it, they might have a chance.

And hells, if it all worked out, they could probably save the priest too. Damn him, but he was growing on Jayce. He couldn’t just let him die in the dark, not when there was still hope!

As the gamemaster, you're not a person playing a single character. You play a host of characters, as well as representing the universe in which the players move.

NPCs

(Non-Player Characters)

GMs are players too, but they play a host of characters — namely, anybody who appears in the drama who is not a PC.

As you can surely tell from reading **Chapter 2: Characters** in the **Character Book**, PCs can have a lot of depth and detail. Not all of your characters will get that degree of descriptiveness; it's simply too much work. You can streamline the NPC creation process by categorizing your cast of characters into three types: Headliners, Agents, and Extras. Summaries of their roles are provided below; you'll find more complete details in **Chapter 2: People**.

HEADLINER

A headliner is a key player in the events that embroil the PCs. Headliners might be antagonists, allies, villains, or neutral parties — but in all cases, they are important. Playing these characters is the closest chance that you, as the GM, will have to playing fully fleshed out PCs of your own. They're the ongoing, recurring characters in your drama or the behind-the-scenes operators who finally show up at the climax, giving a face to their Machiavellian schemes. For each Sherlock Holmes PC, you're going to need some Moriarties.

Headliners get full trait descriptions, just like PCs.

AGENT

Agents are interesting characters who play an important role but a limited one. They're the baroness a PC tries to distract with their performance

while the rest of the troupe picks the bishop's pocket; they're the serving wretch or wench who *overhears* things; they're the wily merchant who senses your desperation when haggling over the cost of a weapon.

Agents have more fleshed-out traits than Extras, but they're still not as complete as PCs.

EXTRA

Extras are bit players and stock characters who don't play important roles as individuals, but they can still pose problems for the PCs. They usually appear as part of a crowd: the peasants riled up by the appearance of strangers, the town guardsmen hunting down the crew who just robbed the agora, or the maids who witnessed the ghost.

Extras have simplified traits, since you won't be doing a whole lot of dice rolling with them. When you do roll dice, it'll be over quickly.



NPC Cards

Just as each player has a character sheet, you'll keep character sheets of your own. Since you'll be juggling more than one NPC at a time, we recommend that you use index cards for them.

- Each Headliner gets a card of their own with traits on one side and a description on the other.
- Each Agent gets a card.
- A single card can cover multiple Extras in the same group.

Using different colored cards for the three categories of NPC certainly helps. Once you choose a color scheme, stick to it; this system will help you quickly sort your NPCs in a stack.

THE ADVERSARY COFFER

Unlike players, you don't get WP for superlative roleplaying, but you do get the satisfaction of roleplaying a wide variety of characters. And you get to play god — especially when the characters suffer the misfortune of bad dice rolls.

Whenever a player rolls a critical miss, you gain 1 WP. These bad-luck WP go into a special coffer: the *adversary coffer*. You can spend them anytime to aid an NPC. At the end of the drama, the coffer's contents are emptied back into the well.

Gauging Challenges

As players rise in level and get better at what they do, they're going to need tougher challenges, lest things become boring. **Fading Suns** isn't an outright combat game; social and spiritual coin can be just as impactful as combat. But you'll still need guidelines on what kinds of NPCs to use as foils for the troupe.

As a general rule, assume that one NPC with a level equal to the average level of the troupe is a challenge for one PC in that troupe. An NPC of +2 levels is an equal challenge for two members of the troupe. If the troupe is 2nd level, then a 4th-level NPC can take on two of them; a 6th level NPC can deal with three, and so on.

Extras don't have levels. Sheer numbers are used in this case: a troupe of five 1st-level characters is equally matched to twice their number in Extras, but it takes three times that number to really challenge the troupe at 2nd level.

Remember that the troupe often has to work its way through a whole act or drama before they can recoup and restore themselves, so each hostile

NPC encounter along the way chips away at them. You're setting a challenge for the drama as a whole; you don't need to make every showdown a life and death matter.

The Troupe Coffer

There are lots of forces in **Fading Suns** that work to pull characters apart. One noble house might war against another, forcing friends to choose family over friendship; a priest's heretical views might strain relationships within a pious troupe; a Scriver's vow to never become anyone's chump threatens to constantly test his loyalty to his friends whenever he gets the opportunity to cut and run with the money.

Players must struggle to keep the troupe together through all such trials. Luckily, the Pancreator is on their side: The Prophet formed a troupe with his disciples, setting the mold for all such bands of fellowship, blessed from on high. The more players strive to aid their fellows, keeping unity and faith with one another, the more they'll be rewarded. In profane game terms, this means that you, the GM, can reward those endeavors with wyrd points that are collectively shared by the troupe.

These wyrd-point awards go into the *troupe coffer*. While each individual player has a bank, the troupe has its own central bank; troupe members contribute to it and draw from it. Instead of victory points, the troupe coffer holds wyrd points.

Players get victory points from their *die rolls*. They get wyrd points based on how well they play their *roles*. Whenever a player roleplays well, the whole troupe benefits: you award 1 or more WP into their *troupe coffer*.

APPLAUSE:

REWARDING THE TROUPE

Your role as gamemaster is not simply to be the adversary. You're also an advocate, looking out for the troupe by providing the right kind of fun. In a sense, you're the main audience for the players' performance in their passion play. They're trying to move *you* (and each other) to joy or tears. When they do, you can respond with metaphorical applause, which comes in the form of free wyrd points.

Whenever a player does something that moves you or the troupe, give them 1 (or 2... or heck, even 3) WP from the well. This might be in return for an emotional kick or a simple laugh; whatever it is, if it has a good effect on the game, toss out a small reward.

You should award WP to the troupe coffer when...

- ... a player delivers a great moment of roleplaying, causing anyone at the table to gasp, cry, or laugh out loud — even if it involves the defeat of the troupe. Everyone's here to enact a passion play; whatever summons laughs or tears deserves applause.
- ... a character's concept and/or backstory comes into play in a major way.
- ... a troupe member takes one for the team: They turn back enemies or win against opponents in combat but suffer wounds in doing so. Award WP at the end of the incident... or when it's needed most.
- ... a troupe member's ingenuity gets the troupe a reward, anything from prestige to something tangible and cool (such as tech or money or an invaluable object).
- ... the troupe triumphs over the Dark.
- ... the troupe achieves one of its key goals.
- At the end of a drama, award 1 WP per member.

Players can also petition for WP if they think another player has done something fun, dramatic, or

amazing. (Nominating yourself, on the other hand, is rather gauche.)

DRAWING FROM THE COFFER

Any troupe member can draw from the troupe coffer at any time... unless another member objects. In that case, everyone in the troupe votes (except the petitioner). If the majority agree, then the petitioner can claim however many WP they requested (or however many the troupe voted to allow). In the case of a tie, the troupe leader decides. In addition:

- Once per scene, the troupe leader can overrule a vote and decide the issue.
- Once per scene, someone with the Inspiring perk can take 1 WP from the coffer to give to a troupe member without requiring a vote. (See *Perks* in **Chapter 3: Traits**.)

There is no maximum capacity for the WP in the troupe coffer (unlike an individual's bank). It is not emptied out at the end of a scene; its WP stay there until they're spent by troupe members.

A TOUCH OF MELODRAMA

As described in **Chapter 1: Rules** of the **Character Book** (under *Spending Wyrd*), wyrd points can be used to accomplish amazing and nigh impossible feats. As GM, it's your job to accept or refuse a player's request for a crazy action. There's not a whole lot of advice we can give here because it's all going to come down to the tone and tenor of your game: what you'll allow and how wild things can get. There's a shifting scale between complete realism and action movie madness. The **Fading Suns** rules sit somewhere in the middle. They're not terribly realistic (in real life, someone probably wouldn't survive more than one blaster hit, if blasters were real), but they're also not super-heroic. With WP, you can choose to tilt the scale towards the more super-heroic side.

Here are some things to think about when granting players their WP-fueled melodramatic moments.

Up the stakes: A character's successful WP stunt might change the environment. For example, when they successfully swing from a chandelier and land on their feet, it might detach from the ceiling and come crashing to the ground, setting the room on fire. This doesn't

have to be to the characters' disadvantage; it just alters the playing field.

Commit to the crazy: Even in real life, some incidents seem unbelievable after the fact. After a player uses WP to do something wild or impossible, the story could reflect that socially. Witnesses then put that event into story and song, and the troupe's reputation spreads. For good or ill, they'll have to live up to it. It's often harder to deal with a patron who expects miracles.

If they can do it....: After a player uses WP in a melodramatic way, have at least one enemy attempt a similar feat, inspired by what the character did. In part, it's to level the playing field, but mostly it shows that the characters' actions do move people to greater deeds; in this case, it might work against them.

The plot thickens: WP can also introduce details that will enrich the plot later. As an example, the troupe succeeds in escaping the burning building, but they end up with a rescued kitten. They later discover that the kitten belongs to the reclusive but influential baronet's daughter. Returning it allows them an audience they otherwise wouldn't have been granted.

Character Development

One of your duties as GM is to set the pace at which the troupe's characters develop and grow: gaining new levels, and thus new skills, characteristics, perks, etc.

Before we get to that, let's make one thing clear: Characters grow together, as a troupe. They don't level up separately; all troupe members level up at the same time. Each troupe member's deeds redound to the benefit of all. When a particular player can't make it to a game session and their character is sidelined, they still level up along with the rest, even if they weren't there to directly contribute to the affairs of the troupe. It's *their* passion play.

Full Advance and Partial Advances

As mentioned in **Chapter 2: Characters** in the **Character Book**, the troupe doesn't always have to wait between levels to see some form of personal improvement. Between any two full level advances, you can award *partial advances*.

A partial advance allows a character to gain *one* of the trait increases awarded by a full level advance, such as an increased skill, increased characteristic ranks, or increased VP bank capacity. The player chooses the trait category. This places the character one small step toward that full level advance, where they gain all the trait improvements listed for the new level – all of them, that is, except the ones they've already improved with a partial advance. If a player chose to gain a calling perk with a partial advance, they don't get that calling perk again when they get a full advance; they've already "spent" it.

Setting the Pace

Before you begin a new drama, you should set the pace of character development for that drama. As you get experienced with this process, you can just handle it all on the fly, but when you're starting out, it's helpful to use some structure. We present three different pre-set paces as guidelines. Feel free to throw off these

crutches and run on your own, once you feel comfortable with your choice.

You should vary this pace from drama to drama, based on the overall weight of the dramatic stakes for any given drama (see *Dramatic Stakes* above). The higher the stakes, the faster the pace. You might present a murder mystery in a mansion that's intriguing and fun but doesn't really provide a wide array of challenges, so characters grow at a *prosaic* pace. The next drama might have the troupe whisked away to confront a rogue vau mandarin and his army of Changed aliens. That one should probably be *meteoric* for the troupe — it's almost impossible *not* to evolve quickly after experiencing all that.

Don't tell the players what the pace is beforehand! Let them find out as the drama plays out. If they're getting partial advances frequently, they'll guess that the stakes are high.

PROSAIC PACE

A slow-paced drama tries to capture a more realistic feel. When the pace is prosaic, people change slowly, not overnight. At the end of each drama, give the troupe one partial advance. By the end of five dramas, let them advance the full level.

HEROIC PACE

An adventuresome drama can still be grounded in verisimilitude. A heroic pace is sort of the standard or default mode for **Fading Suns**. When you've completed the middle point of a drama (see below), you reward the troupe with a partial advance. When you've completed the end of the drama, you give them another partial advance. By the end of three dramas, you advance them the full level.

METEORIC PACE

The troupe may be chosen by destiny to become the best of the best. They would then rise to power at a startling rate. When the pace is meteoric, award a partial advance at the end of each act (or game session) and a full level advance at the end of the drama.

INTRODUCTION

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How to Run a Fading Suns Game

Fading Suns is an expansive game with a rich history. Beginning gamemasters, as well as those with limited planning time, might wonder where to start. The options are unlimited: **Fading Suns** caters to any and all imaginations. This can, however, be a bit daunting, at least in the beginning. The following steps provide a quick-start guide, suggesting how you and your players can first engage with the game. These steps include:

GATHERING THE TROUPE

All games begin with players. Encouraging them to discuss and design together leads to a solid foundation. This doesn't mean they have to share all their secrets; they just need to create enough connections to function well as a group. To aid this, we've listed a number of troupe archetypes.

DEVELOPING THE ARC

Decide on the main threads that will run through your epic (or skip this, if you're only running a one-shot session). This mythology might be deeply connected to one particular character, linked to multiple goals, or paired with an impending threat, even if it's currently a hidden one.

PREPPING FOR OPENING NIGHT

While you and your players may have discussed their characters' connections as a troupe, Opening Night is the first time they play together as their characters. Often, the focus of Opening Night is highlighting each character and how they interact, especially with role-playing and dice rolling. Perhaps it's a divisive party at court, an encounter with an inquisitorial lynch mob, or a nasty bar brawl the troupe is thrust into (or causes). Within this Opening Night, you might introduce the themes developed for your arc... or not. Players, however, should gain a good idea of how they work together and what the overall genre of the epic will be.

CHART THE RUN

Look ahead to the games you'd like to run, once you've now seen how the players work together. There's no need for a full commitment to your plan. In fact, if your players are overly curious, too many details might trip you up if your players decide to suddenly explore Malignatus instead of Rampart. In other words, think of the general setting you might need (for example, an abandoned castle, a thriving market, or a temple), the supporting cast of NPCs, and the plot highlights. Then allow for some wiggle room for filling in the specifics.

Step 1: Gathering the Troupe

Troupes are named after the Diaspora-era miracle play ensembles that spread tales of the words and deeds of the Prophet and his disciples across the Known Worlds. In our current framing, all troupes, even those not remotely like a miracle-play company, are considered to follow in the footsteps of that archetypal troupe. Their lives together enact a passion play, a tale of trials and triumphs under the providence of the Pancreator.

A troupe's *passion* refers to the ongoing story of how they meet and overcome terrible challenges, despite punishing setbacks and tragic downfalls. Like the medieval passion plays performed for the lower classes, these stories aren't exclusively spiritual. They can certainly be like carnivals in the vernacular sense; they can be divine comedies, both farcical and happy-ending. All of the stories track the progress of the troupe's *wyrd*: an old word of Urthish origins that in the 52nd-century of the Fading Suns means how one's deeds are entangled with capital-F "Fate." Wyrd is often associated with the invisible powers of the universe, most often the Pancreator, but sometimes the powers of the occult.

In short, the troupe is the fundamental building block of a **Fading Suns** game.

Everything revolves around this framework. The troupe describes the individual characters as they stand in relation to one another and their leader. To speak in literary terms, the protagonist of a **Fading Suns** drama is the entire troupe, not any single person in it. While certain dramas can highlight one character more than the others, the overall passion play is about all of them together: the ensemble. Many examples from sci-fi and fantasy stories concern groups: the crew of a starship (whether it's the U.S.S. Enterprise or a *Firefly*-class transport) or a questing band (like in *Fellowship of the Ring*).

The game function of a troupe *archetype* is to establish a quick way to unify the party when competing loyalties (and player preferences) pull them apart. Each archetype asks the players during character creation to figure out their places in the troupe, through their "pledge," their "role," and their "providence."

A *pledge* describes their base motivation to be traveling with the troupe. The most common reasons may include: fealty, which is a direct tie to a noble house as its vassal or ally; loyalty, which is looser than fealty and can be linked to past shared experiences or temporary alliances; or necessity, because it's frankly dangerous to travel the Known Worlds alone.

A player's *role* briefly describes what they do for the troupe. What sort of quick descriptor would you use? For example, "she's the...": leader, counselor, bodyguard, Devil's advocate, troublemaker, soldier, crafter, mechanic, etc. The only role that's required in an archetypal troupe is the *leader*, the person who's the center of attraction or "north star" the group centers around. It's a role that serves to establish long-term goals.

Providence is simply a fancy way of saying that, in **Fading Suns**, weird coincidences happen. It's not unusual for members of the troupe to have had some sort of brief interaction in the past or at least a disturbingly similar experience. ("You fought the symbiots on Malignatius? I fought the symbiots on Dais-han!") This gives characters something to bond over and talk about right from the start.

The quickest way to start a game is to have the gamemaster choose the troupe archetype below that best fits with the genre the gamemaster would like to explore. Having said that, however, a wise gamemaster always get feedback from the players and understands that, as everyone gets more familiar with the game, this kind of heavy-handed input should be reduced. You might even find, over time, that the more experienced players evolve their troupe type from one to another due to experience and circumstance.

In each of the examples below, it's accepted that one of the players will assume the role of the troupe's leader. This character is not in charge of the *players*; they hold sway over the *characters*. Their role takes place within the drama, not around the table, and it comes with rules advantages and responsibilities. The leader resolves ties for things like conflicts over the troupe confer and influences the initiative order. However, that means they're also the one responsible for the troupe; if someone screws up, it will be blamed on them.

NOBLE ENTOURAGE

This is the default troupe type. The rules, especially the GM advice and sample drama, are written assuming this type. You can certainly adapt to other types (see below); from time to time, we'll give advice on how to do that.

Under this archetype, a single noble leads the group. The typical roles of others in the troupe might consist of that noble's bodyguards, priestly adviser, guild expert(s), and all manner of useful aides and hangers-on, including aliens. Unlike the sycophants most nobles collect in safer circumstances, this type of entourage hosts people important to the noble, requiring pledges of fealty that go beyond mere oaths, extending to life and death.



When traveling, nobles tend to be hosted by the local power structure (i.e. noble households, churches, guildhalls) that's in charge. It's the best way for local powers to gain information on the outside world or to use travelers who can take care of situations the local authorities might want to keep their hands off.

TROUPE ALLEGIANCE: THE LEADER

People in the Known Worlds owe many different allegiances: to friends, to family, to a faction, to a fealty lord, to the Church, to the Emperor, all the way up to the Pancreator. The most immediate one for most, however, is the allegiance to one's troupe. This is embodied by the leader.

The leader is the guiding light, moral center, or simply the captain of the troupe. They might (or might not) also be the public face of the troupe. This go-to figure for leadership in the troupe provides the final word. Members might bicker and backstab, but they're all united in service to the head of their troupe, and they know to put aside differences to accomplish the troupe's goals.

The leader might be egalitarian, soliciting votes from the troupe, or they might be indecisive and easily manipulated by one member after another, tugging the troupe from here to there on whims. It's whatever the players have elected to play: one player plays the leader and the others figure out their parts in the company.

Who becomes the troupe's leader is rarely a decision to be made randomly by rolling dice. Players who want their characters to provide the focus should present their arguments for why their character is best suited for the role. This does not have to be judged simply on in-game merit — one character might a better leader than another — because it depends on what everybody wants to play. The Hawkwood might be the most even-tempered, but the hot-headed Hazat is sure to push them into interesting times.

The GM can certainly weigh in here, voicing their preference, but in the end, it's a decision the whole group needs to make. Some characters will object now and then to the leader's stated wants and needs, but this is where the roleplaying challenge comes in: how does the leader make sure everyone gets what they want?

SPIRITUAL MISSION

A mission is an entourage, often funded by a Church patron, that follows a spiritual call or inquest. The call might arise from someone's vision or as a desire to represent a particular article of faith. The missionary troupe seeks this spiritual goal, testing its worth just as it tests that of its members. An inquest is a preliminary investigation into something that might threaten the faith or the faithful, which might include potential heresy, though it's just as likely they're figuring out why a potential parish's coffers keep draining.

A mission differs from a noble entourage in that it's shepherded by a holy figure, usually a priest, although anyone who embodies the spiritual goal — a blessed stable boy, a visionary midwife, a miraculous mercenary — could be its leader or shepherd.

A mission's focus tends to be narrow in the beginning, and it's very likely to be accosted by people concerned about matters of faith. Rarely, this can be something occult. Too often, it's a complaint that someone's neighbor is a sinner. ("Why isn't the local priest dealing with it?")

Roles for missionaries can include a noble adviser (typically someone related to the priestly leader), someone to serve as a devil's advocate, a trader (because coin can sometimes loosen tongues when a priest cannot), and possibly (depending on the locale) one or more bodyguards. Members often find themselves attached to such circumstances out of loyalty, and it's not uncommon for more than one member to be working through penance for some past mistake.

Because of their perceived connection to both the divine and the common man, spiritual missions are often hosted by the common folk, who are also more than willing to unburden their worries.

MERCHANT CARAVAN

Caravans operate in an odd gray area. While often legal and often anticipated by the towns they visit, most folks also openly believe that outside caravans encourage criminal activities and might even kidnap people if they're not careful. Sadly, their fears aren't entirely unjustified.

"Caravan master" is the title given to the merchant in charge, but their primary focus is protecting the investment, which serves as a shorthand for the reason why the caravan exists. Other members of the troupe might be hirelings, their old friends, or actors in a miracle play that travels with them across the stars. Motivations for a caravan can often be broken down to retrieval versus recovery. Retrieval can be framed as trade (you retrieve the cash for the goods promised), but most often it involves securing a known

asset. Recovery entails going after knowledge or items that have been lost or deliberately obscured.

And part of the reason for their unsavory reputation? That would be locals wanting to get out of town due to trouble or maybe a teen who just wants some adventure for a while. There are plenty of reasons why one or two folks might want to “disappear” and go on the road, at least until the next stop.

Roles within the caravan include a priestly adviser (often to keep locals in line if they become hostile), a quartermaster to tend to the cargo or the destination, a navigator to make sure they find their way there, and some manner of folk to protect or secure the investment. Caravans are frequently driven by necessity. Maybe someone needs to pay off a past debt; perhaps someone wants to get some distance from an unpleasant situation in the past.

While on the move, merchant caravans are usually hosted by guildhalls or outcasts who are unafraid of the dangers of technology.

BONDED BAND

This troupe is a tight-knit group of rough equals or “band of brothers.” Most likely, it’s a yeoman-led troupe – such as an ex-military unit, cell of exiles or outlaws, or a pirate crew (perhaps Vuldrok raiders) – but it could also be a band of Questing Knights or a group like the Three Musketeers.

Like a caravan, the bonded band has a leader position: the “captain,” whose main goal is to keep an eye on whatever job the troupe needs to do to keep their freedom. A mission leader is often selected for their expertise. At the end, though, all profits are split evenly with a share going to all the people involved, or perhaps a share and a half goes to the leader and people who are absolutely mission-critical.

Bands tend to attract the occasional healer, master-at-arms, and bosun (in this case, the person tasked with keeping and acquiring needed supplies). Complex ties of loyalty keep the life of band members closer than most families.

Bands may be recognized and welcome in public spaces under some circumstances (as in the Vuldrok worlds), but in the Known Worlds, the local law tends to start tracking them as soon as they enter town. This can push them into the weird corners of the world. The troupe might end up camping in forgotten ruins or sheltering in artificially designed cliffside tunnels.

PATRONAGE

Sometimes a troupe has an offstage patron, an NPC who sponsors its journey. This patron can be anyone: noble, priest, merchant, alien, etc. They

might hire the troupe themselves or represent an organization’s interests, such as a spy agency that uses the troupe to complete impossible missions. The patron(s) might be openly known to the troupe and/or those they encounter, or their actual identity (or identities) might be hidden, a secret to their charges (as they contact the troupe via audio or dead-drops messages).

Even though the patron is the ostensible, if distant, leader of the troupe, the troupe still needs a player leader, usually the character who serves as its “face.” Leadership might even change per job. If the job is to break into a palace, perhaps the Scraver is put in charge. If it’s to rescue a holy child, perhaps the Amalthean leads the quest.

A troupe like this often includes an adviser who looks out for the patron’s needs, a navigator and/or guide, and muscle to make sure things go right when it gets tense. These types of patronage troupes are commonly driven by loyalty or necessity and linked providentially to shared past experiences that attracted the patron’s attention in the first place.

A patronage can’t usually rely on being hosted in the same manner as other troupe archetypes. They’ll have to make their way as they see fit until they achieve their mission. That means they’ll have to deal with local dangerous creatures, bandits, or hazards others would normally try to avoid during their travels.

A WORD OF ADVICE: IN ALL FAIRNESS....

Troupe archetypes are presented with options for certain factions being in charge. Given this structure, over time, some characters may end up bossing others around. If one player doesn’t want another player to do that, that relationship should ideally be worked out during the troupe’s formation and character creation. But even when roles are agreed upon ahead of time, gameplay can cause friction over issues of agency.

Try to resolve this in-game by using incidents appropriate to the setting. Not even nobles have complete free reign — they’re consistently countered by Church and League power. Bossing the wrong people around has consequences. Even a merchant character who’s not on good terms with their guild can get aid and assistance from them, so long as that would put a noble or priest in their place whenever the guild’s power is questioned.

Step 2: Developing the Arc

The architecture for creating an epic follows a trajectory similar to a single drama. Come up with a basic story, figure out what category of fiction it falls in, and plot out the basic beats you should have to tell the full story.

That's it. Those are the only elements you need to be successful. Because tabletop gaming is interactive, the details may fluctuate over time, but so long as you understand your basic structure, you'll be okay.

THE BASIC STORY, A.K.A. "THE PITCH"

Each epic possesses a theme that's echoed, complemented, or even contrasted in each drama. The description of this over-arching theme is like an "elevator pitch": Describe your story as if you were trapped on an elevator with another author. This clarification is for you, not the players, although you should share it with them if you feel they'd enjoy helping you mold this story.

The pitch covers the broad beats of what you want to see over the course of the epic. For example:

"Two households, both alike in dignity, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny, from forth the fatal loins of these two foes, a pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life; whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows do bury their parents' strife." (Apologies to The Bard.)

What does that mean? Well, there are two distinct sides, they hate each other, their kids fall in love, mischief ensues, violence ensues, and the end product of that situation alters the destiny of those two sides.

In an epic, you'd take your time unraveling this pitch. One session might introduce one of the families. Another might cover a running street fight between the two sides. Between these scenarios, there might be unconnected side adventures the troupe goes on that highlight your theme. The epic slowly builds to those points, and inevitably, it works towards an end.

GENRE: CATEGORIES OF FICTION

Fading Suns accommodates all sorts of stories in its setting, mimicking genres from all over the spectrum. Though it's grounded in a science-fiction setting, it has many similarities with fantasy: feudal social structures, occult mysteries, and a Golden Age that lies in the past (the Second Republic).

Within these genres, you can tell all sorts of other types of stories. The convention of a genre can guide you on how to run your initial pitch. Let's take the example from the Bard above, tweak it a little, and see what genre does for it.

Two families at war, their children in love, violence ensues, the product of their love changes destiny. (Romeo, Juliet) *Romeo and Juliet* – Relationships

Two nations at war, their children in love, violence ensues, the product of their love changes destiny. (Dr. Erskine, Howard Stark) *Captain America: The First Avenger* – War

Two houses at war, their children in love, violence ensues, the product of their love changes destiny. (Duke Leto, Lady Jessica) *Dune* – Fate of Empires

One way to use a genre, spelled out in Step 3 below, is to use the framework of *beats*. In theatrical productions, beats are the smallest division of the story. They are concise, defined moments of change, backed up by the raw settings placed around them. Beats are the necessary sequence by which the story flows, so if your script says "in fair Verona, where we lay our scene...", you know that this beat employs an urban setting, it's public, and that something is about to go down *right now*. These elements must be there to set the next point.

The beats of a genre also make your story *feel* a specific way. Your players can quickly suss out that they're in an adventure, or a war epic, or a horror story. Genres work by setting a steady and identifiable rhythm to the beats you lay down. (You can find examples in Step 3.) In the context of an epic, they're told over multiple episodes: Bringing about the downfall of a crime family, for example, is more than stopping a single heist. Here's a brief examination of a number of appropriate genres and how they specifically can be brought into your epic.

ADVENTURE

The default setting for **Fading Suns**, this genre plays out for nobles along the lines of *The Three Musketeers*, centered around long-running courtly intrigue. This genre is often combined with others, as it's very flexible. For a spiritual mission, this kind of story might emphasize the journey over the ending. A merchant caravan would look forward to unexpected complications that can net a larger end profit.

FATE OF EMPIRES

Fading Sun's backstory is dominated by the politics of power with all its vicious tongues, betrayals, and outright war. Even if the troupe never directly participates in the trifecta politics of Nobility-Church-League, its ripples spread out to affect their lives. Spiritual missions tend to rile up the concerns of the faithful. A caravan would be more likely to use the gap between both sides to gain an advantage.

FRONTIER

At its height, the Second Republic boasted connections to hundreds of worlds and the possibility that perhaps thousands more were available via jumpgate. With



the contraction brought on by the Fall and the Fading Suns phenomenon, even the worlds left often devolved into untamed edges of what used to be, containing the secrets of centuries buried often just out of reach. Because of this isolation, uncovering those secrets takes time and multiple incursions into unknown space.

Noble troupes often reach out to reclaim Lost Worlds for the good of humanity. Spiritual missions deal with Lost Worlds on a case-by-case basis, condemning or embracing them, even if it might upset the more conservative orthodoxy. Caravans fall more on the reckless side, pulling in resources from the edge and making them available as soon as they can.

HORROR

Imagine a legacy of several thousand years where the Powers that Be claim everything is under control, even as they downplay accounts of alien terrors that can modify a person, a city, or the world's very essence. Ancient aliens who went to war and apparently annihilated each other left behind devices without instructions or warnings. Now think about the other *things* that crawl, slither, and worship these beings.

You can tell many horror stories in that setting, if you dare, and many of them won't need to fit into just one telling. The roots of evil runs deep in some corners of the universe.

Horror is an ideal genre for a troupe of spiritual missionaries, since they're often compelled to investigate threats that may endanger the soul. Caravans are highly likely to avoid these situations at all costs, which makes things worse when they're drawn in without a simple way to escape. The nobility, though... they're just as often drawn into a tangled web of their own making, often while they try to consolidate power mortals were never meant to have.

MYSTERY

Fading Suns maintains an overall mood of religious mystery. Stories in this genre are often about solving a particular problem. A puzzle is presented, so the troupe must uncover clues until the mystery is solved and the perpetrator is uncovered. This is a common genre for caravans, as the dramatic reveal leads to their success (or failure) in obtaining goods. Granted, the reveal could identify a crime, but sometimes the target deserves their fate. Mysteries are also stock and trade for the nobility, as people rely on their liege lords to deal with situations they cannot.

While mysteries often come packaged as single dramas, they can easily be built into an epic: perhaps the story involves taking down that Muster boss with his thriving human trafficking ring, uncovering a noble's conspiratorial ties with aliens, or finding a serial killer hiding among the respected clergy.

RELATIONSHIPS

It should provide little surprise that in a game based around the personal dynamics of a troupe, relationships can be fertile ground for drama. They may develop between members of the troupe, or the troupe might foster them by empowering others as they make their journey across the stars. Relationship sagas can be tragic, leading to an unfortunate end, or romantic, which (in older parlance) means it's an emotional story that ends happily.

Volumes have been written on courtly romances, and many of them feature a helpful priest. As a spiritual mission, this type of story can resolve iniquities while bringing resolution to a dire situation. Caravans, who have been known to pick up strays, often get sucked into these types of sagas despite their own best interests. In their defense, though, these stories do make for wonderful tales around the fire.

Relationship epics work well when they're mixed with other experiences over time. For example, a relationship drama might work its way into one session, followed by a couple of adventures and a mystery. Then when the relationship is revisited, these experiences can highlight how a pair has either grown closer or drifted apart.

SPECULATIVE

The speculative genre immerses a troupe in a situation alien to their own. Perhaps it's the world of the ur-ukar or the hells of an ascorbite hive on Severus. It might be a mining colony, separated from human contact for too long. In any case, exploration is deviation from the norm.

For a long time, civilization has relied upon the nobility as a buffer between humankind and the alien. More spiritually oriented individuals find such epics often challenge their own perceived position in the Pancreator's universe, whether for better or for worse. Caravans see this type of story as a way to expand their understanding, so they're likely to dive deep, which might get them into a situation they can't get out of.

THRILLER

Stories set within this genre push the troupe into a place of paranoia, peeling back a never-ending series of layers. While some mysteries are thrillers, this genre is equally featured in espionage and noir tales. Problems are not always solved, and resolutions are not always happy ones. Noble entourages may find ties of fealty dragging them into a hall-of-mirrors conflict that that spirals out of control. Spiritual missions may find themselves dealing with Church

law and the Inquisition or needing to confront ecclesiastical abuses of power. Merchant caravans find themselves as patsies, hired for one task that turns out to be another job entirely, perhaps with them as the scapegoats.

WAR

War stories are action-centered, following the troupe's exploits and how they impact pieces of history. Often this genre highlights how devastating war can be to those who are tangentially connected to it. Taking care of people while the world is falling apart is a vital part of a spiritual mission. Caravans often deal with impossible logistics under extreme time pressures. Troupes aligned with noble houses often lead the war effort.

Step 3: Prepping for Opening Night

Opening Night is the first drama within your epic. It can set the tone for everything yet to come. Before everyone begins the epic proper in the next drama, Opening Night can act as a proving ground where they become familiar with their characters and the setting.

SCENARIO DESIGN

A scenario is an outline or synopsis of your drama. It's your blueprint or plan for what will happen in the drama, although the players will almost certainly challenge your plans and require you to change them. That's why you should start with an outline that keeps the big picture in mind. When the details change in reaction to the players, you can alter your cast, props, and backdrops as necessary to keep the overall scenario viable.

When creating a drama to run for your troupe, you'll need to figure out their entry into the story. For a place to start, we've provided some genre frameworks below. You can use their beats (or "plot turns") in their listed sequences to give your drama a real sense of genre. These are tried-and-true methods for creating stories — the skeleton structure beneath the surface of a tale.

In addition, the following questions can help you form dramas. These questions are for you to answer, not the players; they'll get to answer these for themselves as they play out your drama. This topic is covered in more depth in *Dramatic Structure*, listed below.

1. WHAT HAPPENS?

In an RPG, your answer to this question needs to be open-ended to account for the astonishing decisions players make. It could be relatively linear, although most players could then feel they're being "railroaded" to a predetermined destination and that their choices don't matter. It's best if your outline is a very loose series of happenings that could take place out of your intended order, depending on how the troupe responds to things. Start with the classic three components — a solid beginning, a filling middle, and a tentative end — and work the rest out from there.

2. WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

The answer to this question isn't the plot; it's the theme. Your high-level concept animates the drama, giving meaning to its disparate parts. This idea is explored in more detail under *Theme* in the section on *Dramatic Structure*, listed below.

3. WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

This answer describes the atmosphere, tone, or mood you wish to convey. Although the details can vary from scene to scene, there should be an overall tone to the drama as a whole, which helps to give it some coherence and support the theme.

4. SCENE BREAKDOWN

Once you've established the details above, you can block the drama scene by scene, coloring and illuminating it with theme and atmosphere. A scene takes place between the rise of the curtain and its drop; after that, the set and props are rearranged for the next scene.

- *Scene Card*: Just as each player character gets a sheet and each NPC gets a card, a scene should also get its own card. On it, briefly list the "what" of the scene (its plot), the "who" (NPC cast), and the "where" (its place). Also choose the scene's title: "The Strange Sigil," "A Peculiar Meeting," "The Angry Deacon," "A Shortcut Through Fungi," etc.
- *Inciting incident (beginning)*: Each scene has an inciting incident, the first thing that happens when the curtain rises, which could simply be "the troupe enters the room."
- *Main action (middle)*: This card describes the main thing that happens in the scene. There can be minor actions, too, but if you need a new main action, that's probably a whole new scene.
- *Curtain drop (ending)*: When the main action has been resolved, the curtain drops and ends the scene. The curtain drop is always a consequence of the players interacting with your plans, showing how that all worked out.

SCENE CARD

For each scene you plan ahead of time, you should have a card listing its vital info. (Not all your scenes are preplanned, however; some just happen spontaneously based on the troupe's choices and your reactions.) Use the template below; you can also take a look at *Nightmare in Yngmark* (in **Chapter 4: Playing the Game**) for examples.

SCENE TITLE

What (plot): Write a brief plot summary with 1 or 2 sentences describing what happens (or, at least, what you *intend* to happen).

Who (cast): Make a list of the NPCs who appear in the scene. (See **Chapter 2: People** for info on creating their separate trait cards.)

Where (setting): Include a brief description of the place(s) where the scene happens and any notable features.

Notes: If you want, add any special notes you'll want to know — or remind yourself about — before you run the scene.

GENRE FRAMEWORKS

The barest basics of various genres were introduced in Step 2. In this next step, we'll introduce some frameworks you can use for crafting your dramas. They aren't strictly necessary, but they can give your dramas the coherence of a well-told tale within their genre.

These frameworks are made up of *beats*, plot turns that embody stories within genres. They indicate archetypal change points in each genre that the troupe needs to meet to move the story forward. Everything around them — the cast (PCs and NPCs), backdrops (places, environments), and props (prominent items of tech or occult power, whether they're MacGuffins that are never used but which lure the PCs forward into action or devices vital to the success of an endeavor) — serve as raw material to establish these changes.

The beats listed below are typical for their genres, but they're not exhaustive; other beat sequences are possible. However, when you veer too much from them, you're probably heading into a new genre (or a hybrid genre). While the beats typically remain the same for most dramas within a genre, the details change with each drama.

Beats come in sequences. In this framework, *all* the beats need to be hit for the drama to end. An adventure story begins with an inciting incident (the

“Mission”) that sets off a quest (the “Journey”) which, through a series of complications, ends in the resolution of the inciting incident (the “Return”). If the duchess is missing her rare diamonds, the troupe must find them; the story won’t end until they’re returned. Another way to put it would be that the story won’t end *satisfactorily* until the troupe restores the diamonds. If they fail, the adventure fails. The fine details of just how this plays out can vary (maybe the diamonds belong to a Scraver crime lord instead of the duchess), but the overall framework is the same.

ADVENTURE

Beats: The Mission, the Journey, the Unfamiliar Location, the Unexpected Complication, the Return

Examples:

- The missing diamonds (Mission), a ticking clock (Journey), the mountain hideout (Unfamiliar Location), it was the lover behind it?! (Unexpected Complication), grave consequences (Return)
- The rumored bones of a saint (Mission), death approaches (Journey), the abandoned church (Unfamiliar Location), those bones aren’t real (Unexpected Complication), the miracle occurs (Return)
- Rumor of ancient tech (Mission), a hostile planetoid (Journey), the forbidden ruins (Unfamiliar Location), what have we unleashed? (Unexpected Complication), how to profit from a disaster (Return)

FATE OF EMPIRES

Beats: The Powers that Be, the Opposition Uncovered, Secrets Revealed, the New Normal

Examples:

A courtly ball, an alliance threatened, profit in war, a new alliance formed

A vehement sermon, tithing refused, a clergyman in illicit debt, rallying to save the church

A contract signing, weapons for madmen, dire leverage revealed, neutralizing the weapons

FRONTIER

Beats: The Edge of Nowhere, the Threat from Outside, Taming the Untamable, Pushing Out the Edge

Examples:

- Reclaiming the jungle, it comes at night, the hatchery uncovered, it now guards us well
- The town of heretics, the hermit from the wilderness, their occult powers contested, faith rekindled
- The ruined city, poison seeps from the ground, an AI gone rogue, a new program established

HORROR

Horror can roughly be divided into a couple of categories, including “the gruesome in the mundane” and “the violation of nature.” Each has its own elements.

Beats (Mundane): No One Around, A Cry for Help, The Monsters Look Normal, We Can’t Un-See This

Examples:

On a warship between ports of call, an unexpected call from the hold, the bridge crew are slavers, unruly slaves are fed to the passengers

In the revered monastery, a suicide committed, pleas for help ignored, an ancient heresy flowers

In the Old Sewers beneath the town, a scream heard, those poor souls look like Engineers, human experiments, the baron approves

Beats (Supernatural): Situation Normal, Something has Changed, In Too Deep, Never Again Normal

In the revered monastery, the walls bleed, a wronged soul seeks vengeance, innocents are lost

On a warship between ports of call, a jumpkey malfunction, something has possessed a passenger, “did you actually kill it?”

In the Old Sewers beneath the town, there are no rats, the hatchlings were hungry, where is their mother?

MYSTERY

Beats: The Puzzle Revealed, The Game is Afoot, Clues & Clues & Clues, Everyone’s a Suspect, the Opportunity Presented, the Dramatic Reveal

Examples:

The treaty is missing, the ambassadors arrive soon, a conspiracy among nobles, the priest has been encouraging them, a page was seen, hidden in plain sight

Dead body in the wine vat, accusations of heresy, reformed heretics among the faithful, inquisitors with agendas, a hidden library, a lost artifact worth killing for

The body in the locked bunker, the only one with the codes, a botched project and hidden deaths, angry engineers, they are covering for each other, a group effort

RELATIONSHIPS

Beats: What the Heart Wants, There are Issues, The Heart Rejected, Grand Gesture, The Heart Embraced or Denied

Examples:

- She was only seen once, “but he loves her completely”, despite their difference in status, an adventure might grant him favor, “but will her parents agree?”
- They were siblings, one to war & the other to the clergy, now one has fallen in battle, can healing be brought, can the soldier be forgiven?
- There is a child, but the parents are known warriors, on the wrong sides of the battlefield, struggling to bring the child to safety, will both parents survive?

SPECULATIVE

Beats: Far from Home, A Curious People, More Different than You Think, Fatal Misunderstanding, An Uncomfortable Resolution

Examples:

- A hive wants to trade, a long history of exchange, they're taking hostages, hostages are used as egg hosts, we still need what they make
- A mining asteroid, they've adapted to vacuum, worshiping the Long Dark, the Dark answers, the dangers become obvious
- A Second Republic experiment, they look like us, they copy us too perfectly, they no longer need the originals, the experiment must end

THRILLER

Beats: The Door Opens, It's Complicated, In Too Deep, Raising the Stakes, But There's a Twist, Walking Away

Examples:

- Ordered to help, overstepped their orders, now we're in charge, mutiny was a surprise, this isn't the real crew, only a few abandon the ship
- Lady seems sincere, dead husband not dead yet, many want to "talk" to you, that thing he has will kill us all, not really the one in charge, guess the bishop will get away with it
- Proposal was suspicious, thought that sounded too easy, now we're trapped in here, trapped with *those* things, but this was his plan all along, now *he* gets to spend time with *them*

WAR

Beats: The Mission Uncovered, Things Take a Turn, A Desperate Situation, The Price Must be Paid, Remembering the Dead

Examples:

- "Take that hill!", that's not really a hill, that's an abandoned ruin, "who can turn off these war machines?", "no one left behind!"
- Both sides are coming, the townsfolk can't leave, a site of strategic importance, negotiating a surrender, burying family
- They need these supplies, the enemy holds the roads, everyone's getting bombed, someone must take the hill, arriving a little late

Step 4: Chart the Run

Once you've got the epic started, it's best to start fleshing out where you want it to go. You may know its basic pitch, its genre, and the plot of the first game, but what comes next?

KEEP THE END IN SIGHT

Someone in the troupe reclaims their family's dukedom; the Scraver becomes the Godfather of Criticorum; the ukar avenges his clan's genocide.

All good stories, even epic ones, have an end. As you examine your plots, keep in mind the steps needed for the overall story to succeed. At its simplest, stories can fall into a minimum of three parts: introduce the protagonists and their problem, show the problem getting complicated (the longest part of the story), and then watch it resolve.

A lot of the details on how to do this are covered in *Dramatic Structure*, listed below, but for simplicity's sake, prepare a bulleted list covering the broad strokes. If you find your troupe wandering off track, consider how their adventures are building either their characters or their knowledge of the world before introducing a scenario that brings things back in line.

MYTH ARC VS. SHIP-IN-A-BOTTLE

Myth arc stories involve the core elements of your long-term epic. A drama featuring a myth arc prominently advances the "mythology" behind your story. The myth arc doesn't have to be a series of beats in your epic; sometimes, the arc is there to fill in critical information or provide a setting that your players need to enjoy the run.

A WORD OF ADVICE: THE DANCE

You're in a dance with your players to present a drama. Sometimes they'll take the lead and pull you in another direction. Sometimes you'll lead. Here's the best advice: *breathe*. Don't be afraid to trust in a good time; if all of you are enjoying yourselves, then enjoy it. You can and should address what happened openly after the game is over: "This wasn't what I planned, but I had a great time. Next time, do you mind if we start with this?"

During the game, if things are not working, take a break for a moment. Get a drink. Clear your head. Sometimes a look or a hint will get players back into the rhythm, or you can enlist a single player to help you pull things back (the leader is perfect for this role). And if you're not enjoying yourself, stop and address it with your players. Be gentle on yourself and them. Remind them that you're all here to have a good time and that this is a cooperative venture; most importantly, though, remind yourself.

Ship-in-a-bottle episodes are more restricted in scope, focusing on character moments or unrelated adventures. These sessions are opportunities for players to stretch their imaginations while characters stretch their own individual agendas. Bottle episodes are also allowed to diverge from the epic's genre. Do you need a spot of comedy to lighten up that dark thriller you're running? The break may heighten emotions when the characters eventually return to the next myth arc session.

Another reason for bottle episodes? Well, if your preparation for the next big myth arc session accidentally got derailed, it's a great way to take a quick break without disengaging the players.

Dramatic Structure

Fading Suns stories break down into units: dramas (1 to 6 sessions or acts) and epics (2 or more interrelated dramas). You can use these dramatic structures as a form of shorthand to help monitor the pacing of your game.

Dramas

Dramas are a way of describing self-contained sections of the game. They can be episodic, where the narrative play is fully contained in one episode, or serial (ongoing). Serial dramas are framed with a story arc similar to a television show, leveraging an average of 3 to 6 game sessions to tell a larger, linked story. Each drama is bound by a similar setup, which includes: the beginning, providing a clear theme and an impetus that starts play; the middle, where the players' actions set the tone (and the theme could change or reveal deeper thematic layers); and the end, where the gamemaster and the troupe knit the threads together, bringing the story to a satisfying conclusion... often leading to some new questions, threads, or signposts that can point to the next drama.

BEGINNING

The beginning of any drama occurs when someone comes up with an inspired idea or when a new conflict arises from a previous drama. This can come from you (the gamemaster), from any member of the troupe, or through discussion about the game. The key to a drama's successful start is that the end can be conceived. This hint at the ending is limited by its nature. Ideally, an item will be recovered, the barony will be saved, or the abomination from the Dark will be destroyed. Realistically, over the course of play, things usually turn out quite differently....

THE HOOK

There's an old saying: "Talk is cheap." The same principle applies to ideas. Yes, it's essential to develop a theme, but if you can't get the troupe together, and



if you can't come up with the starting point, that idea is essentially useless. Hand-in-hand with the beginning of the drama comes the reason why the characters are involved. This rationale sets the *initial stakes*, which can always be raised later with a plot twist. Properly baiting your hook also sets expectations for consequences if the initial stakes are lost. Here are some cheats to get the action started.

- The easiest technique is drawing on the troupe leader's background or goals. If an old friend asks for help, the leader can bring the whole troupe along to achieve it. If an unresolved conflict from the past arises, the leader will need the troupe to help them put the matter to rest.
- The troupe might suffer a *restriction*. Perhaps a rebellion has begun, and no one is leaving until the victor is sorted out. Maybe a Church interdiction means the troupe's visit to an Ur tech site results in their not being allowed into the only city with a starport. The key to a restriction is that it must be broad enough to impact all of the characters, so they can channel their collective efforts into the narrative.
- The troupe can share a *setting*. Each character, regardless of their class or status, comes from the same area to start with, and the conflict is then something that compromises their sense of home. Consider a locale like the cirrus-tipped spires of Leagueheim or the foreboding rune-halls of Hargard. What about a monastery half-hidden in the rolling hills of Vril-Ya or a bath house for the nobility set just above the great market of Istakhr?
- The story could start with an *individual*. Perhaps the priest in your troupe hears in confession that the faceless assassin Azar an-Hakar has arrived on the planet. Maybe a guild member in the troupe is informed that the merchant-queen, Syrena Temak (whose last appearance heralded a cargo shipment that almost caused a war across three systems), has just come through the jumpgate. A noble character could hear whispers hinting that the ukar terrorist, Misha, who may or may not be a spy for the Decados, has been spotted at the local agora.
- The troupe may get drawn into an *event*. Imagine a book-burning at the Eskatonic chaplain's private library. Consider an explosion in the cargo hold, where the passengers' luggage was secured. What if a local goodwoman is found murdered with crystal-clear evidence that the baron's nephew is involved? What happens when a priest is accused of apostasy by a local guild member who has some very convincing footage to back it up?
- The troupe could face a *deadline*. Players who enjoy intrigue might want to get involved when the setup is in its initial stages. Others may relish the complications that occur by being thrown into a scene

that's already *in media res*: the story could start with characters in the middle of an action-packed scene. For those who enjoy a lot of suspense, up the stakes. For example, if the story is not resolved by the deadline, two houses will go to war.

CONFLICT

Conflict, in this context, relates to the theme. You've got a hook to get things in motion, but how is that issue embodied? Put differently, what is the troupe up against?

- It's common enough to make a conflict that's Person versus Person. The conflict is then embodied in a specific member of the troupe. In some situations, the antagonist holds the power. Perhaps an Orthodox priest has declared the troupe under inquisitorial investigation, or maybe the antagonist is the target: an heir to an estate has fled the site of a murdered guild member.
- The complication of Person versus Technology takes on added meaning in **Fading Suns**. Technology compels others to advance its own agenda. That drive might lead simple farmhands to enslave nearby towns with a golem they dug up. An advanced biotechnological device counseling a physician may advise him to raise his daughter from the dead. A myriad of "normal" problems are possible: A terraforming device malfunctions, or a vaccination machine no one knows how to operate needs to be fixed, so the heroes can halt a plague before it spreads. Even less bizarre situations can deliver a dramatic edge: technological know-how is, by necessity, segregated in Known Worlds society, so how do you fix a starship in battle when the crewmen with the needed skills are already dead?

A WORD OF ADVICE: THE GREAT LEVELER

Technology can be an immense force, making the powerless quite powerful. It can humble even the most prideful troupe, but eventually, too much of it will end up in the characters' hands. Use the strictures built into the setting to limit its sudden ability to upend things. In other words, make it scarce and make it scary.

As a variation on Anton Chekhov's gun: If in the first act, you have hung a blaster on the wall, then in the following act, someone from the Inquisition could confiscate it. Alternatively, that smart gun might be a little too smart, as it suddenly realizes the character wielding it is technically an "enemy soldier" despite having been born a thousand years after the gun's manufacture date.

- When designing a Person versus Society plot, consider a particular cultural segment's long-standing traditions and then adapt them into something worth challenging. Perhaps the characters need to increase the acceptance of an Eskatonic sect by the normally Orthodox Li-Halan. The argument the Li-Halan present is conservative: Their ancestors walked down a heretical path, and they don't want to do it again. However, without the help of the Eskatonics, symbiots will overrun an entire town.
- The Fading Suns phenomenon, which has caused ecological troubles across the Known Worlds, sets the stage for a number of Person versus Environment scenarios. Take, for example, a fishing route used by a group of people for millennia. What do they do when the currents suddenly shift and the fish go with it? How will the characters deal with the locals' imminent starvation? Will they brave the dangerous waters and collect enough food for everyone, buying time for a lasting solution?
- In addition to all the alien races and ancient artifacts in the Known Worlds, mysterious forces defy conventional wisdom, creating Person versus Weird conflicts. A ghost is haunting a castle. Is it a magic lantern trick? A psychic projection? Or, as the local Eskatonic warns, is it something far more sinister? The Li-Halan Garden Worlds are rife with little corners that bear the stench of ancestral evils, and the Istakhr market has seen more than its share of items that can only be described as "cursed."
- The most challenging form of conflict is Person versus Self. In this conflict, the characters and their past actions gave birth to the problem they must now face. How do they deal with the consequences, not only because of what they've done, but also because of that part of themselves that attracted such an insidious end?

THEME

A theme acts as the beating heart and unifying soul of the drama at hand. As a function of a passion play, the theme can spring from any sort of sin or virtue you can think of, but more properly, it plays out as a single sentence that embodies the drama as it emerges. It can be a statement ("Lusting after your neighbor's property is wrong"), or it can be a question. ("Is it a sin to defy a moral authority to help the more deserving?") That prompt doesn't have to provide an obvious answer or suggest a clear outcome. In fact, a good theme flows into the action without forcing which way the action will proceed.

Roleplaying game sessions, somewhat like stage plays, often depend more on character conflict than on plot. The theme surrounds the arena where these clashes

take place. Rather than a linear journey through a series of plot points, as in a movie or novel, a game session is more typically a jumble of encounters that are held together in a meaningful pattern by how they echo the theme, which provides the central question.

Whenever you are at a loss as to what should happen next in a drama, look to your theme for guidance. The following are some samples of themes and where they may take you:

- *The ends do not justify the means.* In a universe where miracles, alien powers, and high technology exist, it's very easy to allow those tools to fulfill a noble goal without fully examining the cost. How horrifying would it be to save the orphanage at the cost of annually feeding a young life to the alien entities protecting it?
- *The ends justify the means.* Inverting the previous theme, consider a story that provides a reason why the nobles, Church, and League share the Privilege of Martyrs doctrine — the ruling that allows them to wield high technology. They're required to take actions and make decisions for the greater good that put their souls at risk. Shirking that duty could result in social isolation or even temporary exile. Sometimes the troupe will need to activate a war golem to protect a town, even if the cost is being tasked to destroy it afterwards before it threatens the city.
- *Things are never as they seem.* The Known Worlds harbor many moral systems, sometimes contradictory and often conflicting. What code will the troupe adopt? What happens when they find their worst enemy has the same moral code? How will they react when they learn their most trusted ally is an apostate?

MIDDLE

The middle of the drama is the biggest part of the narrative, because it's the part where the players really come in. As each player gets to experience dealing with each other and you, there's an excellent chance the ideas will flow — and that can lead to the need for quick fixes when things go wrong.

Does the setting feel unfocused? Pull things back by making it local. Let's say a Charioteer decides to contact a Scraver acquaintance on Leagueheim to get a rundown on an Orthodox priest. Instead of handing off information, perhaps he's told to get in touch with the local guild officer, a grumpy customs official who's going to want some very special favors later.

Has the narrative become boring? Feel free to borrow an old writer's trick and spray the troupe down with bullets! Or if you like, unleash a psychic attack, a horde of crazed gannock, a barrage of nasty

messages, a mysterious invitation, or unsigned love letters from different unknown admirers. Up the stakes, and you can bet both you and the players will be re-energized.

Has the theme gotten lost? Use set pieces to enhance the mood. For a horrific bent, increase paranoia and uncertainty. That faint sound in the middle of the night *might* be a scream, but the local townsfolk are *begging* you not to check it out. Maybe your troupe finds a flier with a missing person's face on it; someone may notice a sigil being scrubbed off a wall by a washerwoman; perhaps the missing person's actual face can only be seen in the bottom of a well.

Romance and courtly intrigues can be built on suspicion and concern. Was that young lady hiding a sneer behind her fan or a smile of welcome? Did that young man in the corner tighten his fist around the hilt of his sword when he saw you? What are those two nobles in the shadows talking about, and why did they straighten up and nod deftly when you approached?

Discovery can be built on excitement: the thrill of a scavenged jumpkey engaging for the first time; the suspense concealed in a debris field that holds the answer to a lost Charioteer's last message; the sound of piece of technology humming to life for the first time in over a hundred years.

Details add to the verisimilitude of the drama.

THE PLOT TWIST

A plot twist introduces something unexpected, which often casts a wholly different light on a situation; it may even send the players down an unanticipated path.

Large plot twists can throw a new light on your story, revealing hidden foes or agendas, or they might illuminate unexpected information, raising the stakes dramatically. Small plot twists act as narrative fuel, conveying to the players that they're making real progress. Opportunities open new paths and reveal old secrets.

If you're considering a plot twist, "reversal of fortune" and "a door opens" are two of the standard ones. A "reversal of fortune" twist relies on opposition. An ally turns into an enemy. Perhaps the baron's daughter now hates the characters, or maybe a secure situation has become tenuous. "A door opens" involves a secret brought to light or a new factor being brought into play, like a Vuldrok raid descending on the city.

Each twist offers an opportunity for the characters to act, but it also places additional obstacles between the troupe and their goal. The energy they bring to play propels their characters forward as they sense that, since the status quo has been disrupted, they are moving closer to the endgame.

THE END

The end of a drama occurs when all the major questions finally get answers and the main issue is resolved. If all goes well, the story ends in a satisfactory way but not always in a positive one. Sometimes, characters have died or been crippled along the way. Allies are lost or connections are severed. There will be times when the characters lose. If the resolution was dramatic and satisfying, then even the darkest ending can leave players wanting to come back for more.

CLIMAX

Here's an interesting quirk: Players tend to act the most heroically if they believe that the end is approaching. The climax then presents itself as the most exciting part of the game. This is the moment when duels happen, when unbreakable oaths are broken, when the heavens weep and the bomb is primed to explode. Above all, the characters should be given a chance to be heroes. If that requires martyrdom, let it happen. If they need to spend every last victory point, keep them spending. If that last breath is needed to brave the vacuum of space to rescue a child, let them breathe it.

This is the moment most pregnant with the miraculous. Whenever players evoke the intercession of heaven by praying for a miracle, this is the best moment for such holy evocations. You're fully within your right as the GM to deny such requests until the climax has commenced.

The consequences come after; the climax is the time to shine. Actions have to make a difference. For this to happen, you'll need to keep an eye on another factor: time. You can't pull off your best scenes when you've only got five minutes of real time to complete them all. Make sure there's enough space in the schedule for the spotlight to shine on the heroes, showing them doing what they do best.

RESOLUTION

Just as the climax is the most exciting section, the resolution has to wrap it up. Whether the resolution is an award ceremony or a turn in front of an inquisitorial synod, the characters should have enough time to debrief and reflect on what happened. This also allows you to see how the players internally processed the game. They may have picked up on clues and discarded them or created unexpected connections that propelled them forward faster. Talking about the players' conclusions and speculation allows you to take notes, using this experience for better gaming sessions down the line.

The players can also use this time to wrap up any loose ends. Perhaps they wanted to talk to that young man on the docks, or maybe they wanted to make

sure that guild wagoner was rewarded for her loyalty. In downtime, they can make that happen. In return, they can experience the consequences of some of their own actions. Maybe they'll get temporarily censured by the local Orthodoxy or fined by an angry noble. Perhaps someone might try to smear their reputation or attempt to promote them as part of an agenda.

As the players tie up their own loose ends, you and the troupe have a chance to examine and discuss threads for later dramas. People who have heard of their deeds might want favors from the characters, or maybe that piece of technology they found spits out a map to where it was made, promising a whole new set of adventures. The local bishop might notice how moral the heroes were during their latest trials and decide to recruit them for a demon-hunting expedition.

Epics

An epic is a series of interlocked dramas, like different seasons in a television series. It has a beginning, middle, and end, but it still allows for a broader exploration of your theme, allowing for in-depth politics and potentially empire-wide intrigue.

Here's an in-universe conceit to consider. In **Fading Suns**, according to Orthodox teaching, a person doesn't just possess a substantive "soul"; they have a "soul mirror," which is imbued by and reflects the Light of celestial origin. A person who sins doesn't lose their soul or alter it in a meaningful way; they "tarnish" it. A fully tarnished soul is subject to the whims of the Dark.

The Orthodox position may seem like a divergent way of describing the "battle between good and evil," but it's actually quite significant. If you take the conceit to heart, then evil is primarily positional. Refusing good takes an active effort from you, or active efforts by others, to obscure it. This means at heart that no one is completely lost to damnation.

The point is that the connective tissue between dramas exhibits a continual, recognizable tension: actively pushing for redemption versus the tragic and deliberate rejection of the Light. You are caught between being connected and being alienated. Villains become dangerous through their ability to obscure the truth: They sever connections and push people with comforting lies into situations they never intended to experience. It also creates the complication of a character being *too* virtuous. If a player demands that their character only ever acts a certain way, how will that impact the NPCs, who may feel like they can never measure up? Many people are used to making small compromises – a fact that villains often exploit. If a character can't compromise, how does that reflect on others around them?

On the flip side, if people don't have paragons to look up to, then how will they ever improve themselves? Who will children look up to, and who will young adults aspire to be? Without ideals, the strategy of darkness is "death by a thousand shadows": compromising people little by little until they are far away from their original position. It all starts with "well, if your heroes compromised their word..."

So, which is it? Should you compromise and be seen as relatable? Or should you stand tall and be a hero on a pedestal? The answer depends on the drama, and it can change as the epic progresses. Sometimes the response will have to be both; sometimes it will lead to success in one's goals, but at a loss to one's standing. While these questions tend to be more muted in a single drama, they are definitely the kind of motif that can be thoroughly explored over the course of an epic.

You can play the cardinal sins off the tension between tragedy and redemption or the disparity between alien and human identity; you can play off the cardinal virtues just as easily. You can make the answers simple and clear, or you can make them hopelessly complicated. In the end, it all comes down to two questions: "how do we get along?" and "what are the consequences when we don't?" For example, you can show the bitter outcome of a fallen ally at the start of a drama; then over the course of the epic, you can walk a character right down that same path. Will *their* friends be able to stop them from experiencing the same fate? Will the tales of the character's deeds stand out as an inspiration or an object lesson for generations to come?

ALIENATION VERSUS CONNECTION

Light connects all things — that's how it allegedly goes — and the Dark conceals it. As a result, you can build dramas that weigh integrity versus disconnectedness. The drama can reach across houses — the pious nature of the Li-Halan against the practical realpolitik of the Decados — or sects — the burning idealism of the Avestites contrasted against the cosmic machinations of the Eskatonics. Can these ideals be connected to serve a greater whole? Or does their very nature set them eternally against each other? How does either side react when their opposing number makes a mistake?

Some aggressive sentient species worship grim and violent gods. What makes their aggression different from the militant Brother Battle or Hazat? Is there enough similarity in their martial philosophies to ultimately find common ground? What about species or worlds that revere higher technology? Do they benefit from a techgnosis unavailable to most humans? Or

has their species become horribly and irretrievably warped from their constant exposure to high technology? What about species like the ukar and obun whose exposure was *forced* by their Anunnaki masters? Are they redeemable after that level of interference?

TRAGEDY VERSUS REDEMPTION

People often focus on the happy ending of a story or the positive wrap-up of a saga, but there's real power in allowing a dramatic tragedy to take place. Part of the pleasure in gaming is going through experiences that you wouldn't dream of doing in normal life. The idea of soaring through the stars, fighting battles with sword and energy shield, and uncovering alien ruins all serve this agenda, but this ideal can also be channeled into deep emotional experiences.

Creating and maintaining real stakes over time makes a story worthwhile. You and the troupe will have to do some record-keeping, so the elements of the story that started out as set dressing can later be brought to the forefront to reinforce the stakes. That seneschal your troupe accidentally killed while fighting a corrupt lord? That's his daughter with a gang of Chainers, now looking for payback. The priest whose sermon the troupe interrupted? Now he's back and his sermon is directed right at them.

Resolutions that rely on tragedy or redemption reinforce how narratives play out well over the course of an epic. Relationships can be built and elaborated over the course of individual dramas. Just as importantly, you can examine what is important to the players, so that the journey can be customized to have dramatic weight.

WHEN TO END IT

Epics tend to play out as either iterative or unique. An *iterative* epic takes an idea that the players enjoy and sets up scenarios to run that idea forever. Perhaps they enjoy being the crew of a ship, going from planet to planet and finding ways to keep flying. Or maybe the setting is in one court on one planet, and the players are struggling to maintain their position on the throne. Either way, though their characters may go through different adventures, the epic will still exist within that framework. In serial storytelling like this, stories working through their beginning, middle, and end occur in one to two sessions, though the characters continue.

The strength of an iterative epic operates through the idea that you can give each of the characters time to breathe and grow. Do you have a Scraver in a mostly noble group? Maybe the next set of games can center around building his connections within the guild,

leveraging his connections for the benefit of the whole troupe. Next, maybe two of the nobles can reconcile some issues between their two houses, at least where those issues apply to them. As you might see, the prospect of letting each player have a moment in the spotlight is quite enticing. This approach can be more difficult to plan, though, since the epic can change directions according to the actions of the troupe.

Unique epics have an end goal in sight. Let's take the ideas above and make them unique. Consider this: Your troupe is acting as the crew of a ship because they're searching for a lost world foretold by an Anunnaki gargoyle. Or maybe they're in the middle of courtly drama to *gain* a throne. Of course, once they've achieved that goal, the epic has officially ended.

The power of a unique epic lies in the idea that you can add layers to the drama. Did you think that last session was about a rescue? Turns out the hostage was a lost heir. Was it about restoring the heir to power? That lost heir is possessed. Thought it was just about exorcising the doomed heir? Did you know that their family was in league with the cult that caused that possession?

Unfolding an epic in this manner also promotes a situation where you are rarely surprised. Instead, the reveal can be reasonably pushed back until the next episode, spooling off the next skein of threads in a conspiracy the players need to unravel. One word of warning, though: Make sure you take down plenty of notes. You'll diminish some of the fun if, ten games in, the players remember an item of significance that you don't, and that can derail the current session being played.

As gamemaster, your responsibility is to populate the epic with adventures that seem to align with your players' wants; if you can anticipate that, when there is an end, you can provide a satisfactory one.

Dramaturgy

Getting a game together might be simple, but no one ever said it would be easy.

That's why we've compiled a few axioms and suggestions, so we can ease your next encounter with the tempestuous ocean of narrative.

Axiom 1:

We're all in this together

As the gamemaster, you need to encourage a level of cooperation and communication among the players at the very beginning. It's not uncommon for there to be small lulls when one or more players are not directly involved in the action; it's quite common for people

to want to pull back and engage elsewhere. However, roleplaying is not a passive medium. **Fading Sun** games orbit around the idea of the troupe, and even solo scenes are an important part of that larger dynamic. They're important moments that weave their impact into the whole troupe's destiny.

Hence, the players have a responsibility to stay involved, even when they're not in the spotlight. Sometimes, they just listen to the current scene or take notes as an aid to remembering it later. Sometimes, a player can add suggestions or even complications to the scene. Or maybe they might refresh the snacks or drinks, so other people don't have to think about it. Everybody's in this together.

The gamemaster also bears this responsibility. Early in the game, involve the players in laying the groundwork, so there's a shared interest and responsibility for

the game's ongoing success. Ask questions of them: What kind of themes would they like to explore, and what are their characters' initial relationship to those themes? Are they sinners on the path to redemption or saints being tempted by a corrupt and unseemly world? Are their characters the focus of their chosen theme, or are they initially just agents of change? Will their adventures be down-to-earth tales, or will they expand out, becoming epic in scope, designed to ultimately shake the heavens and upset the foundations of the empire itself?

Axiom 2:

We're here to have fun

Roleplaying, at its heart, is about a group of people getting together to have fun. That means, in practice, that while it might *seem* fun to create a character who is exactly the opposite of what everybody wants or needs, it's often destructive to the group dynamic as a whole. It can lead to a group just waiting around until the character dies... or the player takes a hint and creates a different character.

You can avoid this by ample application of the first axiom: "We're all in this together." But let's say the game starts, and it's obvious that at least one character is not going to fit into the narrative. There are a few options to fix this situation quickly. The most disruptive way is to retcon the situation — basically, pretend none of it, whatever it is, ever happened, and a new character has been there all along. If you want to avoid that, you could allow characters to alter a few traits to better reflect the growing dynamic and the story; this fits in under the "we're getting to know each other" mentality; this works especially well if the concept of the group is that they've just met. Less obvious, but more dramatic, is the "tearful conversion" solution, where the character admits that they *were* that kind of disruptive force, but they're trying to change. The player then commits to playing the character through the in-game change. It's a harder route, but dramatically, it can be very satisfying to participate in.

The same rules that apply to the characters apply to the gamemaster. If, even after the initial discussions about the game, the theme and the settings don't seem to be working, open the conversation up again. Rather than retconning, you can flash forward to a new setting or open up an opportunity for characters to change their circumstances immediately. Maybe you can explain that it *is* all part of a sinister plan; the pressure the players feel may be transferred back to their characters as suspense.

A WORD OF ADVICE: TROUPE FRACTURING

It happens: Players sometimes fight over what they want to do. In some cases, it may come down to "bleed": players either take emotions from outside the game into the game or take emotions from within the game outside of it. That requires a check-in with the player, giving them time and self-awareness to regain their composure. One of the reasons for declaring a troupe leader is to control this type of friction better, but that's an in-game thing; players aren't beholden to it.

Sometimes it boils down to an unequal matter of attention: one or more players might feel neglected. You can overcome this by keeping an eye on players who seem to be withdrawing during play. While a character may not be highlighted every game, it's wise to make sure that, over time, everyone gets their time in the spotlight, portraying their role within the troupe.

If the members of the troupe do decide to go separate directions, though, that thrusts the situation into your hands. As soon as possible, you should endeavor to unite them again, using sudden plot twists, unexpected arrivals ("Aunt Chao! Mistress of Manners for Duke Wei Lu! What are you doing here?"), and common enemies.

But...

Some degree of infighting is good spice. And good spice makes for a good meal. Conflict is drama. Just make sure to remind yourself and your players that, by the end of the day, you're all there for a good time.

Taking a peek behind the scenes for a moment, you should never feel bound by the rules if they're getting in the way of fun. The universe, once it comes off the pages and into the hands of the group, is yours. If a trait needs to change or a rule needs to be tweaked, do it. The rules were set up and designed as a framework for arbitration — "I succeeded!" "No, you didn't!" — not as a straitjacket to hamper play. If you do want to make changes, also remember there are communities online that may have rules fixes already in place, as well as their own shared experiences that could help you through the problem.

Axiom 3: Fun walks hand in hand with meaningful stories

A grand story is great, but how do you make it personal? How do you make it feel alive? The most obvious route is to draw in the characters with subplots, stories that are meaningful to them as individuals that may or may not be tied to the main story.

So how do you come up with those?

Here's a secret that writers use when they need to get creative, a well they draw from that produces a delightful array of tales: that source is the people around you. Take a look at any two characters. Do they have something similar in their experiences? What about their background? What about their traits? Do they have experiences, backgrounds, or traits that are diametrically opposed to one of their peers? Does one have a serious flaw and the other the opposing gift? Do their factions have issues with each other? Build a scenario that tugs on both of their threads. For instance, if you want both characters to feel compassion for a kidnapped little girl, you don't need both of them to know her personally.

The more experiences your characters have, the more threads you have as a gamemaster to play with. But here's the important bit: It's not a sin to tell your players you're going to do this. Let them glimpse behind the curtain before they get swept into the narrative. Let them suggest plot threads to each other. ("Oh, I could never do that." "But I could!") Give them the gift of being allowed to reject a plot. Remember the axiom of fun, but also remember that dramas are meant to be challenging.

On the gamemastering side, here's a word of caution: Don't let things slide into an endless discussion of "we could do this!" Choose up to three subplots from any combination of characters you like and run with them. You don't have to let the players know which ones you're going after. Just start it all up and let it go.

You've probably noticed that the advice above seems centered on only two players, but there are ways to spin that up and out of control. You could try to find links between everyone or pair up people. Most commonly, one or two characters, by their nature, tend to draw in the most connections. Consider, for a moment, a Charioteer pilot. It's only natural for them to have a connection to the people who bought and paid for their ship or the travelers who use it on a regular basis.

As the gamemaster, you can take a look at those central characters and weave in connections to other characters. Consider our kidnapping example: Two of the characters feel a moral obligation to help. The child is one character's cousin, and the other remembers his ordeal when he was a child, stolen by a nomadic clan. You can suggest to another noble the situation is personally relevant because of *noblesse oblige*: The child is a serf and the nobility has a responsibility to her. A guild member might see a profit in stopping an activity that's more rightly the purview of the Muster. A Church member might see the darkness associated with a child in peril and lend their assistance.

Axiom 4: The journey is the key

How do you create a successful story for a game? Every story in existence includes a complication to resolve and a series of steps to overcome it. Complications can apply to any type of story, whether that's winning a war over a piece of territory, unraveling the purpose of a piece of Anunnaki technology, or concluding an epic romance. Complications might involve facing direct conflict, unraveling an enigma, or gathering the resources needed to complete a mission.

However, if you make those steps too simple, it's less of a story and more like a poem.

*Lord Vladimir,
A crown he claimed,
To fire he was consigned.*

Your task as gamemaster is devising those steps between the place the players start and the destination where they will end up. Test those steps, and then adjust them for difficulty. It's also your responsibility to quickly come up with new steps if the players suddenly decide to solve the issue in a unique and meaningful way.

Here are some important aspects to keep in mind as you develop your concept:

- What is the primary complication?
- What is the scope of the drama needed to resolve the complication?
- How do the characters fit into the situation?

If you can successfully address each question, you'll have a solid foundation for everything that comes after.

When assessing your primary complication, **Fading Suns** harbors a multitude of ready-made issues to choose from. The three most powerful factions — the noble houses, the Church, and the Merchant League — constantly seek ways to expand their influence. Internal issues run rampant: Hawkwoods vie against Decados, Eskatronics barely avoid persecution by Avestites, and Reeves contend with Scravers for precious resources. Then there are the goals of individuals struggling to climb higher on the socio-political ladder.

Determining the scope of the drama entails assessing the primary groups involved. Are all three factions to be used, or will the plot focus on only one? What planets are involved, and will you need space travel? By taking the time to analyze the issue's parameters, you can avoid confusing yourself and the players with a mess of miscellaneous tidbits that have nothing to do with your story.

Given the hierarchical structure of 51st-century society, an epic's beginning can be initiated, if desired, by overtly linking the troupe to a specific faction. An example of this would be a noble sent on a mission alongside her confessor, a pilot, and an alien. An intense political drama is a good venue for a lead noble character. A guild member could lead the troupe towards more military or action-based stories. For emotional or social dramas, a Church-oriented character in a troupe offers an excellent opportunity to drag their less-spiritual companions into the adventure.

Axiom 5: Problems are a chance to move forward

Gamemasters must endure playing the role of the reactionary. This means the threads of the ongoing narrative may appear to veer off course, and players may come up with ideas that are, to put it bluntly, a bit odd. If you understand the setting and themes you and the troupe began with, and if you have good communication with your group, many of these issues will be easy to resolve. Unfortunately, not every contingency can be covered. When in this kind of situation, take a few more points into consideration.

Does the request affect the outcome of the primary goal? Some requests might touch right onto the heart of what the game is all about, and a poor choice on your part as gamemaster can find the drama prematurely short-circuited. Consider the request carefully. Who else is affected? How far into the story does the request come? The later it is in the narrative, and the

less players are affected, the more likely you might be to grant the player's wish. If not, you can always use time as a weapon. Maybe what's needed to move the request forward can only come from another world; maybe the request means a crafter will need time to build something; perhaps the fees and/or bribes needed to deliver it are prohibitive. If the player is in a hurry, they'll likely find another way. If the player feels it's important enough to wait for, they'll make the time for their plans to come to fruition.

How creative is the request? The backbone of role-playing is creativity; roleplayers, as a whole, enjoy putting ideas into the game. You can invite these submissions openly around the table or covertly through notes. Make sure your players understand that all suggestions will be taken under advisement, but some might only occur if the theme permits. Sometimes, you have to hold on to rationales behind the scenes that the players are not aware of. In every case, at the end of a game session, give full credit to the people who gave suggestions. If you or the players choose to keep all the suggestions covert, you may not be able to tell people exactly what those suggestions were, but this praise goes towards fostering a cooperative atmosphere.

Inspiration

Where do you get your ideas? From the Pancreator, of course. But really, we all need wellsprings of inspiration when coming up with ideas. Here's some advice:

Look up the plots of the top 10 novels, movies, or other story media in the genre you're working in. Think about how your player characters might react in that same situation. Who would they call if they ran into a ghost in the Central Library on Leagueheim? Could that old hermit in the deserts of Istakhr actually have knowledge of an abandoned Second Republic weapon that's the size of a small moon?

Dive into history from cultures across the world, especially history that's written from an outsider's perspective. They say history is written by the victors, but there's inspiration to be found in books written by those almost forgotten by history. This can give you unique storylines to spring on PCs, who may think they know the story from "real" history books in school.

Don't discard cryptohistory. All the mad theories and crazy conspiracies in the modern world can serve as tons of great fodder for a **Fading Suns** epic.

Then there are fairy tales and myths. They're great starting points for adventures. The troupe, outfitted in the red hood and cloaks of the local Scravers, must avoid the bandit gang known as the Shadow Wolves, while trying to deliver a shipment of needed supplies to the grand matriarch of an Amalthean monastery....

Most importantly, though? Take the potential sources listed above and discuss them with your players. What are *their* favorite novels and movies? What kind of specific historical knowledge do they possess? What conspiracies or mythologies do they love? What makes you and them laugh or cry or hurt inside? What are your players willing to *search* for to bring to you, so you can weave stories for them?

In the end, the greatest and most meaningful inspiration comes from the people around you and the passions all of you bring to the game.

Astro-Divinity Cards

During the early Second Republic, a short-lived fad saw the use of old Urth tarot cards reconstituted with early Church imagery. Although the popular appeal lasted only a few years, the cards continued to be used by traveling Children of Zuran (a pagan sect) for the reading of fortunes. The Church frowned upon the use of these “astro-divinity cards” for many centuries, condemning them as a folly of “folk saint cults.”

During the Emperor Wars, the “casting of cards” saw a resurgence on the Stigmata Front, although nobody can seem to trace just where the practice started or by whom. As soldiers mustered back into civilian life, their cards came with them, serving as superstitious luck wards.

Then against all expectations, Empress Freya revealed a deck at the imperial court. Apparently, divinity decks were well-known on Hargard. Raiders claimed a pack as booty centuries ago in a forgotten raid into the Known Worlds. The Vuldrok used them as a game, misunderstanding the imagery. Of course, the empress’s cards became all the rage. Every noble court now had to have a card-caster, and every merchant had to have a variety of decks to sell, appealing to different tastes and wallets.

Patriarch Palamon, unwilling to embarrass the new empress by condemning the cards, instead issued instructions on their proper interpretation, calling upon the aid of Magister Moore of the Eskatonic Order. Although these “instructions” dismiss the cards’ ability to divine fortunes, they admit their value as teaching tools. Each card provides the person who draws it with a spiritual topic for study and prayer.

The cards, however, have taken on a life of their own. They’re becoming popular among pilgrims, who use them to divine each step of their journeys. This has given Zuranists a new popularity: Everyone knows they kept the “secret” of reading the cards when everybody else had forgotten them. (Many Zuranists also forgot them, but they now pretend they’re heirs to centuries of family secrets of card reading.)

The most common decks use the following images:

Card #	Image (and meaning)
0	Hombor the Beggar — freedom, chance, happenstance, generosity
1	The Prophet Zebulon — guidance, the right path, perfection
2	Amalthea the Healer — selflessness, blessings, fellowship
3	Ven Lohji the Mystic — mental discipline, insight
4	Emperor Alexius (older cards depict Lextius the Knight) — right rule, stability
5	Horace the Learned Man — wisdom, knowledge, doctrinal accuracy
6	Cardano and Amorita (some newer cards depict Emperor Alexius and Empress Freya) — oathmaking, accord, love
7	Paulus the Traveler (or his ship, the <i>Emissary</i>) — travel, taming technology, optimism
8	Maya the Scorned Woman — justice, breaking bonds, revenge
9	Lextius the Knight in Exile (older cards depict The Hesychast) — hermitage, noble pariah, hidden glory
10	The Merchant League (older cards depict a “breaking” or “Catherine” wheel) — luck, fortune, misfortune
11	Mantius the Soldier — strength, power, courage
12	Vladimir Aflame (older cards depict The Psychic) — sacrifice, hardship
13	The Vau (some newer cards depict The Symbiot) — death, secrets, transformation
14	The Universal Church of the Celestial Sun — balance, protection, unity, temperance
15	The Antinomist — the Dark, the occult
16	Second Republic — hubris, technology
17	The Jumpgate — hope, escape, ecstasy
18	The Anunnaki — mystery, illusion
19	The Fading Sun (some depict the Reborn Sun, while newer cards depict Princess Aurora) — revelation, light, grace, virtue
20	The Empyrean Angel — judgment, right order, eternity
21	The Pancreator (Zuranist cards sometimes depict the Pancreator as Gjarti, the World Mother; sanitized Church versions depict an “Eye of God” nebula) — fulfillment, the living universe, the Soul Above Souls

CASTING THE CARDS

When using the cards for an oracle, casters employ many different card layouts, but the most common one has been used by Zuranist card-casters for centuries: Trio Fortuna, a three-card spread. Each card is a snapshot of the moment read for. If you read the cards daily, they represent the coming day; read weekly, they represent the coming week; and so on.

From left to right, the cards represent: your worldly life (“the dust that is upon you”), immediate spiritual influences (“the eyes that look down on you”), and what is to come (“the other side of the door”).

Your worldly life is a snapshot of your immediate worldly or material situation or influences. It’s your waking life with all its mundane tasks and troubles. Spiritual influences represent the plans pressing from on high, the invisible threads of fate that pull you toward your destiny (in this moment). What is to come is a hint at your future, should the twin forces of worldly matters and spiritual matters align or clash as depicted in the cards. You can change or alter this future by working for or against the first two cards.

USING THE CARDS AS A GAME TOOL

You can use the major arcana cards from just about any classic tarot deck.

At the beginning of an act, shuffle the divinity deck. You can do a Trio Fortuna reading, as above, or an Uno Fortuna: draw a single card (or you can have the troupe leader or their designated card-caster do this). The card reveals the pattern that Fate intends for the act. It won’t necessarily come to pass, but it symbolizes the challenges the act will pose, not necessarily in a literal sense but in a figurative or metaphorical one.

You can use this a guide for bending the plot or even awarding WP when the troupe’s choices in some way aid or foil the card(s) that Fate has chosen.



EXAMPLES: IN-GAME

When the common folk quietly visit the caravans of the Children of Zuran to consult a card-caster, these are some of the questions they typically ask and the answers that the caster provides, based on the cards drawn.

QUESTION #1

A merchant asks: “How will market day go for me?”

Result: The first card (worldly) is Zebulon the Prophet. “You are in the right, asking honest and fair prices for your goods, but you will suffer adversity. Others will try to impoverish you with their haggling. Persevere.”

The second card (spiritual) is Mantius the Soldier: “You have hidden wells of strength to draw upon when facing adversity. Do not be swayed. Stick to your original prices.”

The third card (the outcome) is Amalthea the Healer: “Adversity leads to peace, as each side becomes satisfied with the outcome.”

QUESTION #2

A serf asks: “Will my pilgrimage to the well of Saint Yym on Rampart save my crops?”

Result: The first card (worldly) is the Church. “Your journey is done for all the right reasons but perhaps from too much impatience.”

The second card (spiritual) is the Vau. “Fate does not favor your journey.”

The third card (the outcome) is Vladimir Aflame. “Your pilgrimage will not save the crops and will only damn the land to future failure. Stay home, pray, and wait. The Church provides sustenance, even when the land fails.”

EXAMPLES: META-GAME**QUESTION #1**

You might decide to use the random draw of the cards to guide your evening’s drama. The question is: “What is tonight’s game about?”

Result: The first card (worldly) is Vladimir Aflame. This means trouble, adversity, setbacks, and downfalls. In other words, the players should be faced with challenges beyond their ability to easily handle.

The second card (spiritual) is the Jumpgate. When reading from a meta-game level, the spiritual card speaks to the theme behind your drama. This card means transcendence, escape, yearning. In this case, it probably refers to the troupe’s goal, hinting that the way to achieve it is by rising above the situation and reaching for something higher, whether that’s through keeping their better angels in mind or refusing to take the low road (crime, deceit, ignoble acts).

The third card (the outcome) is the Pancreator. This is the most auspicious card in the deck. It tells you that all the challenges you put the players through lead to supreme victory, if they heed the higher calling. You might consider giving out a big reward, not necessarily material (tech) but rather something to mark the troupe’s rising to a higher level, whether socially, politically, or even in actual class level.

Thus, the answer to the question is: The troupe must walk a righteous path to defeat a more powerful enemy. In light of this, you should freely award WP when the troupe makes noble choices, especially when the easier option is to go low.

QUESTION #2

You can use the card to plot out your next drama: “What happens to the troupe?”

Result: The first card (worldly) is Hombor the Beggar. This means something random or unexpected. You might just follow the troupe’s lead and see where they take you.

The second card (spiritual) is Paulus the Traveler. This means the unexpected event opens new vistas and reveals new ideas (possibly even new technologies). Remember, this is the thematic card, not the literal card; it doesn’t necessarily mean space travel.

The third card (the outcome) is the Vau. Something sinister that was hidden is revealed: Has one of the character’s rivals returned? Does the troupe’s unexpected adventure uncover an alien or occult plot?

Taking the cards into consideration, your answer might be: An artifact (Ur or perhaps vau) is accidentally uncovered and activated by the troupe. It is up to them to tame the chaos it creates.

CHANCE DECKS

Some decks, mainly the Zuranists divination decks and the Vuldrok game-of-chance decks, use additional suits of cards, totaling up to 56: four suits, each with 10 sequentially numbered cards and four “royalty” or “hero” cards.

SUITS

Staves/Maces: Status, industry. Also: enlightenment, intuition (associated with Saint Horace and the Miracle of the Club: the staff smashes ignorance).

Swords: Force, of both arms and will. Also: reason, the well-honed mind.

Grails/Horns: Conviviality, fellowship, celebration, healing.

Coins/Shields: Wealth, protection, status quo, the good earth.

ROYAL CARDS

The Zuranist “royalty” cards vary from deck to deck, depicting various historical figures who are considered divine saints in Zuranity. The Vuldrok decks depict archetypal figures rather than actual persons.

Squire/Trader: A young person just beginning their career (apprentice) or (in Vuldrok cards) a wily merchant or lawyer who gets by on their wits and honeyed tongue rather than skill at arms

Knight/Thane: A skilled person capable and noted in their career

Lord/Warlord: A leader; not a tyrant, but a meritorious king/queen

Lady/Runecaster: A wise counselor, priest, or conduit to the invisible world

Signs and Wonders

Your players' adventures follow the concept of a passion play: a saga of spiritual struggles wherein all events and encounters stand as symbolic tests, inspiring and informing later generations who hear them recounted over and over. Like medieval plays, stories in **Fading Suns** are rife with miracles and mysteries. While the exacting details of daily life are important for evoking time and place, beneath them lurk the eternal mysteries and the wonder of Creation, ever ready to burst to the forefront.

Fading Suns is science fiction, but it's science fiction full of the wondrous and strange. The universe shines with divinity, and the will of heaven erupts into even the most mundane moments. Or are these the unfathomable workings of ancient Anunnaki technology? Or are we seeing astonishing works of Second Republic science, now forgotten and so poorly understood as to be mistaken for divine magic? Or is this miracle the divine working through the forces of super-science? Most likely, it's all of the above. You, as the GM, stand as the representative for this divine will, this unfathomable circumstance, this strange power that both shepherds and destroys.

It is important that this force, this spiritual power, should never become predictable in timing or effect — it can't be foreseen, and it can't be strategized. It is the epitome of the unexpected deliverance, the bolt from the blue, the inexplicable victory or defeat.

But it rarely operates as a force unto itself. It most often comes in the form of signs and visions, sudden jolts of warning, censure, or enlightenment, delivered unto the powerful and the weak alike in moments where the balance of events can be shifted by the choices its beneficiaries make — by *their* agency, not its own. It might take the form of sudden conversions,

insights, or good or bad luck, but at the eye of the storm is a person — a player character — who must act in light of the divine revelation.

So how in the world do you run such a force in your game? Alas, there are no easy rules. While we provide a loose system for players to pray for — and get — a miracle (see *Miracles* in **Chapter 5: The Occult** in the **Character Book**), that's not the beginning and end of supernatural matters in your game. The sense that the divine — or a super-science so advanced it might as well be divine — can appear at any time should be pervasive and beyond any set of simple rules and limitations. You simply have to learn the balance for yourself.

Don't feel you always have to use this mystery. Use it sparingly when you do and make it... mostly... unpredictable. Sometimes special moments arise in game sessions when everybody knows that a touch of the divine is called for. Actually getting it won't ruin the game; instead, it serves to enhance it. Listen to your players; they're the best bellwether for when such a moment is at hand.

If you're unsteady here and just don't know when to pull the trigger on some form of divine intervention, leave it to fate: Make a die roll. If the result is a "1", then unleash the forces of heaven (or hell).

Another method involves the "divinity deck" (see *Astro-Divinity Cards*, detailed above). Use a standard tarot deck with 78 cards (divided into 22 major arcana and 56 minor arcana). Shuffle the deck and draw a card randomly. If it's one of the major arcana, use that card's theme — as described in the divinity cards chart — to inform a miraculous occurrence. For example, if it's the Saint Mantius card, reinforcements arrive. If it's the Saint Horace card, a particular Church scripture or teaching provides a crucial clue or holds the resolution to a conflict.



INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

CHAPTER 2: PEOPLE



SAINT HADARA THE MIRACULOUS

Hail Hadara, holiest of us all. Pilgrim, it is to Hadara we pray when we seek miracles. She was Matriarch of the Church in her day but refused to stay cloistered in Holy Terra's cathedrals. She traveled the Known Worlds instead, healing and helping however she could. She even reached barbarian space, where a dim memory of her survives among the Vuldrok as Hadra Hearthmother. Her reign brought a period of peace, and she still brings about the cessation of conflicts and peace between rivals when her name is invoked.

She performed many miraculous healings during her life and was sainted immediately after her death. Of late, even more miracles are attributed to her. She is believed to be the patroness of the Pax Alexius, aiding the emperor from the Empyrean and guarding against war.

She bears the Fishhook of Deliverance, a simple item from her homeworld of Madoc said to convert all who touch it. She is depicted with one foot in the crashing waves of a Madoc beach and the other among the stars, standing with an Ur menhir behind her, which serves as a reminder of her place of martyrdom on Bannockburn amidst the Ur ruins. She is said to open and protect the portals between this world and the dimensions of the Anunnaki.

— Charioteer Captain Zelina Hamid-Sandor, *The Pilgrim's Path: How to Read the Omega Gospels*

As a gamemaster, you'll populate your dramas with many different characters. Some will be more powerful than the players' characters, and some will be weaker. Not all of them need the same attention to detail that PCs get. Any single NPC will rarely be on stage as long as a PC; you only need to know enough to play their part once they enter stage left.

NPC Types

Fading Suns provides a rich setting for a player-character troupe to experience, but it's their interactions with NPCs that make the place come alive. Because of this, it's good to take a moment to develop some interesting people to meet along the way.

To make it easy for you, we put NPCs into three types: Headliners, Agents, and Extras. Each type has a greater or lesser degree of streamlined traits. Most NPCs don't just need the full kit of traits that PCs do; they spend most of their lives off-stage, waiting for those few hours in which to tramp the boards after they meet the PC troupe.

These types illustrate the role an NPC plays when they enter play, but they aren't restrictive of their power and prestige. A prince or duke might show up as an Agent rather than a Headliner, because their role might be to grant a short audience with the troupe rather than an in-depth series of encounters, while a peasant bandit who just keeps foiling the troupe's plans could be a Headliner.

Headliners

These people are important, fully-fleshed out NPCs, almost akin to players. They can be allies or antagonists to the PCs, or they might be neutral parties who can be pushed either way by the PC's action. In all cases, though, they'll pose some challenge to the PCs, either as friends in need of rescue, patrons demanding their services, or the angels-on-their-shoulders reminding the troupe of their moral duties.

Headliners can also be alien creatures or technological beings, such as golems.

TRAITS

Headliners have the same traits that PCs do.

ROLEPLAYING HEADLINERS

A Headliner's dramatic function is to highlight one or more of the PC's particular qualities. They might be someone who enjoys the PCs' cause and helps them out, or they could be a significant obstacle to overcome, acting as the primary foil of the drama.

Most significant Headliners the PCs run across will not consider themselves villains; even if they do, they'll have a reasonable excuse for what they do. Villains who are morally the opposite of the PCs are the easiest to create, but they tend to be shallow unless they have a reason why they pursue the opposite goal. For instance, the troupe might be tasked to shut down an obscene machine that drains people's life force to

operate, but the Third Republicans operating it have been using it to relieve a local famine, sacrificing corrupt authorities to power it.

It's equally interesting when villains have the same goal as the characters but radically different means of going about it. Perhaps, under different circumstances, they could well have become friends with the PCs. Perhaps, in a longer drama, they did start out as friends.

Headliners will use situations to place themselves into positions of power that somehow wind up landing the PCs into a weaker position. If they are socially strong, they will try and pull things into a noble setting, where courtiers hold sway. Intellectually strong headliners may prefer a trial in an ecclesiastical or legal court. Extras in these cases can consist of lesser nobles and sycophants; in a court, they're members of a jury. Agents coming to the Headliner's aid can be professional courtiers, barristers, or people with ecclesiastical authority.

Even if the situation turns against them, a Headliner will have at least one "out." The sacrifice of Extras and Agents is certainly a standard first line of defense. There might be a hidden ship locked in a local tower, or the "out" might be a disaster set up elsewhere, orchestrated to pull the protagonists away from the main fight.

NPC CARD TEMPLATE: HEADLINER

Use the card template at the end of this book as a character sheet for your headliner NPCs.

EXAMPLE HEADLINER

CANON XIMENES MOROST

Headliner • Priest 3 • Orthodox • Mendicant/Pirate

"I have seen many things, my friend, but I have never seen *that* before."

Description: As a small boy, Ximenes dreamed of one day traveling the stars. He got his wish when his village was burned down. Along with the other survivors, he found himself on a Chainer starship, sent off to a distant slave market for sale. He spent years as a servant for a merchant family of minor means in the rural provinces of Cadavus. When they were killed by bandits, Ximenes limped to the local monastery and begged for sanctuary. He spent the next years learning to be a priest. When he received his ordination, he set forth to follow his original dream. He has tramped across the Known Worlds for the last year, strangely managing to keep his optimism intact...

... or so the official story goes. That's what most people who meet him believe. In fact, he betrayed his merchant family owners to the bandits; in return, he earned a place in their gang of ex-military thugs. At the behest of the gang's leader, he infiltrated the priesthood, all so he could act as a trusted advance scout for his unsavory partners in crime. No one has yet realized that wherever this priest goes, bandits soon follow... or at least, no survivors have remained to prove it.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	4	Pre	7
Dex	4	Per	5	Int	5
End	3	Will	7	Faith	8

Skills:

Charm	8
Drive	4
Fight	7
Focus	7
Knavery	7
Observe	7
Perform	7
Sneak	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Befriend</i>	15	Target is Befriended.
<i>Deceive</i>	14	Target is Deceived.
<i>Shake it off</i>	10 14 15	Removes a state.
<i>Fist strike</i>	10	2 dmg

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral, Streetwise), Knowledge (Jumpweb, Orthodoxy), Melee Weapons (Military), Performing Arts (Oratory), Speak/Read Urthish, Transport (Beastback, Beastcraft)

Perks: Church Ordination (Canon), Fencing, Inspiring, Righteous Sermon

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 26

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 1

Equipment: Heavy robes (armor), tracker (TL5 GPS device)

Agents

Agents are accomplished NPCs with a unique skill set that makes them effective. They aren't as detailed as Headliners, but they still have a significant degree of agency. They could be a deputy or aide to a Headliner, and their goals are usually in line with that leader. Examples of Agents include: the Muster soldier overseeing the town guard, the fourth son of the local noble who is a true believer in whatever cause pays the most, or the town priest hiding a dark secret or two to generate some needed cash.

TRAITS

Like Headliners, Agents are rated by level. They get most of the same traits as Headliners, except:

- Agents don't have VP banks. Instead, they can rely on their surges for an occasional burst of VP, just like PCs.
- An Agent's Vitality is 5 + Size + level. (For average-sized humans, this means 10 + level; vorox are 12 + level.)
- Agents don't get Revivals.
- An Agent might have a few perks, if you think they need them.

ROLEPLAYING AGENTS

Agents are, in temperament, similar to many PCs. They're often someone just outside the social norm: an intelligent peasant operating way outside their station, a defrocked priest, or a disinherited noble. They may even exhibit loyalty to their employer similar to an Extra. This loyalty, however, is only a medium of exchange for them. If the situation drastically changes, they will change with it to serve their own best interest. The best Agents may not be alone; they may have a troupe of their own as backup, not directly hired by their employer, but on call in case things really go wrong for them.

Agents rely on a unique tool-set that makes their services desirable. This may also make them important to the PCs as well under certain circumstances. And since an Agent often relies on negotiation, perhaps they can be wooed away from their current contract... or maybe not, since the Agent might rely on their integrity to keep their freedom. This means, in any practical sense, if an Agent has been contracted to kill a character, they might take on the goal that character hires them for — but still kill the character anyway to keep their word.

Agents can also serve as unique reoccurring characters. They can reappear from drama to drama, maybe eventually becoming Headliners.

NPC CARD TEMPLATE: AGENT

Use the card template at the end of this book as a character sheet for your agent NPCs.

EXAMPLE AGENT

GOLDIE

Agent • Yeoman 5 • Independent • Pirate

"Please, good citizen, grant us the charity of all your possessions... including that tiny slug gun I see in your pants. Careful handing that one over..."

Description: Goldie is the current captain of a loose group of bandits. Like her, they're all mustered-out former conscripts of the Decados, veterans of many nasty battles on Cadavus. Without their soldiers' pay, they've fallen to organized banditry to make ends meet. Canon Ximenes Morost (above) is their advance scout, sussing out victims for their assaults. While Goldie technically outranks him, in reality she mostly does whatever Morost recommends.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	4	Pre	7
Dex	4	Per	4	Int	3
End	5	Will	5	Faith	4

Skills:

Fight	5
Impress	6
Melee	7
Shoot	6
Vigor	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Daunt</i>	13	Target is Daunted.
<i>Fist strike</i>	11	2 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 8 7	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot blaster</i>	10	7 dmg

Resistance: Body 4 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 12 | number: 2

Equipment: Blaster pistol (3 fusion cells), knife, synthsilk jumpsuit, 5 firebirds

Extras

Extras represent NPCs with a very simple or singular skill set. These guys tend to be part of a crowd or group, and their name usually describes what they are: guardsman, thug, peasant rioter, etc.

TRAITS

Only their most relevant traits need to be created, and their templates can be easily re-used. They don't need a class or level, and they only have the traits they need to perform their function. Who they are and who they serve should be part of their name: Decados Thugs, Amalthean Healers, etc. They also usually don't have perks, unless one or two would help to make them a better foil for the PC troupe.

- Extras don't have banks or surges; they just use the VP they generate from rolls for their caches.
- An Extra's Vitality is 5 + Size. (For average-sized humans, this is 10.)
- Extras don't use the *shake it off* maneuver. If they're put into a state, it lasts for its persistence.

ROLEPLAYING EXTRAS

By their nature, Extras occupy the position of interchangeable parts in an Agent or Headliner's hierarchy. They may play a fairly important part — starship pilot, assassin, line chef — but if they die, they will be replaced by the next in line. For many except the densest of Extras, they know this. Some will take security in being a member of the faceless masses; others will find it as an excuse to get away with things when their master isn't watching.

A lot has been written on the loyalty of servants and henchmen. Often, this is considered to be their sole defining attribute other than their job. Loyalty can be complicated, though. You can have *earned loyalty*, which occurs when the leader is seen to be a benevolent force in the Extra's life. But you can also have *forced loyalty*, which means that disappointing the leader comes at a cost. It's not entirely unusual to see a combination of the two.

Extras who experience earned loyalty are difficult for the troupe to break. The Extras have an emotional investment with their master's well-being and will fight, often more than they should, to protect them. That situation doesn't necessarily get any easier with forced loyalty, though. PCs who have to confront it can be put up against a moral dilemma. The villain may be holding the Extras' family hostage or be threatening something of vital importance to the Extras. On some worlds, in some places, it's hard to even survive without certain functioning technology — a master who has their finger on the terraformer's "off switch" would exert a powerful influence on the people living in that area.

Both of these circumstances moderate how Extras will perform. At the beginning of any conflict, typical Extras will work to fulfill their jobs to the best of their ability. They'll show off to maintain their position, or even better it, if possible. However, when things get real, that's when they start balancing things. They

will start relying more on what the other Extras around them are doing. They will weigh their deaths against their task.

This is when they're at their most dangerous. A panicked Extra may not seem like a threat, but they're working on two competing mandates: they don't want to get caught or killed by the PCs, but they don't want to be seen by their bosses as compromising their loyalty. This is when the lab scientist Extra releases every animal and toxin in the lab, hoping to buy enough time to get away. This is when the foot soldier Extra blows the local power grid, ending up on the right side of the collapsed wall and not caring that he just buried his friends, so long as there's a chance the troupe was delayed.

Dealing with Extras after a conflict may be difficult as well, since surviving Extras will likely end up with their families or nearby acquaintances. It's guaranteed they'll have a very different tale to tell about the heroes' adventure, and this might lead to clashes with the authorities down the line.

NPC CARD TEMPLATE: EXTRAS

Use the card template at the end of this book as a character sheet for your extras NPCs.

EXAMPLE EXTRA

CADAVAN BANDITS

Extras

"Put 'em up!"

Description: Ex-military thugs who followed Goldie (ab0ve) into a life of crime.

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Knife <i>stab</i>	9	3 dmg
Shoot SMG	10	5 dmg

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Submachinegun (3 clips of ammo), 2 firebirds each

Sample NPCs

Known Worlds

Nobles

BARONESS SHI SU LI HALAN



Headliner • Noble 3 • Li Halan • Spy/Knightly Order

"I sense doubt in your words, friend. Come, let us take tea and speak of matters metaphysical. There will be time later to draw swords in the Pancreator's name."

Description: Baroness Shi Su is a member of the Hidden Martyrs, the most secretive of House Li Halan's intelligence agencies. While most of the Martyrs' activity involves domestic spying, it is imperative for them to also keep tabs on the other houses and factions. To this end, Shi has joined the Swords of Lextius knightly order, pledging herself to defend the Orthodoxy. This allows her to travel the Known Worlds, protecting the faithful and keeping a watchful eye on anyone whom she suspects might be holding — or withholding — information valuable to the Martyrs.

She, like most Li Halan nobles, is well tutored in cultured discourse. If she must come to blows with someone, she will at least first address them and explain why she must send their soul back to its source.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	4	Pre	6
Dex	4	Per	6	Int	4
End	4	Will	6	Faith	5

Skills:

Academia	3
Arts	4
Charm	6
Disguise	4
Empathy	5
Focus	4
Impress	5
Intrusion	5
Knavery	7
Melee	7
Observe	6
Perform	4
Sneak	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Deceive</i>	11	Target is Deceived.
<i>Rapier strike</i>	13	5 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 10 9	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Arts (Imagery), Customs (Cathedral, Court), Knowledge (Known Worlds Jumpweb, Li Halan, Midian, Religion), Melee Weapons (Military), Musical Instrument (Strings), Performing Arts (Music), Read/Speak Urthish

Perks: Fencing (Swashbuckler), Imperious, Noble Title (Baroness), Order Badge (Swords of Lextius), Saint Lextius' Blessing, Secret Agent (Agent), Stoic Mind

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 8 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 23

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 9 | number: 1

Equipment: Dueling e-shield (5/10, 15 hits), pipa (lute), rapier, synthsilk cloak

EARL EMERSON CARR HAWKWOOD



Headliner • Noble 6 • Hawkwood • Questing Knight

"I have taken an oath to pacify these barbarian lands for the day when *she* will ascend to claim them. Do not stand in my way."

Description: Emerson ruled a well-off fief on Ravenna, content to live the life of an honorable and fair lord to his people. Vuldrok raiders changed all that. A thane allied with Sigfaddir Firestorm of Ostmark (Hargard) burned down Emerson's manse, killing his beloved daughter. Instead of rebuilding, Emerson forsook his lands, leaving them to his wife, and joined the Questing Knights so that he could travel to Hargard and take his revenge. Although he has since killed many Vuldrok warriors, he has yet to catch the thane who destroyed his happiness. Now that the planet is claimed by Alexius, Emerson has had to quell his loathing of the Vuldrok somewhat.

Then Princess Aurora was born. All of Emerson's unassuaged grief over the loss of his daughter was now projected upon the imperial heir. He has sworn his life and blood to serve her, even if it means be-friending the people who harmed him. For her, he would even put aside his sword and blaster. She has not asked it of him (she is an infant), so for now he continues his personal war against the thanes of Ostmark.

Characteristics:

Str	8	Wits	4	Pre	5
Dex	5	Per	4	Int	3
End	6	Will	6	Faith	4

Skills:

Animalia	4
Charm	5
Fight	6
Impress	8
Melee	8
Observe	6
Pilot	3
Remedy	5
Shoot	7
Survival	3
Vigor	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Shoot</i> blaster	12	6 dmg
Rapier <i>strike</i>	16	5 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 9 7	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Armor (Combat, Shield), Customs (Commons, Court), Knowledge (Hargard, Ravenna, Shipboard Operations, Vuldrok), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns, Slug Guns), Read/Speak (Urthish, Vuldrok), Transport (Beastback)

Perks: Contact (Vuldrok merchant), Deputize, Fencing (Swashbuckler), Incite Passion, Imperial Charter, Imperious, Lay Down the Law, Noble Title (Earl), Noblesse Oblige, Stoic Body

Resistance: Body 5 | Mind 8 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 27

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Bank: 20

Surges: rating: 14 | number: 2

Equipment: Studded leather, blaster pistol, rapier

Priests

CANON MUTUMBO MUTWA OF HOLY TERRA

Agent • Priest 3 • Orthodox • Confessor

"I beg you: Confess your sins. If you refuse, you condemn others — your friends and your loved ones — to an eternity in Gehenne."

Description: Concerned that sin is going unacknowledged and that the suns will be reduced to cinders because of it, Mutwa feels he simply *must* convince others to confess their sins. They must polish their soul mirrors enough to let in the light and reflect it back. The fate of the universe lies in the balance. Because of the great weight and muck of sin, the cosmos is like a backed-up sink; only by confessing sins can people unclog it. Because of this mania and the weight of responsibility he carries, Mutwa has become a nervous wreck. People often offer to confess to him out of pity, hoping it will help him more than them.

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	5	Pre	7
Dex	3	Per	4	Int	8
End	4	Will	4	Faith	8

Skills:

Charm	6
Focus	6
Impress	5

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>*Castigate</i>	12	Target is Castigated.
<i>Entreat</i>	13	Target is Entreated.
<i>Shake it off</i>	10 10 14	Removes a state.

Perks: Call to Contrition, Church Ordination (Canon), Inspiring, Micro-Confessions, Purge

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 1

Equipment: A fine edition of the Omega Gospels.

DEACON BARNABUS ABDULLAH TWAIN



Headliner • Priest 5 • Eskatonic Order • Inquisitor/Occultist

"You say the apparition wore a nightgown stained with blood? Did the blood pattern resemble a rose? I thought so. We are dealing with the vile sorcery of a Manja ancestor cultist."

Description: Barnabus entered the priesthood as a hesychast in a remote monastery... which turned out to be haunted. Frustrated with the monk's ascetic refusal to acknowledge or resolve the unquiet dead's misery, he took it upon himself to find the specter's remains and properly bury them. He then left to seek the Eskatonic Order. Wherever he went in his studies, he found himself drawn into one occult mystery after another. His successes in solving them brought him to the notice of the Inquisition, which tendered him an offer: a permanent badge and the charter to investigate any curious incidents. Only twice has he had to call for backup from his fellow Inquisitors; he loathes resorting to flamerguns, but recognizes that sometimes, they're a necessity.

He travels with his longtime partner and consultant, Manager Steven Cavendish (see below), with whom he often discusses his cases. Cavendish serves as a less credulous voice, often helping Barnabus to uncover a mundane cause behind a haunting or visitation.

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	6	Pre	7
Dex	3	Per	8	Int	8
End	4	Will	4	Faith	4

Skills:

Alchemy	4
Charm	6
Focus	7
Impress	7
Observe	9
Remedy	4

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Castigate</i>	14	Target is Castigated.
<i>Search</i>	17	Notice hidden clues.
<i>Shake it off</i>	11 11 11	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral), Knowledge (Es-katonic Order, Occult), Medical (Disease), Transport (Beastback)

Perks: All-Access Pass, Church Ordination (Deacon), Counter the Dark, Deduce, Inquisitorial Seal, Inspiring, Scent of the Witch, Wyrd Knowledge

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 6 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 15

Revivals: rating: 10 | number: 2

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 12 | number: 2

Equipment: Various occult paraphernalia for detecting and analyzing the supernatural.

SISTER LIANA WU**Headliner • Priest 8 • Brother Battle • Brother Battle**

"You think I fear simple *pirates*? I have fought symbiots with my bare hands!"

Description: Stolen as a child by Chainers, she was rescued from a life of slavery by the legendary blind Brother Battle monk Gaius Gemini. He delivered her to the monastery on De Moley and instructed the monks to begin her training. She excelled, driven by his example. Her first assignment for the order was to protect a Kalinthe priest, but her failure to save him from a Slayers guild assassin (who she promptly dispatched) caused her to enlist on Stigmata as penance. After serving over a decade in the worst hellhole in the Known Worlds, she was given "retirement," at least as far as any Brother Battle is allowed. She decided to see the Empire via pilgrimage, visiting its many and varied holy sites. When pirates attacked a transport she was on, she easily repelled them and took over their vessel. She saw this as a sign and now travels incognito on pilgrim ships, waiting for a time when her skills are needed again.

Having seen miracles with her own eyes, she now seeks a truth and encounter with the divine beyond the simple dogma of scripture. She collects saintly relics from wherever she goes.

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	3	Pre	5
Dex	5	Per	4	Int	3
End	6	Will	6	Faith	8

Skills:

Drive	4
Fight	9
Focus	6
Impress	7
Melee	8
Observe	7
Shoot	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Daunt</i>	12	Target is Daunted.
<i>Fist strike</i>	16	2 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	12 12 14	Removes a state.
<i>Sword strike</i>	15	6 dmg

Capabilities: Armor (Combat, War), Customs (Cathedral), Knowledge (Brother Battle, Known Worlds Jumpweb, Warfare), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns, Energy Weapons), Speak/Read Urthish, Transport (Beastback, Landcraft)

Perks: Battle Sense, Born on the Battlefield, Church Ordination (Adept), Deliverance, Inspiring, Mantok, Mental Conditioning, Resilient, Steadfast, Stic Body

Resistance: Body 7 | Mind 8 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 33

Revivals: rating: 13 | number: 3

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 15 | number: 3

Equipment: Assault energy shield (5/15; 20 hits), stiffsynth cuirass, sword, medium autofeed pistol

Merchants

MANAGER STEVEN CAVENDISH

Agent • Merchant 5 • Reeves • Lawyer

"I advise you to plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the duke. Mounting a defense with a claim of innocence would be... expensive. Of course, if you do wish to spend the money...."

Description: Cavendish is a touring judge. He goes from place to place overseeing cases and trials, often serving as the presiding judge, but sometimes employed as an advocate against or defender for the accused. His job tends to show him the worst of human nature, but he remains unphased, placing his faith in the eventual victory of deliberative reason over crass motive. While he is by no means an atheist, he is skeptical of many of the claims of the Church concerning the supernatural. Still, he acknowledges its existence, thanks to the cases he's helped to solve with his longtime traveling partner, Barnabus Twain (see above). He prefers, however, to deal with such things from the comfort of a drawing room chair with pipe in hand, fire crackling in the chimney, and tea steaming in a cup beside him.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	6	Pre	8
Dex	3	Per	4	Int	4
End	4	Will	7	Faith	5

Skills:

Charm	5
Focus	6
Empathy	6
Impress	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Castigate</i>	15	Target is Castigated.
<i>Command</i>	15	Target is Commanded.
<i>Concentrate</i>	11	Spend 3 VP to make next roll for declared task favorable; all other rolls unfavorable until then.
<i>Detect Lie</i>	10	See through lies.
<i>Shake it off</i>	10 13 11	Removes a state.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 6 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: His personal assistant think machine has reams of law archives.

LT. FARFIELD JONES



Headliner • Merchant 4 • Charioteers • Trader

"What? You've never tried fermented *thorarinfin* meat before? It's a Vuldrok delicacy! Come, don't let the putrid smell stop you — have a taste!"

Description: Born a Hawkwood serf on Leminkainen, Jones was captured by a Vuldrok raiding party and enthralled by athane on Hargard. When Eldrid the Wise claimed noble-house status, part of her agreement with Alexius involved her returning the Hawkwood thralls. Rather than paying for their transport, she decided to free them, so long as she could let them find their own ways home. Jones, free but homeless, talked his way onto a Charioteer ship and an apprenticeship, playing up his "foot in both worlds" story. They bought it, and he now runs a trade route between Leminkainen and Hargard. He has his sights set on new markets in the as-yet-unpacified Ostmark continent, which has him on the lookout for a good crew of bodyguards. His needs are precise: they must be willing to protect him when he tries to deal his way into some exclusive markets before the gold rush begins.

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	6	Pre	7
Dex	5	Per	5	Int	5
End	4	Will	4	Faith	6

Skills:

Charm	7
Drive	5
Knavery	6
Melee	5
Observe	6
Pilot	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Confuse</i>	12	Target is Confused.
<i>Convince</i>	13	Target is Convinced.
<i>Sword strike</i>	9	6 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	7 7 9	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Streetwise), Knowledge (Hargard, Leminkainen, Shipboard Operations, Vuldrok), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Read/Speak (Urthish, Vuldrok)

Perks: Gambler, Guild Commission (Lieutenant), Schmooze

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 23

Revivals: rating: 9 | number: 2

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 11 | number: 2

Equipment: Leather jerkin, sword, medium revolver

TERMINAL XXVII

Agent • Merchant 4 • Engineers • Cyborg

"I loved this music when I was a child. At least, I like to think I did."

Description: Rumors say that the Engineer of indeterminate gender called only Terminal 27 was either:

- a noble scion who was too strange for its family and rejected by the Church but was nonetheless taken in by the Engineers;
- the product of a warlock's rite to summon a demon that was rescued by Engineers;
- pulled from a vat in a secret cloning lab;
- a sentient that isn't actually human but instead a sophisticated golem made of flesh.

Terminal 27 likes to entertain all these possibilities, but the truth is it doesn't know its own past. Its memories were wiped when the alien think machine it was hooked to was bombed by the Inquisition. An Engineer found its body and put it back together with cybernetic parts. Terminal 27's name is seared like a brand into its chest, where the alien machine had been connected.

It likes to go to high-class parties just to weird-out the guests, although it has begun to become quite the popular oddity, even inspiring dances based on its slightly spastic movements (an unfortunate side-effect from its near death).

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	6	Pre	5
Dex	6	Per	5	Int	4
End	4	Will	5	Faith	3

Skills:

Academia	7
Focus	7
Impress	5
Perform	5
Shoot	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Mesmerize</i>	10	Target is Mesmerized.
<i>Shake it off</i>	11 12 10	Removes a state.
X-ray eye	11	See through clothing to notice hidden items and read writing.

Perks: Advisor, Guild Commission (Entered), Ingenuity, X-Ray Eye

Resistance: Body 4 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 2

Equipment: Dueling shield (5/10; 15 hits), laser pistol

Yeomen**HALSTON FREDERICK LARGO**

Agent • Yeoman 4 • The Dispossessed • Mercenary

"Hold on... 3'0'clock, five paces... smells like a slinker." (*ka-chack!*) "Let's light it up!"

Description: A serf who sought his way out of bondage by volunteering with his al-Malik lord's troops, Halston found himself on Stigmata. He stood in a trench on the frontlines of combat against monsters of more shapes, sizes, and virulence than he could imagine in his previous life herding brutes back on Istakhr. While he managed to survive his tour with only a few scars, and he was awarded freeman status, he came to realize that war was all he knew. Halston Largo joined up with fellow Stigmata veterans in the Dispossessed and made war his job. He still has nightmares about his time on Stigmata fighting the symbiots, but after a recent firefight with a small symbiot infiltration on Aylon, he has come to realize that the instincts and intuitions that saved him and many of his troop mates back on Stigmata wasn't just luck: He has a nascent psychic ability to sense the presence of symbiots. He fears that, should the Inquisition hear of it, they might try to conscript him. He has approached his chain of command about the issue, and they've taken it as a selling point for landing contracts in regions where symbiot corruption is a fear. Halston has so far accepted his fate with stoicism: he might never truly leave his war on Stigmata behind.

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	4	Pre	5
Dex	6	Per	6	Int	3
End	5	Will	5	Faith	4

Occult: Psi 1**Skills:**

Impress	6
Observe	6
Shoot	8
Vigor	8

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Daunt</i>	11	Target is Daunted.
<i>Detect symbiot</i>	14	As Observe <i>spot</i> maneuver vs. Severe Resistance; cost: 1 VP
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 8 7	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot</i> blaster rifle	14	9 dmg

Perks: Military Rank (Corporal), Professional Reputation (Journeyman), Resilient, Stoic Spirit**Resistance:** Body 6 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2**Vitality:** 15**Surges:** rating: 11 | number: 2**Equipment:** Plastic mail, blaster rifle, knife**OXLEY (KAKANGARANGA)****Headliner • Vorox • Yeoman 2 • Society of St. Paulus • Scout**

"There! Do you see it? Hidden behind the palm leaves? The great-spotted knife-billed glider. A rare

sighting. Did I not tell you that I would show you the best of what this jungle has to offer?"

Description: Raised by a "civilized" vorox family on Ungavorox, Oxley was given his name by a minor Li Halan provincial administrator, who also instilled in him a love for xenobotany and the art of flower arrangement. He began selling his services as a safari guide for the elite who sought tours into the dangerous interior of the planet. When he brought his last group out alive, but not whole — Sir Yuri Kurikova Decados' injury meant he would never produce heirs — his Li Halan friend arranged for Oxley to join the Society of St. Paulus and get off-world. After traveling to a number of planets and serving as a guide and scout for various expeditions, he is now on Hargard. Oxley is getting the lay of the land in preparation for what promises to be the site of many lucrative scouting contracts by Known Worlders and Imperial authorities attempting to tame this barbarian world.

Characteristics:

Str	8	Wits	4	Pre	5
Dex	5	Per	7	Int	5
End	6	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Animalia	6
Arts	4
Drive	4
Fight	6
Observe	7
Shoot	5
Sneak	6
Survival	8
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Bite</i>	14	3 dmg
<i>Camouflage</i>	10	2 VP per +1 Resistance vs. detection.
<i>Identify animal</i>	13	Correctly identify an animal.
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 7 6	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot</i> rifle	12	6 dmg
<i>Spot</i> (favorable)	14	Notice things.

Capabilities: Arts (Imagery), Customs (Commons), Knowledge (Known Worlds Jumpweb, Society of St. Paulus, Ungavorox), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Science (Life), Speak Voroxian, Transport (Landcraft)

Perks: Chameleon (forest), Independent, Keen Awareness, Oriented, Professional Reputation (Journeyman)

Birthright: Bite, Brutal, Extra Limbs, Huge (Size 7), No Occult, Predatory (favorable Survival),

Sensitive Smell, Uncouth (unfavorable persuasion with strangers)

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 22

Revivals: rating: 9 | number: 1

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 1

Equipment: Leather jerkin, hunting rifle (sight 2), tracker (TL5 GPS device)

ZELDA THE EAR

Agent • Yeoman 6 • Vagabond • Amateur (Spy)

“Scuse me, I couldn’t ’elp but over’ear that y’er talking about Dakon the Knife. I might knows where he is. What’s it worth to ya?”

Description: Zelda Priam was born to a well-off freeman family on Leagueheim. When she was about to join her family’s textile trade as an apprentice, her parents ran afoul of a highly-placed Scra-ver, who ruined them with a blacklist. Within three years, her parents had perished under crushing poverty. Zelda nearly joined them, but she had the wits and raw luck to stow away aboard a merchant ship. She has been hoboing ever since. She joined the brethren of the jumproads: the Vagabonds. Now she travels using their network of signs, winks, and nods to figure out the best ships to stow aboard, preferring ships whose owners will often look the other ways in return for labor. She soon learned that the best passage coin is intelligence about a ship captains’ rivals.

Zelda uses the anonymity her impoverished fashion and begrimed face grants her to listen in on conversations, invisible in plain sight to the elite. She’s beneath their notice but not beyond hearing range.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	7	Pre	7
Dex	5	Per	8	Int	7
End	3	Will	5	Faith	4

Skills:

Charm	7
Focus	5
Interface	5
Intrusion	5
Knavery	7
Observe	8

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Entreat	14	Target is Entreated.
Evade	10	Use VPs gained on a successful roll to boost Body Resistance.
Shake it off	8 10 9	Removes a state.
Spot	15	Notice things.

Perks: Independent, Professional Reputation (Savant), Second Skin

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 8 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: Knife, bank with chalk sticks (for drawing hobo signs)



Barbarians

What qualifies someone for the term “barbarian” is really a matter of perspective. The civilizations that Known Worlders refer to as “barbaric” are all highly developed, have their own religions and technology, and are generally happy to remain well outside of Imperial control.

The Kurga Caliphate is a religious state ruled by a heresy (according to the Universal Church) that purports that the living caliph is a spiritual successor and holy heir to the Prophet. The Kurgans are a cosmopolitan and well-educated people, and their universities are famous, even among Known Worlds nobility, but their civilization is now tucked behind Hira’s jumpgate, requiring a difficult and unrewarding journey through Vuldrok space to reach them.

The Vuldrok raiders, meanwhile, are a polytheistic people who model themselves after disparate ancient Urth cultures, including the Vikings. Those on Hargard are a split people. Houses Eldrid and Ramakrishna have both allied themselves with the Empire, whereas the thanes of the Ostmark continent are actively fighting against this “invasion.” Ostmark’s thanes have a longstanding enmity with House Hawkwood, due to decades of raiding and piracy against the house.

Vuldrok

ASTRID THE VALKYRIE



Headliner • Yeoman 6 • Vuldrok Star-Nation • Mercenary

“Do not kneel to the Imperial slavers! Shake off the yolk of Eldrid the Mad and be free!”

Description: Astrid served in the Fheykrigs alongside Eldrid, helping her establish herself as High Thane. Once Eldrid allied with Emperor Alexius, though, Astrid withdrew across the Red Mountains and raised her banners in revolt. She has gathered a sizeable faction of Vuldrok to her cause, including a very few errant members of House Ramakrishna and the children of the thanes Eldrid smashed. Astrid hates the Known Worlds with a passion. Her husband was imprisoned, tortured, and killed by House Hawkwood after a failed raid, and his dismembered body sent back to Hargard in pieces.

This insult cannot stand, and Astrid will not rest until she sees House Eldrid wiped out. Her narrow face is constantly grim, and her thick blonde hair is going prematurely grey at the temples. Her war horn is particularly grisly. She had it carved out of an auroch horn and set with polished pieces of her late husband’s shattered femur.

Characteristics:

Str	8	Wits	6	Pre	8
Dex	5	Per	6	Int	6
End	5	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Animalia	4
Drive	7
Fight	9
Impress	8
Melee	9
Perform	4
Shoot	5
Survival	6
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Command</i>	16	Target is Commanded.
<i>Daunt</i>	16	Target is Daunted.
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 7 6	Removes a state.
<i>Sword strike</i>	17	6 dmg

Capabilities: Armor (Combat, War), Customs (Commons), Knowledge (Hargard, Shipboard Operations, Vuldrok), Melee Weapons (Military), Performing Arts (Oratory), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Transport (Beastcraft)

Perks: Armed to the Teeth, Born of the Battlefield, Fencing, Independent, Professional Reputation (Savant), Resilient, Stoic Body

Resistance: Body 5 | Mind 8 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 23

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Bank: 20

Surges: rating: 14 | number: 2

Equipment: Studded-leather jerkin, sword, medium autofeed, war horn

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

COUNTESS FREYA OF THE RED MOUNTAINS



Headliner • Noble 6 • Eldrid • Duelist

“Aren’t you sweet! And so deluded.”

Description: Freya used to be a queen among thanes, the lord of the Red Mountains on Hargard. She had a thousand Fheykrigs who answered only to her, and her banner made men twice her size quake in fear. All of this is still true, but she has pledged her fief, her might, and her heart to Prince Eldrid the Wise. In fact, Eldrid named her daughter, Alexius’s new queen, after her friend and confidante. Freya is in her late 30s with a flowing mane of long chestnut hair and bright green eyes that are always laughing. Many Known Worlders make the mistake of thinking she is less dangerous than Eldrid, due to her tendency to make light of any situation and flirt with any sentient being in her presence. This wit conceals a heart of iron and a short temper. Freya does not forget any insult, whether to her or her Duchess, and she knows that she always eventually gets revenge.

Characteristics:

Str	9	Wits	5	Pre	6
Dex	4	Per	7	Int	4
End	6	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Charm	6
Drive	7
Fight	7
Impress	8
Melee	7
Perform	6
Survival	5
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Befriend	12	Target is Befriended.
Fist <i>strike</i>	15	2 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 7 6	Removes a state.
Sword <i>strike</i>	15	6 dmg

Capabilities: Armor (Combat, War), Knowledge (Eldrid, Hargard, Warfare), Medical (Poison), Melee Weapons (Military), Military Ordnance (Artillery), Performing Arts (Oratory), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Speak/Read (Urthish, Vuldrok), Transport (Beastcraft)

Perks: Aim Where It Hurts, Dance of Destruction, Fencing, Imperious, Impressive Strike, Nimble, Stoic Body, Stoic Mind

Resistance: Body 6 | Mind 12 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 24

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Bank: 20

Surges: rating: 15 | number: 2

Equipment: Plasteel half-plate armor, heavy auto-feed pistol, sword, drinking horn

Occultists

Psychic Covens

Innumerable psychic covens have survived persecution, creating secret societies that help psychics hide from Church authorities and public scrutiny. Two of them are large enough to have become infamous across worlds: the Invisible Path and the Favyana. See **Chapter 5: The Occult** for more information.

THE INVISIBLE PATH

COUNTESS APRILLA HAMBRA AL-MALIK



Headliner • Noble 6 • al-Malik • Psychic

"If you mention my sister *one* more time, you will regret it for the rest of your very short life."

Description: The Hambra family is famous for two things: an unbroken line of female offspring going back to the Second Republic and an affinity for the psychic Soma Path. Aprilla grew up wanting to make her family famous for something else. This drive eventually led her to embracing the Invisible Path, and her ruthlessness saw her rise to the leadership of the Invisible Path on Aylon. Using the resources and connections of the coven, she usurped control of the Hambra fiefs and set about bringing order under her strict despotic rule.

Shortly after her ascendancy, her Dark Twin started making trouble. Tales of her appearing out of nowhere to order the release of prisoners or surprise arrests of allies sowed confusion. The countess kept the truth close to her chest. What some saw as her Dark Twin or doppelganger she knew to be her baby sister, acting with her Favyana allies. And

so, a shadow war, a war of subterfuges, rages under the surface on her lands. Resistance fighters and psychics on both sides threaten to dissolve all into chaos.

Aprilla has recently turned to the Masking power to change her appearance in more and more unsettling ways, hoping to prevent her sister from mimicking her. Her rising Urge is centered around dysmorphia, which causes strange changes to her body without her will, reflecting the growing madness in her mind.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	7	Pre	6
Dex	5	Per	5	Int	6
End	8	Will	7	Faith	7
Psi 7 / Urge 4					

Skills:

Academia	6
Disguise	8
Empathy	5
Fight	6
Focus	9
Impress	7
Observe	8
Shoot	7
Sneak	5
Survival	6
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Fist strike	9	2 dmg
Shake it off	17 16 16	Removes a state.
Shoot pistol	12	5 dmg

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Court), Knowledge (al-Malik, Aylon, Invisible Path), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns)

Perks: Imperious, Noble Title (Countess), Riches (Well Off), Stoic Spirit

Psychic powers: Sixth Sense (Shape Senses, Subtle Sight), Soma (Toughening, Strengthening, Quickening, Hardening, Sizing, Masking)

Urge powers: Speak in Tongues, Misdirection, Voices, Spirit Drain

Resistance: Body 4 | Mind 10 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 33

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Bank: 20

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: Synthsilk armor, autofeed slug gun

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

THE FAVYANA

DAME VEBECCA HAMBRA AL-MALIK



Headliner • Noble 4 • al-Malik • Psychic/Spy

“Of course I’m Countess Aprilla! Do you doubt your own eyes?”

Description: When Aprilla Hambra (see above) rose to power, it was at the end of a bloody series of assassinations that left her and her younger sister orphaned. Vebecca was only 15. She only barely escaped with her life, helped by a small group of Favyana psychics who saw her potential to help their cause to disrupt the growing influence of the Invisible Path on Aylon. Vebecca lost most of her noble “polish” in her years on the run with the resistance, but she learned a lot of spycraft in that time. The Favyana also trained her in the use of the

Soma powers her family was famous for. Once she could shape herself into a likeness of her sister, she started the guerilla war to bring down Aprilla. Now she stays one step ahead of the authorities, creating as much confusion as possible. She often has the Quickening power active, giving her amazing agility and speed when needed.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	6	Pre	5
Dex	6	Per	5	Int	5
End	6	Will	7	Faith	6
Psi 6 / Urge 2					

Skills:

Charm	8
Fight	7
Focus	7
Knavery	7
Melee	6
Observe	7
Perform	7
Sneak	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Befriend</i>	15	Target is Befriended.
<i>Deceive</i>	14	Target is Deceived.
<i>Shake it off</i>	13 13 12	Removes a state.
<i>Sword strike</i>	12	3 dmg

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Court, Street-wise), Knowledge (al-Malik, Aylon, Favyana), Melee Weapons (Military), Performing Arts (Theatre)

Perks: Allies (Favyana), Imperious, Noble (Dame), Stoic Spirit

Psychic powers: Soma (Toughening, Strengthening, Quickening, Hardening, Sizing, Masking)

Urge power: Speak in Tongues, Misdirection

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 2 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 28

Revivals: rating: 9 | number: 2

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 2

Equipment: Dark, heavy robes, rapier

Theurgist

SILDA SAR'HALIMA



Headliner • Obun • Priest 3 • Voavenlohjun • Theurgist

“The darkness I speak of is no metaphor. It is quite real. And it is coming.”

Description: A nephew of Bran Botan vo Karm, the emperor’s councilor, Silda has had divine visions of a living darkness in Vuldrok space. He has been dispatched there as a Cohort to find out if they have any basis in reality. He travels with Belinda Ruddy-Brow, a Questing Knight of both Hawkwood and Vuldrok heritage who began his quest on Hargard. He has heard stories about a species of sentient, multi-tentacled mollusc called a Nizdharim – a creature that

resembles the beings seen in his visions. Seeking them out, he has hired the trader Farfield Jones (see *Merchants*, above) to be his guide.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	7	Pre	5
Dex	4	Per	4	Int	6
End	3	Will	6	Faith	7
Theurgy 3 / Hubris 0					

Skills:

Alchemy	3
Charm	6
Empathy	5
Focus	7
Perform	4
Remedy	4

Actions:

<i>Entreat</i>	11
Prophet’s Blessing	14

Impact

Target is Entreated.
Target’s roll for declared task is favorable.

Spend VP for info.
Target heals 2 Vitality per VP; self: 1 Vitality per 1 VP.

Shake it off 12 | 15 | 15 Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral), Knowledge (Obun, Occult, Religion, Voavenlohjun), Performing Arts (Song), Read/Speak (Lojmaa, Urthish)

Perks: Church Ordination (Canon), Inspiring, Stoic Spirit

Theurgy rites: Ecumenical (Divine Revelation, Laying on of Hands, The Prophet’s Holy Blessing)

Birthright: Sagacity, Serene (+2 *shake it off*)

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 24

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 1

Equipment: Heavy robes, prayer bowl

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Heretics

“Heresy” used to mean any incorrect interpretation of a standard doctrine. In the world of **Fading Suns**, however, any religious faction that counters the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun, from within or without, are heretics — and therefore subject to the interrogation and flame guns of the Inquisition.

Ironically, the major heresy within the Universal Church is nestled in the heart of the Temple Avesti, the sect most likely to produce inquisitors. The Flama Incarna are inquisitors who believe that the Holy Flame doesn’t just live in the hearts of suns, but in the hearts of all living beings. Furthermore, the Holy Flame allows them to seek out heretics outside of the Church and exterminate them. Publicly, the Avestites are against this faction, as it has caused an unacceptable number of innocent deaths due to “hearing the flame.” Privately, however, they keep members of the Flama Incarna on hand solely for their zeal — provided, of course, they don’t publicly flout the dictates of the Temple.

Another major Church heresy is the Worldshapers, a group of Eskatonics who have decided to study geomancy. Geomancy, the movement of a planet’s ley lines, is a crude method of terraforming. It is extremely slow and currently very faulty but requires only a sufficiently dedicated group of theurgists to accomplish. The Church mostly leaves the Worldshapers alone, as they often make small, beneficial changes to very local areas. If this influence changes, however, and their experiments result in a major “natural” disaster, the Inquisition may have some questions.

Outside of the Church, the most well-known heresies are the Sathraists, the countless Anunnaki cults, and the Antinomists. All three groups worship aspects of the Known Worlds other than the Holy Flame of the Empyrean. Sathraists practice an ecstatic path based on the drug-like high induced by unprotected jumpgate travel. Anunnaki cults worship the mysterious Preadamite creators of the jumpgates. Antinomists are in direct opposition to everything the Church stands for, actively worshipping the darkness engulfing the suns of the Known Worlds. All three operate in secret, fearing arrest and persecution by the Inquisition. (See below for a sample Antinomist.)

Republicans

While still a heresy, Republicanism is also a high crime in most jurisdictions. It is the desire to dissolve the feudal system and erect a new Republic — the Third Republic — in its place. While acting to promote this cause is a severe crime, even thinking about

it — especially talking it over with others — is a heresy. Merely declaring yourself a Republican is a crime in some locales. This doesn’t prevent some from joining secret Republican cells and preparing for the time when the Republic can be declared.

MAYOR DIEGO CASTENDA DE HAZAT DE SUTEK



Headliner • Noble 5 • Hazat • Courtier

“Money is the real power. Money and technology, though a little muscle doesn’t hurt either.”

Description: Raised on the stories of the Second Republic and educated at Jade University, Diego is one of those rare Hazat who did not choose the martial path. Rather, he found his love in management, raising the well-being and prestige of the city of Ptah Seker through trade and technology. The portly, middle-aged mayor is well-liked by the merchants and guildsmen in the city, though the Church is beginning to catch on to his anti-Imperial sympathies. There is nothing Diego would like more than a Third Republic. He envisions a glittering new age of machinery, progress, and exploration, with no emperor or state religion to stand in the way. He knows he doesn’t have the power for a coup just yet, so he bides his time and quietly keeps a running correspondence with other secret Republicans, informing them of the mysteries he finds in the depths of Ptah Seker.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	8	Pre	7
Dex	4	Per	9	Int	8
End	5	Will	5	Faith	4

Skills:

Academia	6
Alchemy	5
Charm	7
Interface	8
Knavery	6
Sneak	6
Tech Redemption	8

Actions:

Goal	Impact
<i>Befriend</i>	14 Target is Befriended.
<i>Confuse</i>	14 Target is Confused.
<i>Deceive</i>	13 Target is Deceived.
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 8 7 Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Court), Knowledge (Hazat, Sutek), Medical (Disease), Science (Life, Physical), Tech Lore (TL5, TL6), Transport (Landcraft)

Perks: Ally (an Orthodox bishop), Imperious, Noble Title (Knight), Reeve Advocate, Riches (Well Off), Schmooze

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 24

Revivals: rating: 10 | number: 2

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: Synthsilk couture, Advisor think machine

count. Thrilled at what he saw, Rashid threw in with the Antinomists and slowly began to plot the downfall of the Decados from the shadows.

* Rashid has followed the Antinomist calling, which acts like the Theurgist calling, except that allows access to Antinomist rituals (see the sidebar) instead of theurgy.



Antinomists (Warlocks)

BARON RASHID KEDDAH

Headliner • Noble 4 • Keddah • Antinomist*/Conspiracist

"The time will come when the Decados will tremble at the name Keddah."

Description: Eldest son of Marquis Haroun Keddah of Grail, Rashid grew up hating the Decados for their schemes against his house. He knew the history of his family and his planet, and he understood well the ploys by which the Decados had schemed to make the Keddah their puppets. Despite his father's counseling caution, Rashid seethed with rage, vowing to do everything he could to free his house from the Decados and raise it up to the status of a major house.

To that end, Rashid traveled extensively and sought out any aid he could find. On Pandemonium, he encountered an Antinomist cult that promised him the power he sought. Initially, he was repulsed by the idea of allying with demon worshippers, but he changed his mind after the Antinomists demonstrated their abilities by slaying a Decados

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	5	Pre	9
Dex	5	Per	7	Int	6
End	5	Will	7	Faith	3

Theurgy 3 / Hubris 0

Skills:

Academia	4
Arts	4
Charm	6
Drive	5
Fight	5
Focus	4
Impress	7
Knavery	8
Melee	4
Observe	9
Perform	4
Shoot	4
Sleight of Hand	6
Sneak	4
Survival	4
Vigor	7

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Command</i>	16	Target is Commanded.
Curse**	11	Target suffers unfavorable roll on declared task.
<i>Deceive</i>	17	Target is Deceived.
Exsanctification**	11	Creates profane vestment.
Evil Eye**	13	Targets rolls are unfavorable for the scene.
Fist <i>strike</i>	9	2 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 11 7	Removes a state.

** See *Antinomy Rituals* sidebar.

Capabilities: Arts (Writing), Customs (Court), Knowledge (Decados, Etyri, Grail, Keddah, Occult, Shipboard Operations), Performing Arts (Oratory), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns), Read/Speak Urthish

Perks: Calculating, Imperious, Lay Down the Law, Noble Title (Baron), Stoic Spirit

Antinomy: Curse, Exsanctification, Evil Eye

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 6 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 24

Revivals: rating: 9 | number: 2

ANTINOMY RITUALS

Warlocks and other Antinomists have access to rituals similar to theurgy. Space prevents a fuller description of them all here, but three are described briefly in conjunction with the sample NPC presented in this section.

Curse: This ritual is the opposite of the ecumenical ritual, The Prophet's Holy Blessing. The target suffers unfavorable rolls when accomplishing a specific task of your choice. (Roll Focus + Will vs. Spirit Resistance.)

Exsanctification: This ritual is the reverse of the Urth Orthodox ritual Consecration. You make an Antinomy vestment that lasts for the duration of the act, after which it returns to normal — unless the casting roll is a critical hit, in which case the Exsanctification is permanent. The consecrated item resists being affected by psychic powers or theurgy; rolls by these powers to affect the item are unfavorable. (Roll Focus + Will vs. tough Resistance.)

Evil Eye: This is a more advanced version of Curse. Instead of affecting a task of your choice, the unfavorable condition applies to *all* the target's rolls for the rest of the scene. (Roll Focus + Presence vs. Spirit Resistance.)

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: Laser pistol, thick robes

Gangs

Here are sample antagonist groups to use against your PCs. Some of them come in several flavors to represent where they're stationed.

Physical Threats

These types pose a risk to life and limb for anyone in the wrong place at the wrong time.

BANDITS

Extras

"Stand and deliver!"

Description: Often tattooed, ritually scarred, or branded by the law, professional bandits conceal their true strength from their victims until it's too late.

Vitality: 10

COUNTRY

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Deceive</i>	10	Target is Deceived.
<i>Shoot</i> bow	9	4 dmg
Knife <i>strike</i>	9	3 dmg

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Knives, bows

URBAN

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Deceive</i>	10	Target is Deceived.
<i>Shoot</i> pistol	9	5 dmg
Frap stick <i>strike</i>	9	6 dmg + Shock
Knife <i>strike</i>	9	3 dmg

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Leather armor, knives, shockers; the captain also has a slug gun

SPACE STATION

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Deceive</i>	10	Target is Deceived.
<i>Shoot</i> shotgun	9	8/4/1 dmg + Stock
Frap stick <i>strike</i>	9	6 dmg + Shock

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Spacesuit, frap stick, shotguns (which risk damaging hulls)

GUARDS

Extras

“Halt! Who goes there?”

Description: Dressed in whatever their liege can afford, guards clearly wear the symbol of their faction as either a badge or a tabard. Their traits differ by region and role.

Vitality: 10

COUNTRY

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Shoot bow	10	4 dmg
Fist strike	9	2 dmg

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Leather armor, bow

URBAN

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Fist strike	9	2 dmg
Staff strike	9	3 dmg, Slam (+ Shock)

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Leather armor, staff with shocker (3 charges)

PALACE GUARD

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Fist strike	9	2 dmg
Shoot pistol	10	4 dmg
Sword strike	9	6 dmg

Resistance: Body 1 (or 3) | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Padded armor (with optional ceramic or metal plates in fabric pockets: +2 Body Resistance), sword or pistol (light revolver with 6 shots)

SPACE STATION

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Fist strike	9	2 dmg
Frap stick strike	9	6 dmg + Shock

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Spacesuit, frap stick (10 charges)

INQUISITORS

Extras

“Burn the sinner!”

Description: Dressed in robes or cloaks marked with flame symbols. Their faces bear jumpgate crosses painted with ashes.

Vitality: 10

DEPUTIZED SERF

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Fist strike	9	2 dmg
Throw firebomb	9	3 (1) dmg + Flame

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Fire kit, tar-tipped staff doubling as a torch, clay pots with alcohol or fuel oil for dowsing and igniting

OFFICIAL INQUISITOR

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Daunt	10	Target is Daunted.
Whip strike	9	3 dmg
Shoot flamewgun	9	5 (3) dmg + Flame

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Whip, flamewgun, flameproof robes

RAIDERS

Extras

incoherent, intimidating scream

Description: Raiders immobilize their prey through terror. They dress accordingly, but their primary tactics rely on striking quickly and avoiding damage.

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Dodge	9	Spend VP to boost Body Resistance.
Fist strike	10	3 dmg
Staff strike	9	3 dmg, Slam + Shock or Hard

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Light armor made from alien scales/hide, makeshift weapons (spears with machine-sharpened points, cudgels wired up as temporary shockers)

Vitality: 10

UNRULY MOB

Extras

“There they are!”

Description: Frightened or compelled civilians driven to acts of violence

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Staff strike	10	3 dmg
Spot	9	VP vs. Resistance to detect things.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Equipment: Club or staff

Vitality: 10

URBAN YOUTH

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Knife strike	10	3 dmg
Staff strike	9	3 dmg

Throw firebomb 9 3 (1) dmg + Flame
Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Equipment: Knives, clubs, improvised explosives

VIGILANTES

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Staff strike</i>	10	3 dmg
<i>Shoot</i>	9	4 dmg (arrow or slug) or 8/4/1 dmg + Stock (shotgun)
<i>Spot</i>	9	VP vs. Resistance to detect things.

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Equipment: Padded armor, masks, clubs, bows or
 shotguns or slug throwers with limited ammunition

ZEALOTS

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Fist strike</i>	10	2 dmg
<i>Spot</i>	9	VP vs. Resistance to detect things.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Equipment: Rope, brands

Social Threats

These types won't beat you down, but they might fast-
 talk you into trouble.

COURT GOSSIPS

Extras

"Have you heard the latest? Oh my!"

Description: Flamboyantly dressed, gossips are
 guaranteed to stand out in a crowd. However, any
 signs of their allegiance to a faction are either subtly
 woven into their garb or conspicuously absent, en-
 couraging others to open up around them.

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Deceive</i>	10	Target is Deceived.
<i>Entreat</i>	9	Target is Entreated.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 1
Equipment: Ink and pen, perhaps a media recording
 device, 2 firebirds worth of various coinage
Vitality: 10

MARKETERS

Extras

"That's a great deal, but have you seen *this*?"

Description: These flashy folks are ready to part
 fools from their money.

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Deceive</i>	10	Target is Deceived.
<i>Entreat</i>	9	Target is Entreated.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Equipment: Various wares, First Republic-era junk
 that still looks impressive
Vitality: 10

NOSY PRIESTS

Extras

"Now what have you heard about *them*?"

Description: Nosy priests usually appear around
 meal times, always demanding hospitality or at-
 tendance at sermons, yet however unwelcome they
 may be, they always seem to walk away with valu-
 able information.

<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Castigate</i>	10	Target is Castigated.
<i>Entreat</i>	9	Target is Entreated.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Equipment: Bottle of local wine or mead or beer,
 jumpgate cross, medicinal herbs
Vitality: 10

Creatures

"The one thing I learned in my many travels: Just
 when you think you've seen it all, you get stung by
 something completely new."

— *Lord Erbian's Stellar Bestiary* (foreword to 3rd edition)

The many worlds along the jumpweb are home
 to an endless variety of wildlife that even pre-Fall
 scientists never managed to fully catalog. Most
 serfs are very knowledgeable about their local
 flora and fauna, but the truth often mingles with
 fables and myths on the fringes of civilized society.
 Thus, any expedition into the wild has to expect
 the unexpected.

During the Second Republic, many native lifeforms
 were genetically engineered to better serve as replace-
 ments for Urthish livestock. Horses were of particular
 interest to the nobility, as each house bred horses for
 specific qualities. The Aragon destriers of the Hazat
 are the best warhorses money can buy, while the Severan
 stallions of the Decados are renowned for their
 intelligence and the Qalim of the al-Malik are known
 their speed.

Below you'll find some examples of non-sen-
 tient creatures that your players might encounter
 on specific worlds or pretty much anywhere along
 the jumpweb. The traits represent average mem-
 bers of the species as Agent NPCs. They can be
 improved or altered to suit particularly exceptional
 specimens.

AMEN'TA (HULL RATS)

Agent (creature) • Level: 1 • Size: 2

Amen'ta resemble armadillos about 30 centimeters in length with heavy, black fur and hard, scaly skin. The nightmare of any starship captain is finding out midflight that their ship is infested with hull rats. First encountered on Severus, where the amen'ta evolved steel-sharp teeth to gnaw through the thick, armored hides of the local fauna, they soon spread all over the jumpweb by stowing away on human ships. The former carrion feeders began to shift their



diet after they tasted the soft flesh of offworlders. They can cause considerable damage to a ship's systems as well, once they start building their warrens within them.

The Purgers Guild specializes in cleansing ships plagued by hull rats, but it invests considerable effort to stay ahead of the game.

Special Abilities:

Hibernation: Amen'ta are able to enter hibernation and adapt to any toxin used to get rid of them, even passing this immunity on to their offspring. Upon reawakening, they experience a feeding frenzy that has devastated countless villages trying to flush out a pack of these pests. The Slumber, the gland responsible for their hibernation, is often sold as a cure-all or narcotic.

Characteristics:

Str	2	Wits	2	Pre	2
Dex	5	Per	7	Int	5
End	5	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Fight	5
Sneak	6
Vigor	6

Actions: *Goal* *Impact*

Bite 7 2 dmg

Claw 7 1 dmg

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 8

Surges: rating: 3 | number: 1

MATRIKA

Agent (creature) • Level: 2 • Size: 3

Best described as feline snakes the size of a large dog, these venomous predators native to Vijayanagar on Hargard have been partially domesticated by House Ramakrishna. Iridescent scales cover their hairless, slender bodies in intricate patterns, making them quite the sight to behold and suggesting that breeding them would be a profitable endeavor. Small arched horns protrude above their earholes, actually increasing their ability to locate sound. They walk on four legs, virtually silent, but a matrika can produce a threatening rattling sound with its long tails when it wants to be noticed.

Matrikas are extremely territorial, taking some time to get acquainted with the people they share their living space with. Ramakrishna nobles value them as guard pets, since matrikas react violently to any unknown person not in the company of someone they're familiar with. Even in the presence of their owners, they tend to act nervously around guests, a trait that suits the Ramakrishna just fine when dealing with supplicants.

If provoked, a matrika doesn't necessarily stop attacking after incapacitating its prey, using its sharp claws to rend the flesh of anything it can't swallow whole.

Special Abilities:

Venom: Matrika venom is extremely painful to humans, but rarely fatal. Still, the promise of its pain can engender fear in those who hear the matrika's rattle and are aware of the venom's property.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	2	Pre	5
Dex	5	Per	5	Int	5
End	5	Will	5	Faith	5

Skills:

Fight	8
Observe	7
Sneak	5
Vigor	6

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Bite</i>	11	1 dmg + Tormented
<i>Claw</i>	11	3 dmg
<i>Rattle</i>	10	If VP exceed Will or Faith, target (who must know about matrika venom) becomes Afraid.

Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Surges: rating: 7 | number: 1



PIQI (PARROT BEETLES)

Extra (creature) • Size: Negligible

These bland looking insects are barely five centimeters long, but they caused a mass hysteria over potential symbiot corruption, given their sudden appearance out of nowhere all over the Known Worlds and the craze they caused among the youth. It eventually came to light that they actually originated from Iver, smuggled out as part of a Jakovian cover operation, but somehow ended up on Pandemonium's bazaars, selling like crazy and rapidly spreading from there.

Special Abilities:

Audial mimicry: What gives these insects their colloquial name is not their coloring, but their ability to mimic any sound they hear using arrays of chitinous resonators along their body. When trained properly, they react to specific triggers, either memorizing or repeating. They are commonly able to memorize between 10 to 15 minutes of sound, but there's fierce competition in breeding endeavors that result in greater capacity. Noble youths trade for piqui with recordings of musical

performances they enjoy and often spend considerable quantities of coin to have street artists decorate their favorite specimens lavishly.

The Jakovian Agency has since discovered other useful applications for the beetles, using them to smuggle information or as listening devices undetectable by technology. As an added bonus, they are also rather inconspicuous to carry around, given their current popularity.

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Perform</i> (mimicry)	10	Listeners are Mesmerized.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 1

SÆHRIMNIR (WHALEHOGS)

Agent (creature) • Level: 3 • **Size:** 8

While their colloquial name may suggest otherwise, whalehogs are not actually aquatic creatures. They are immensely massive quadrupeds, measuring upwards of two meters at the shoulder and concealing enormous layers of fat under their tough black-and-white hides. Despite their bulk they are surprisingly fast runners, sometimes able to outrun even horses if they've had time to pick up speed.

Whalehogs originally served as an ample source of meat and tallow for early settlers on Hargard, but the conquering Vuldrok soon realized the creatures' military potential as charge cavalry. Covering them in armored plates and driving them against fortified positions proved to be a rather effective tactic. Particularly barbaric Vuldrok took up the practice of executing noble prisoners by releasing whalehogs to trample them to death.

The practice of training Sæhrimnir mounts was largely relegated to history books until recently. Once again, whalehog riding become a favored pastime on Ostmark. While it seems unlikely these beasts are actually meant for warfare — their enormous weight and size make them impractical to ship over sea and space alike — House Eldrid has expressed its concern over the renaissance of this symbol of barbarian brutality.

Characteristics:

Str	8	Wits	1	Pre	3
Dex	3	Per	3	Int	3
End	8	Will	3	Faith	6

Skills:

Fight	5
Vigor	9

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Squeal</i>	12	If VP exceed Will or Faith, target becomes Daunted.
<i>Trample</i>	14	6 dmg

Resistance: Body 5 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
Vitality: 16
Surges: rating: 11 | number: 1



Weird Monstrosities

The galaxy has a limited number of Known Worlds, but millennia of evolution have created countless forms of life across creation. Alien creatures fight to survive on worlds where they're surrounded by weird and mystical monstrosities. Psychic abilities, theurgic curses, and manifestations of outright evil distort and pervert diverse alien ecosystems, spawning wonders and horrors that defy scientific explanation.

After the fall of the Second Republic, the denizens of many worlds had a thousand years to mutate. A rich panoply of predators, scavengers, harvesters, and abominations appeared. The most baffling outliers in this collection of genetic iterations are only barely understood, creating legends and nightmares of weird monstrosities. Step right up, and you'll witness a handful of these horrors.

Husks

Evil walks among us. Reviled by many names throughout the Known Worlds, the unconsecrated dead are returning to life and seeking sentient victims. Their epic bouts of mass destruction ravage worlds where heresy, apostasy, or Antinomy thrive. Their strength is brutish; their armies are mindless; their pursuit of the living is relentless and indefatigable. Survivors most commonly refer to these armies of the walking dead as *husks*: animated corpses that should not be, but nonetheless manage to shamble, shuffle, and lurch until their mortal clay

is annihilated. Imbued with hideous strength, they kill and kill again, leaving behind a trail of dead that reanimate to join their armies of the damned.

Tales of those who have witnessed such horrors are varied and colorful, but a few facts recur. Crude physical force can destroy a husk, but some forms of energy that kill the living do not affect the dead. They do not breathe. Radiation does not affect them, but other physical forces, such as fire or electricity, gradually destroy their physical forms. Husk bodies slowly decay, much as human and alien bodies decompose, but left undisturbed, the dissolution of their physical forms can take decades. Peasants and nobles alike tell of armies of husks advancing while on fire, or marching across the bottom of a lake, or continuing to kill everything in their path as weapons fire tears them apart piece by piece.

Trudging with a slow and methodical gait, husks glare at all of creation with milky, vacant eyes. When presented with danger, a husk's thousand-yard-stare can focus on nearby movement, but no glimmer of intellect is visible in their countenance. Somehow, air (or whatever passes for local atmosphere) is drawn and expelled through their lungs, resulting in an unholy horrific groan, but they cannot draw sustenance from these vapors. When seemingly frustrated or enraged, their raucous din becomes louder. Husks cannot form articulate speech, although some troubled witnesses claim they can hear sounds vaguely like intelligent words, usually no more than one or two syllables. Whether this cacophonous din is subtle communication or merely frustration, the sound of outraged husks always summons larger hordes of husks.

A single husk is listless, methodical, and predictable. It acts as though it has faint memories of things and places important to it in life, drifting towards opportunities to protect the locations of good memories or destroy former sources of trauma. It may recognize people important to it before resurrection, although this only briefly delays its killing spree. One drive unites all husks: they seek and destroy all living sentient beings. Husks have sought vengeance against those who wronged them before death. Multiple husks cooperate to focus their crude strength or tireless vigil at a common purpose, such as overtaking a starport, breaking into an animal's cage, or all battering at the same door with fearful colonists cowering on the other side of it.

Husks only possess crude manipulation. Anything more complicated than battering down a door or breaking a window confounds them, and simple mechanisms like door latches confuse them. That won't prevent them from relentlessly and repeatedly using trial and error until they find something that works. Some witnesses claim as hordes of husks grow larger, they become more resourceful. They often act with a single purpose. By some accounts, if a hundred

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

husks need to leap into a crevasse to form a crude bridge of bodies, shamblers behind them will crawl over shattered bodies to get to fearful villagers on the other side. Proximity to living things redoubles their efforts. They won't destroy themselves by obvious means, such as falling into a pit or walking into open flame, but proximity to the living enrages them enough to cause lapses in what passes for judgment.

When husks manifest on a planet, the local strain may be different than the ones witnessed on other worlds. These variations are known as *plagues*. Like a cold or virus that mutates over time, manifestations of evil may adapt to their environment or (as some theologians attest) the sins that summoned their resurrection. In one city, a well-aimed shot to the head may deal double or triple damage, while a chapel on another planet may be haunted by husks that can only be killed by wooden ammunition fired directly through the heart. Some plagues of animate dead consume the flesh of the living, using that fuel to power short bursts of speed, strength, or rage. Others eschew flesh-eating, and their abilities degrade more rapidly. A few plagues are empowered by manifestations of evil itself, taking their strength from places where humans have committed great atrocities, acts of desecration, or unforgivable sins.

Theurgic ritualists attest that despite these variations, many of the same holy rites are highly effective. Consecrated ground usually repels husks. If an act of atrocity, Antinomy, or blasphemy caused the plague to

gather, performing an act of atonement might cause the plague to perish. If the husks appear to be seeking revenge against the living, then punishing those heretics is another possible solution. Insightful mystics claim they can interpret the groans of the unholy or detect a pattern of clues to their motives or weaknesses. Since many husks are vulnerable to fire, Avestites often prefer a more direct method: burn everything. If all other methods fail, the husks continue their ceaseless vigil until all life is destroyed. No flesh shall be spared.

Special Abilities:

Dead Flesh — A husk's Body Resistance begins at 2, plus any armor they might be wearing.

Influence immunity: Husks are immune to mental and social states, as well as physical states that rely on the frailty of living bodies (Dazed, Mangled, Unconscious, etc.). Husks cannot be affected by social influence attempts.

SAMPLE HUSKS

HIRAN HUSK

Agent (creature) • Level: 5 • Size: 5

Following the closure of the Hira jumproute to Khayyam, a series of vicious battles between Hazat and Kurgan forces ravaged the landscape on many continents. Before the dead could be gathered and buried, many of them rose up on their own and shambled against their former foes, continuing the war long after their part in it was over, now with unholy strength. Some of these husk troops forced evacuations and abandonment of their areas, so that they still wander the empty battlefields, seeking to engage the enemy.

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	1	Pre	3
Dex	3	Per	3	Int	1
End	5	Will	2	Faith	3

Skills:

Fight	5
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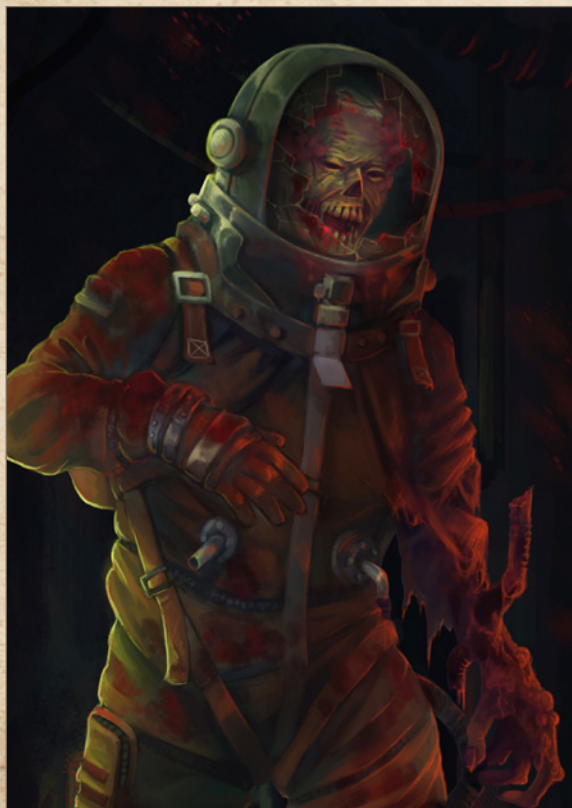
Actions:	Goal	Impact
Fist <i>strike</i>	12	3 dmg

Resistance: Body 4* | Mind 0 | Spirit 0
* Slamproof

Vitality: 15

Equipment: Torn leather armor

Surges: rating: 12 | number: 2



MEGARAN HUSK

Agent (creature) • Level: 3 • Size: 5

According to legend, this particular plague was last witnessed within the Megara asteroid complex. Allegedly, a radiation breach, chemical fire, and sudden breaching of airlocks all failed to eradicate the plague. The current whereabouts of this species are unknown, as there were no survivors of the infestation.

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	1	Pre	3
Dex	3	Per	2	Int	1
End	7	Will	2	Faith	3

Skills:

Fight	5
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Actions: *Goal* *Impact*

Fist <i>strike</i>	10	2 dmg
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Resistance: Body 2* | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

* Fireproof, Slamproof

Vitality: 13**Equipment:** Shredded clothing**Surges:** rating: 8 | number: 1

Monsters

Some of these were once creatures that had a natural place in their planet's ecosystems and made sense within a narrative of evolution. No longer. Second Republic science, Anunnaki radiation, or unholy powers have, for one reason or another, by one means or another, warped them into monstrosities.

PETRA WYRM

Agent (creature) • Level: 3 • Size: 9

Terrors lurk below. The petra wurm is an exotic subterranean lifeform capable of burrowing through solid rock, sand, or magma. Most of its life cycle is spent dormant, as it processes the minerals it has devoured, but in a furious burst of energy, it can tunnel its way through solid matter. As part of this process, it excretes the materials that cannot provide it sustenance, leaving a corridor of semi-solid silicate matter in its wake.

In desperate times, the petra wurm augments this sedimentary diet with living creatures. Fortunately for the sentient inhabitants of the Known Worlds, its ability to detect vibrations from the surface world is crude and indirect. It can only lunge from the world below to the world above across short distances, typically about 10 meters or less. When its would-be quarry draws near, the petra wurm surges out of the ground, attempting to crush a hapless victim in its craw. Devouring organic material takes slightly more time than processing rocky terrain, so the victim has a few moments to fend off its attacker, hopefully with help. If the wurm misses its target by a meter or two, it can still sense vibrations well enough to adjust for its error and shamble in the direction of the nearest panicky surface dweller. Stealth and calm are a sentient's best defenses in this situation.



One exotic variant of the petra wurm prefers a diet heavier in silicates, and as a result, favors environments with rolling sand dunes. The chances of surviving a desert petra wurm's predations are about the same, but people who live on desert worlds find ways to improve their odds. Some natives claim to have found an arrhythmic way of walking that confuses the petra wurm's ability to sense minor tremors. They may offer to teach tourists and explorers how to imitate that lumbering gait for a fee. Despite this generous tutelage, many offworlders who pay handsomely to learn the art of "sandwalking" mysteriously disappear in the desert, leaving much of their valuable equipment behind. Whether this is the result of an improperly executed sandwalk, incorrect instruction, or a misguided belief in the wurm's inability to read sandwalking is left for the contemplation of scholars and explorers.

HARGARD ROCKWYRM

Petra wyrms only appeared on Hargard 10 years ago. The Vuldrok claim they were smuggled in as eggs and grown by the "Hawkwyrd," but some speculate that they've been there much longer, living far beneath the mantle. Allegedly, they've only recently come to the surface due to some deep disturbance. Their sloughed-off plates are prized by Vuldrok armorers for use in scale mail (+1 Body Resistance, Hardproof, +200 lb cost).

Characteristics:

Str	9	Wits	1	Pre	5
Dex	3	Per	3	Int	3
End	10	Will	7	Faith	5

Skills:

Fight	5
Vigor	9

Actions: *Goal* *Impact*

<i>Strike</i> from below	15	8 dmg (Slam)
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Resistance: Body 7 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0**Vitality:** 17**Surges:** rating: 12 | number: 1

FIREBAT

Woe betide any fool who dares disturb the lair of a firebat. These temperamental and territorial avian creatures will do just about anything to protect their offspring. It's easy to spot one flying overhead. Its 15-foot-wide leathery, batrachian wings form a distinctive profile. Clutching pteranodon claws and a long, vicious beak contributes to its fearsome form. Like many

flying reptiloids, they have rock-hard hides, but a firebat's rugose epidermis is lubricated with a moist, viscous fluid seeping from subcutaneous pores. Avestites have confirmed that the substance is very similar to the naturally distilled ka oil used to fuel Inquisitorial flamethrowers. When a firebat is angered — an event that seems to happen rather frequently — the incendiary pteranodon clicks its stony molars to produce a spark, resulting in a pyrotechnic detonation that's extremely harmful to most living things below, but it's quite comfortable for the well-lubricated flying reptiloid.

Firebat eggs are just as distinctive: Because of an unusually long gestation period, the eggs have a rocky outer crust to protect offspring for prolonged periods of time. Before the embryo is fully formed, the spawn-in-a-shell is suffused in roiling fluids approximating magma. If the embryo doesn't fully form, most likely because the ovum wasn't properly impregnated, the magma hardness into a bright, colorful series of igneous layers — a medium some artists prize.

Irresponsible off-worlders harvest firebat eggs, but they don't always know whether a live firebat is nestled within one. Scavengers and Engineers have devised crude flame chambers for storing firebat eggs, preparing an incendiary trigger in case the critter inside hatches. Not everyone takes such expensive precautions, however, as it tends to eat into profits. In this way, fire bat eggs have been transported to distant worlds, where hardy fireproof offspring eventually escape, propagate, and inevitably incinerate.

Most eggs don't hatch, so a firebat matriarch will tend to make nests far apart from each other. It's an evolutionary adaption that ensures one compromised nest is isolated from a dozen others. A clutch of firebats patrols their network of nests, terrifying and startling interlopers with shock-and-awe displays of fiery fury. Because firebats do not care about the finer distinctions concerning threat levels, they attack any sentient who approaches, regardless of whether a human or alien intends to steal its eggs. Xeno-hunters have tried to exploit this instinct, watching the flight path of a firebat and timing its patrol so that swift gatherers can get in, steal valuable eggs, and get out before a firestorm hits. Those who fail die in fire.

CADAVAN FIREBAT

Agent (creature) • Level: 2 • Size: 2

You'd think that an icy world like Cadavus would hold no niche for the firebat, but they've figured out ways to hide their nests at ground-level beneath windblown,

scraggly trees and bushes. The local serfs actually prize them for their ability to produce flame on the coldest nights, although attempts to tame them and keep them in captivity have resulted in many a fiery end. Still, desperate parties have learned out to seek them out, anger them, and use the resulting flames to get their cookfires burning.

Characteristics:

Str	2	Wits	1	Pre	2
Dex	8	Per	5	Int	5
End	4	Will	5	Faith	5

Skills:

Fight	4
Vigor	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Fireball	14	6(3) dmg; Flame; once every three turns
Bite	6	1 dmg

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 9

Surges: rating: 4 | number: 1

Creature Creation

The Second Republic in its self-proclaimed “infinite wisdom” truly messed up an awful lot of species at a genetic level, making all manner of creatures that, once let loose into the wild, exploded into all sorts of unforeseen niches. (Ask any native Hawkwood about cryphota and watch them go pale.) The worst ones were bred for war, but even the ones made for the “best of reasons” can still be a shock.

Even without that era's meddling, a number of worlds host some very strange beasts. Many of these creatures have managed to (accidentally or purposefully) migrate to other worlds. That means the predatory horrors of Ungavorox or the symbiot worlds might appear on even the tamest of worlds, if only for a limited time.

With that in mind, you should keep your troupe guessing. Here are some guidelines to use when making up creatures both mundane and strange.

NATURE'S WAY

Consider these concepts when creating a creature: senses, cognition, offense, and defense.

SENSES

Lifefoms need the ability to sense their environment and react to it. This can include a dizzying array of sensory organs that allow for at least rudimentary



identification of what the lifeform senses, as well as the ability to react to obstacles.

Creatures that are impaired in one sense (say, vision) usually make up for it with a heightened sense (hearing or touch).

A creature's role in its food chain can also affect its senses. Predators need to find prey, and prey need to detect predators, but simple slime molds don't need such sophisticated senses.

COGNITION

Animal behaviors can be broken down into three categories: innate, distributed, or noetic. Each type of behavior includes its own methods for reacting to the environment.

An innate behavior is fully instinctual. It's a set of programmed behaviors that react to the environment. They're used to overcome obstacles and facilitate access over time. (Simple machines can be programmed to mimic this kind of behavior, which can make the machines seem quite emotional over time, as their programmed behaviors adapt to better deal with sentients.)

In distributed intelligences, each separate component combines to form a greater whole but can also act autonomously. Colony-based insects often act this way, as do cephalopods, where each tentacle possesses a different brain from the core host. Working against a collective can be dangerous. One curious encounter with a couple of scouts may escalate to a well-executed attack after the scouts return to their hive.

The term "noetic" means that an animal at this level understands higher-level concepts. Fully sentient species like humans and vorox are noetic, but

animals in this category are a slightly different subset. Certain birds with a need to navigate three-dimensional space fit within this definition. Primates and other puzzle solvers are also noetic. Travelers sometimes hear rumors of bizarre creatures that recognize and feed on concepts, like love or anticipation or justice. These cryptic creatures obviously "think" in relation to their needs, but they are not sentient in any recognizable sense.

OFFENSE

Predators are specialists in offensive techniques, though prey may possess one or two of their own. The category of natural weaponry includes everything from the bone-shattering bites of tundra wolves to the hyper-caustic secretions of a particularly nasty mobile mold that enjoys growing under fusion reactors.

Animals that produce venoms rely on substances that cripple or incapacitate their targets. A venom might even start digesting its target. As frightening as that might be, plenty of animals offer more unique adaptations to unusual environments, such as erupting into flames, inducing subsonic panic, or even devouring thoughts.

DEFENSE

Animals often avoid threats through camouflage, masquerade, selective environments, or activity during a selective time of day or night. A more exotic defense is apostasy: the ability to have a common form that is easily predated and a rarer one that is much harder.

A nasty form of apostatic life was found on one of the Hazat worlds, where a hunting party was shooting down a troop of multi-legged primates that local folklore said were bad luck to kill. The hunters later discovered that their prey were juveniles when the adult version burrowed up beneath them and devastated most of their hunting party.

Prey animals use a significant combination of defenses to avoid being eaten. To reduce their risk, they may employ bright coloring to warn predators off (if they're toxic), use mimicry, induce fear, signal to others, distract pursuers, or survive in a herd.

Prey may instead fight through chemical means or through a communal action (like a stampede). Travelers have seen communal species in which one or more members of a herd become suicidally brash in order to save the others. Some species of prey release noxious internal fluids. The scrup monkey, known to the Decados, can drop all its waste at once. Its effluvia smells and tastes sweet, which often distracts and entices its predator. However, that offal also hosts a variety of parasites, guaranteed to make any predator eating it regret that decision later.

INFLUENCING CREATURES

Creatures that are not fully sentient are immune to most forms of influence. Characters can use the Animalia skill (often in conjunction with a capability like Beast Lore) against creatures in ways that approximate certain maneuvers, like Charm's *befriend* or Impress' *daunt*, but these provocations are crudely performed; the results rarely persist for longer than a scene at best.

Each creature or encounter is different, so the GM must decide whether to allow a character to attempt this type of influence and what its effect might be. Perhaps the bright light sparkling off a weaving-and-bobbing sword can be used to *confuse* or *mesmerize* an animal. Maybe a house pet could be *castigated* for clawing the furniture.

Of course, the most common prey response is to flee, and there are a number of interesting ways to accomplish that. One unusual technique certain animals use to escape is autotomy: sacrificing a body part so that the predator eats one portion instead of the entire animal.

CREATURE TRAITS

Most creatures are built as Agents, although some can operate as Extras. Particularly unique or challenging creatures might even become Headliners.

CHARACTERISTICS

Body characteristics: These statistics are the same as they are for other characters.

Faith: In a creature, this characteristic is equivalent to courage. Predators tend to have it higher, and prey have it lower. It's rarely over 7, except for antagonistic creatures like wolverines, wasps, or alien equivalents.

Intuition: Represents instinct. Most wild animals have at least 5 in this characteristic, but certain domesticated animals (especially farm animals) might have it lower than 3.

Perception: Predators and quicker prey have this trait at 5 or higher. Others hover around 5. This trait is used for instinctual perception tests.

Presence: Useful for both attracting mates and scaring away competitors.

Will: Stubbornness. Used to resist attempts to command or tame them through the Animalia skill. Wild creatures tend to have more Will than domesticated creatures.

Wits: Most creatures have Wits 1 or 2; it's rarely higher. Even smarter or cunning creatures are limited, relying primarily on Intuition.

LEVEL

As Agents, creatures are rated by level. There is no strict measure for this. It's a ballpark call on the GM's part, based mainly on how challenging the creature is to deal with.

The better and more deadly a creature's forms of attack, the higher its level should be, especially for strange and unique weaponry (flame breath, acidic spit, etc.).

You can use the examples provided in this chapter as guidelines.

SKILLS

As with any NPC, you only need to list skills above 3. There are many skills creatures don't have, such as Tech Redemption.

Skill	Used for
Charm	Used to gain affection from sentients and attract mates. Domesticated animals tend to have more ranks than wild animals.
Fight	Bite, claws, spurs, beaks, etc.
Impress	Primarily used for scaring away threats.
Knavery	Employed for clever escapes, feints, and hidden defenses.
Observe	Empowers <i>spot</i> rolls to detect danger or prey or to identify food.
Sneak	Includes pouncing on unsuspecting prey or avoiding detection.
Vigor	Used as an escape trait. Animals who run, jump, or fly have at least 5 ranks. Also helpful for animals that sacrifice a limb to predators.
Sleight of Hand	Used by clever animals (crows, monkeys) to steal and hide objects.
Survival	Useful when gaining food; also, it's activated when using unique powers endemic to a specific environment.

SIZE

Creatures range in Size from negligible (an insect) to gigantic (15+). Size ranks mainly describe a combination of height and weight.

Size	Examples
1	Cat, bird
2	Small dog (beagle), monkey
3	Large dog (mastiff), small ape (chimpanzee)
4	Medium ape (orangutan)
5	Large cat (panther)
6	Large ape (gorilla), very large cat (tiger), donkey
7	Horse
8	Brute (beast of burden)

SURGE

A creature's Surge rating is figured by this formula:

Highest force characteristic (Strength, Wits, or Presence) + level.

The number of surges a creature can use in a scene is based on level:

Level	Surges
1 – 3	1
4 – 6	2
7 – 8	3
10	4

VITALITY

A creature's Vitality is figured by this formula:

$$5 + \text{Size} + \text{level}$$

A 3rd-level gorilla-like creature (Size 6) would thus have a Vitality of 14, whereas a 3rd-level rattlesnake-like creature (Size 2) would have a Vitality of 10.

ATTACKS

Below are some typical attacks that animals can make with their natural weaponry. Every creature is different, though, so use these as guidelines, not hard rules.

Attack	Goal	Impact
Beak <i>strike</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 2 dmg + Hard Size 3-5: 3 dmg + Hard Size 6+: 4 dmg + Hard
Bite	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 2 dmg Size 3-5: 3 dmg Size 6+: 4 dmg
Claw/talon <i>strike</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 3 dmg Size 3-5: 4 dmg Size 6+: 5 dmg
Horn(s) <i>strike</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 3 dmg + Hard, Slam Size 3-5: 5 dmg + Hard, Slam Size 6+: 7 dmg + Hard, Slam
Pincer <i>strike</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 2 dmg + target is grappled Size 3-5: 3 dmg + target is grappled Size 6+: 4 dmg + target is grappled
Tentacle <i>constrict</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 1 dmg + target is grappled Size 3-5: 2 dmg + target is grappled Size 6+: 3 dmg + target is grappled
Tentacle <i>whip</i>	Fight + Strength	Size 1-2: 1 dmg + Slam Size 3-5: 2 dmg + Slam Size 6+: 3 dmg + Slam
Stinger <i>strike</i>	Fight + Dexterity	Size 1-2: 1 dmg + venom Size 3-5: 2 dmg + venom Size 6+: 3 dmg + venom

SPECIAL ABILITIES

In addition to natural weaponry, some creatures have special abilities and attacks. These can get pretty bizarre, resembling nothing known on old Urth.

Barbs: The claw/stinger/etc. tears flesh as it withdraws. Add the Mangle damage property.

Electric shock: The creature can emit an electrical shock to accompany its attack. Add the Shock attack and damage properties. Often, this can be used only a limited number of times per scene (perhaps equal to Vigor).

Fierce: The animal's sheer ferocity throws opponents off balance, halving their non-armor Body Resistance.

Fire: Certain creatures can spit flame or the organic equivalent of Molotov cocktails. Add the Flame attack and damage properties. Often, this can be used only a limited number of times per scene (perhaps equal to Vigor). In some cases, this might be an area attack, directed against anyone within its radius.

Psychic: While creatures rarely exhibit the kind of psychic control that sentients can attain, some rare

few use psychic powers to attract, incapacitate, or distract prey or to avoid predators. Some even use thoughts and emotions as food sources. The sky's the limit on the sorts of weirdness you can devise for these creatures. Use the psychic powers in **Chapter 5: The Occult** in the **Character Book** as guidelines.

Venom: The creature's attack injects venom into the wound. For examples, see *Drugs and Poisons* in **Chapter 4: Technology** of the **Character Book**.

Golems

After the collapse of the Second Republic, survivors in the Church wanted reasons for humankind's fall from grace. Technology was an easy scapegoat, especially whenever it appeared in obviously human form, exemplifying man's false pride. Since the Pancreator chose a human, Zebulon, as His Prophet, the act of creating artificial soulless life in any humanoid form was the height of hubris. Even crafting a machine capable of imitating thought in any form was an attempt to steal the power of creation from its place in the Empyrean.

As humanity devolved after the Fall, Inquisitors ruthlessly hunted and destroyed forms of artificial intelligence, especially any made to resemble, emulate, or replace the human form. The few self-aware automatons that survived became mythical horrors. Unaging and inhumanly patient, legendary golems hid for centuries, waiting for a time when they could emerge from the shadows and fulfill the tasks for which they were designed.

Self-aware AI brains rely on a cephalic matrix crafted from a rare element called pygmallium. This construct simulates the neural pathways of the human brain. The original designers tended to prefer minds that paralleled human quirks and foibles. Like humans, their creations could display emotions, both good and bad. Hardwired subroutines installed a few signature traits nearly impossible to remove. The most common ones were a desire to serve humans and a need to protect them from harm. These restrictions could be extended through a "behavior repressor" that enforced a golem's servitude. Golems tended to resent this additional programming, reacting much as a human would react to electroshock therapy or slavery.

Humans created golems with a wide array of forms and functions. Most have a specialization, such as combat, exploration, or companionship. The oldest ones (approximating tech level 4) were little more than grunt labor or amusing diversions. Reflective AI (typically seen around TL5 and 6) relies on algorithms and scripted dialogue designed to mirror

human activities and thoughts, but it does not qualify as true self-awareness.

As technology advanced throughout the Second Republic, artificial intelligence improved, until at TL8, it became indistinguishable from organic sentience. Vastly intelligent, they allegedly expressed a complex tapestry of emotions, predicted the activity of lesser minds, and accessed entire worlds' worth of information.

This created a theological problem for the Church that, thanks to the Fall, it never truly had to wrestle with. It resorted instead to flamethrowers to melt down any instances that might raise the thorny question. TL8 golems (and even some TL7 models) display reactions resembling human emotions, but whether they actually feel emotions is a highly contested subject, one that cannot be answered so long as the remaining representatives are forced to hide their very existences. There's no way for anyone in the Known Worlds to track down how many of them are left. They may still walk among the citizens of the empire.

Only a handful of engineers still possess the level of skill and knowledge to recreate these marvels. During the Emperor Wars, engineers began experimenting again with reflective intelligence. In the Pax Alexius, those among the wealthy elite who are obsessive enough can commission and/or purchase (hyper-expensive) new golems that have driven, "memorable" personalities, but not true sentience.

As one would expect, the Church watches these patrons closely. Some investigators claim to have seen evidence of automatons becoming self-aware — a revelation that nearly always leads to the golem's destruction, along with its creator. On some worlds, creating a golem is an act punishable by execution. Even the most zealous engineers make sure their creation's knowledge of tech is lower than their own; after all, golems creating more golems might threaten humanity's very existence.

Special Abilities:

Hardy: Golems get +10 to their Vitality rating. Their Body Resistance usually begins at 4 or higher, depending on the thickness of their armor plating.

Influence immunity: Most golems are immune to mental and social states, as well as physical states that rely on the frailty of organic bodies (Dazed, Mangled, Unconscious, etc.). Only truly sentient golems can be affected by social influence attempts. Even barely intelligent golems can, however, perform crude coercion influence (such as *daunt*).

Inorganic: Golems don't get Revivals, even when they are Headliners.

Tech-agnostic: Golems don't suffer from techgnostic overload, even the most sentient among them.

Surviving Golems

Second Republic robots are virtually immortal if they receive regular maintenance and avoid destruction. Some conspiratorially minded humans believe they're capable of communicating with each other, no doubt as part of some hidden agenda. Since any golem exhibiting such behaviors would be hunted and destroyed, it's a difficult claim to prove. Fortunately, the crudest golems are, as we'll soon see, simple-minded and loyal.

LUNK (TL5)

Lunks were built for grunt labor and programmed to perform repetitive, mindless tasks. A Lunk is simply not capable of higher reason. Since its most common adversaries are rocks, radiation, metal, and water, it doesn't need to be smart. Thick steel and simple engine parts ensure a Lunk can take a beating without retreating, working through any apocalypse. For this reason, they're one of the easiest golems to resurrect.

The most complicated part of its programming is obeying its Robotic Laws: strictures preventing it from harming sentients or allowing them to come to harm. Brute force usually prevails for a Lunk, but they can also be tasked with rescuing humans and aliens from harmful environments. Sometimes, this challenges their simple minds, so not all succeed.

WORKER UNIT 3

Agent (golem) • Level: 2 • Size: 6

"Okay, pal, where do you want it? I live to serve, but I ain't got all day here."

Description: This Lunk is a piece of humanoid construction equipment, built more for function than form. Most Lunks don't need a human visage; instead, their user-interface consists of a monitor that displays a shifting sine wave, bouncing meter, or crudely animated mouth as they speak.

Characteristics:

Str	9	Wits	5	Pre	3
Dex	5	Per	5	Int	1
End	9	Will	9	Faith	1

Skills:

Crafts	9
Drive	5
Fight	4
Focus	5
Melee	4
Observe	3
Vigor	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Drill</i> rock/person	13	5 dmg; Ultra Hard, Slam
<i>Jackhammer</i>	13	7 dmg; Hard, Slam

Capabilities: Science Lore (Geology), Transport (Landcraft)

Resistance: Body 7 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 23

Equipment (built-in): Pneumatic drill, jackhammer

Surges: rating: 11 | number: 1

PROTECTOR (TL6)

Emperor Wars-era engineers created a new generation of Protectors to act as bodyguards for the highest bidders. A Protector is obsessed with its task, relentlessly evaluating all possible threats as it works to protect a single target. Patrons willing to spend a little more may customize a Protector's appearance to put a loved one at ease. Such efforts usually end up as a mockery of whatever they were intended to resemble. Furthermore, social skills aren't really a specialty for TL6 golems kludged together from old parts. A Protector will gladly take a bullet for its ward in a combat situation, but in social situations, they're known to repeatedly challenge or question anyone who approaches its chosen ward until instructed to relent.

PRAETORIAN



Agent (golem) • Level: 4 • Size: 5

"Caution! Caution! Penitent approaching! Identify yourself, citizen. Keep your appendages where I can see them. Reach for the stars."

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Description: Cobbled together like a patchwork Pygmalion, this bot is at best a clinking, clanking, cantankerous construct. You know you're getting your money's worth when a golem has spinning gears, pulsing turbines, and the occasional plume of black smoke — it *looks* like it wants to kill, crush, and destroy. Most Protectors are inherently two-faced: when all is well, whatever visage its creator chose beams beatifically, presenting a manic permanent smile. When danger is near, the face-plate flips (or its helm performs a quick 180) revealing a fearsome, monstrous countenance. Weapons are features here, so any place where a weapon can be menacingly displayed adds to its value.

Characteristics:

Str	12	Wits	5	Pre	7
Dex	7	Per	7	Int	3
End	12	Will	7	Faith	5

Skills:

Drive	5
Fight	7
Focus	5
Impress	7
Melee	7
Remedy	3
Shoot	7
Sneak	3
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Shoot blaster	14	9 dmg
Shoot flamer	16	4(4) dmg
Shoot stunner	15	3 dmg; Shock

Capabilities: Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns), Transport (Landcraft)

Resistance: Body 8 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 24

Equipment (built-in): Blaster rifle, flamewgun, stunner

Surges: rating: 16 | number: 2

COMPANION (TL7)

Golems that have survived for a thousand years with their functionality intact are understandably rare. At TL 8 and higher, androids look exactly like human beings, but since they're so adapt at hiding, no one really knows how many exist. Companions are limited to TL7 tech; they're more common and easily identifiable. Each has a basic ability to interface with think machines, and most are capable of a mild degree of diplomacy and/or banter. Utility ensures survival, so a Companion's best chances depend on acting as a servant or slave — at least, until circumstances change. Most pretend to be pacifists... until you hand one a gun and point.

CHAPERONE

Agent (golem) • Level: 2 • Size: 5

"Goodness me! You'll catch your death of cold, mistress! Allow me. Cold does not concern me."

Description: This Companion golem has the same shape, voice, and movement as a typical human, but its appearance is obviously inhuman. Its face is an expressionless mask; its skin is polished synthsteel. If it has capabilities greater than the humans who accompany it, it wisely keeps them hidden. A Companion that looks threatening is a Companion that humans are tempted to destroy, so most present a façade more worthy of pity than fear.

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	7	Pre	6
Dex	7	Per	7	Int	3
End	7	Will	7	Faith	5

Skills:

Charm	6
Fight	4
Focus	6
Impress	4
Melee	4
Observe	6
Perform	5
Remedy	2
Shoot	6
Sneak	4
Vigor	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Entreat	12	Target is Entreated.

Capabilities: Court Customs

Resistance: Body 6 | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 22

Equipment: None

Surges: rating: 9 | number: 1

Beyond the Borders

Outside of the Known Worlds, two major alien empires endure: the Vau Hegemony and the Symbiot Reaches. The vau are the oldest and most advanced race yet encountered. While the Anunnaki are older, a living member of that species (or multiple species?) has never been met, and nobody even knows what they looked like. The symbiots are a newer star-faring race, born from a melding of human and xolotl (a parasitic entity), although they have "converted" other races since their genesis and seem intent on claiming many worlds within the Empire and Vuldrok Space.

The Vau

(Pronounced “vow,” heavily nasal at the end.)

The vau are an ancient race who first achieved star travel in the 1800s (Urth calendar). Very little is known about their ways, and they purposefully keep it that way. The vau actively guard their borders against human intrusion, but they rarely enter the Known Worlds themselves. They seem to view Known Worlders as unwelcome children, although they are rarely overtly hostile to them. The philosophy seems to be, “As long as they stay on their side of the fence, we’ll get along fine.”

They have a caste society, with a peasant class on the bottom, a soldier class above, an artisan class above that, and a mandarin class (including priests) at the top. Few details of the intricacies of vau culture are understood; few humans have witnessed them firsthand. The mandarins are not the leaders, but they are the only diplomats that humans are allowed to meet. They seem to be bureaucrats for the most part, ferrying messages back and forth from the true vau leaders, who have yet to be encountered. Three worlds are found along the borders of the Empire where vau maintain some form of presence, although humans are rarely allowed to see too deeply into their activities there. The fact that the vau eventually allowed humans to colonize these worlds caused many to believe they were finally beginning to accept humans, but more cynical people (the colonists among them) claim that colonies were only allowed because the vau wanted to scrutinize humans for weaknesses.

More recent intelligence from a diplomatic foray into the Hegemony has revealed that there are multiple sentient species living there, each with different places within the Hegemony’s hierarchies.

The mandarins rely obsessively upon what they call “Prophecy,” a mélange of cultural and strategic advice revealed to them by “Prophecy machines.” These appear to be think machines that link into a Hegemony-wide network or AI of some sort. Their think machines can parse vast amounts of data to produce eerily accurate forecasts of coming events. Certain Engineers posit that these machines might even be able to view time as if it were a dimension like space, making the past, present, and future perceivable as an already existing object. While Church doctrine accepts some degree of pre-existing fate wrought by the Pancreator, it abhors the idea that an alien race can simply consult it with the press of a button. Ambassadors to the vau claim that the mandarins do nothing without first consulting Prophecy and deliberating over its utterances, which perhaps explains the glacial pace at which they seem to employ diplomacy.

Appearance: The vau are tall (averaging seven feet in height: Size 6) and thin. Their skin is somewhat wrinkled, and they have nostrils in place of protruding noses. Their eyes are pupil-less, although they vary in color. They dress in different fashions depending on their caste status: Soldiers invariably wear segmented and lacquered armor with an energy pike, while mandarins wear long and ornate robes with elegant shoulder pads and headpieces.

Tech: Vautech is elegant and aesthetic, displaying graceful curving lines and seductive sigils. Most devices involve energy of some sort, even simple tools. Their technology was superior to humanity’s during the Diaspora, but the later Second Republic exceeded it in a few areas. However, since the fall of the Republic, the vau are again in the lead.

They do not have a progressive society, and their technology has changed little since before the Second Republic. The basis of their tech, like their religion, medicine and culture, is energy. They are masters of forces. Starship grav plates and personal energy shields were created from stolen vautech. If you want a first-class shield, a vau engineer is the sentient who can get you the best one. However, since the vau are forbidden from trading technology to humans, this is a secretive black market.

Citizens of the Hegemony are raised in high-tech environments and their education prepares them to deal with technology better than Known Worlders. Most of them have the perks Comprehend Tech Level at TL5, TL6, and TL7. Mandarins and workers often also have TL8. Hence, vau rarely suffer techgnostic overload.

ENCOUNTERING VAU

It is highly unlikely that most Known Worlders will ever encounter a vau. For those player characters that do, they probably won’t get into a successful dice rolling situation with a mandarin. However, if they happen to meet a vau soldier on a world like Vrill-Ya, Manitou, or Vau, you can use the following traits.

VAU SOLDIERS

Headliner • Noble 8 • Vau Hegemony • Soldier

“Your presumption to attack me is... suicidal. Yes, that is the word: self-killing. To attack me is to kill yourself.”

Description: Tall, thin, muscled, and sheathed in carapaced armor made of an unknown metal, the soldier wears a neutral expression. It doesn’t seem to lose its temper even if attacked. A vau soldier maintains a monk-like equanimity and poise, even when it is eviscerating an enemy with its energy stave.

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	3	Pre	3
Dex	6	Per	4	Int	3
End	5	Will	5	Faith	5

Skills:

Drive	2
Fight	7
Focus	4
Impress	4
Intrusion	2
Melee	7
Observe	5
Shoot	8
Vigor	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 9 9	Removes a state.
Stave-axe <i>strike</i>	14	6 dmg
Stave-blaster <i>shoot</i>	14	9 dmg (blaster)

Capabilities: Armor (Combat), Artifact Weapon (Energy Stave), Lore (Hegemony), Read/Speak Middle Speech, Speak Urthish, Think Machines, Transport (Aircraft)

Perks: Comprehend Tech Level (TL5, 6, 7), Hegemony Knight, Ruthless, Stoic Body, Stoic Mind, Stoic Spirit

Resistance: Body 9 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 29

Revivals: rating: 13 | number: 3

Equipment: Assault energy shield (5/15; 30 hits), energy stave

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 15 | number: 3



Symbiots

Shapeshifters. Parasites. Godless beasts who turn friends into foes. These are some of the various facts and/or beliefs humans have about symbiots, but little is really understood about this sentient species that poses such a great threat to humanity. The symbiots claim to perceive a “lifeweb” stretching across space, knitting and weaving deeply into planets and across the stars. Allegedly, they’re either out to claim supreme hunting rights over their food chain or they’re protecting it from harm.

Each symbiot is a unique creature that finds it hard to confederate with fellow symbiots. Although they appear to have developed tribes or clans, humans know nothing about these family groups. They breed among themselves, creating bloodlines by selecting strong genetic traits, but also by parasitically “converting” other species (including human, obun, ukar, and vorox). They claim the conversion is voluntary once the target has seen the Lifeweb, but Known Worlders don’t believe this claim for a moment. They’ve seen firsthand what happens when friends and family have been converted: they turn into bestial killing machines or seductive parasites.

Symbiots have a “motherform,” the base shape they’re most in tune with, usually tied to a particular species of flora or fauna, such as an oak or a bear. They are molecularly amorphous (shapeshifters) and claim to have a special, mystical relationship with the universe. Some claim that they have awakened their cellular consciousness and exist in more than one dimension.

The xolotl, the race that co-created the symbiots, are believed to be extinct. The few encountered on Chernobog are thought to have been the remnants of a previously extant star-faring race, or perhaps they’re the “pets” of an extinct star-faring race who seeded them throughout many worlds (verified by discovered fossil remnants). No xolotl has been encountered since the initial symbiot conversion, although the Imperial Eye is said to be desperate to find one they can study, hoping to glean a weakness with which to attack the symbiots.

Appearance: A symbiot’s motherform is an organic blend of human/animal or human/plant, displaying a definite emphasis on the human side. A human symbiot can pass among other humans, so long as no one gets a real good look at him, but he will usually be revealed if he’s seen naked in full light. Some feature always betrays his true race, whether that’s fur, a carapace, fangs, claws, cat-eyes, leaves and branches, horns, tail, etc. Of course, as shapeshifters, they can take on different shapes as needed. Alien symbiots, such as obun or vorox, look like representatives of their race with animal or plant feature exceptions.

Tech: Symbiot technology is organic and alive: living guns and bullets, swords and krinth-flesh armor, acid-spitting shexeez snakes, etc. They grow this non-sentient equipment from plants or raise them as animals. Each tribe has its own methods and special organic technology. Even their spaceships are organic (though few people have seen their weird, insectlike hulks).

ENCOUNTERING SYMBIOTS

By the Pancreator's grace — and the muscle of the Stigmata Garrison — most Known Worlders will not encounter symbiots within the Known Worlds. Still, some do slip through the blockades....

GOODMAN MCGILL



Agent • Yeoman 2 • al-Malik serf • Scout

"A crashed ship? I haven't seen a crashed ship. I'm just a humble hunter. Don't mind me." (*blinks eyes with nictitating membranes*)

Description: McGill was out hunting when he saw a strange meteor fall from the sky. Investigating, he found what looked like a giant seed-pod driven into the ground, cracked open and oozing milky liquid. When the liquid moved and came at him, he screamed and ran. He wasn't fast enough. He now knows that he was foolish to run, for that would have denied him the gift of a connection to

the Lifeweb. He is now one of the truly living, not the cut-off dead thing he was before. He is now a symbiot. His real challenge is figuring out how to escape the notice of his former friends and family, even as he contemplates how to get close enough to give them the gift of his star-seed milk.

He appears human, although his skin is extremely oily. His eyes have nictitating membranes, like a frog, so he wears a wide-brimmed hat to hide them. His voice gurgles a bit, as if he has phlegm in his throat. His throat is the least human thing about him, as it now has become an organ capable of producing a sonic blast.

He himself is not contagious, and he cannot convert others to symbiotism. The weird "milk" he carries in his waterskin, however, is semi-sentient and highly contagious.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	3	Pre	3
Dex	3	Per	4	Int	3
End	3	Will	3	Faith	5

Skills:

Vigor 6

Actions:

Sonic screech Goal Impact
9 As a womp gun stunner: 5 dmg; area 2m; Shock; Slam

Resistance: Body 1 (3)* | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

*slippery skin: +2 Body Resistance, +2 goal to resist/escape grapples

Vitality: 12

Equipment: Thick hide armor, knife, bow

Surges: rating: 5 | number: 1

Anunnaki Artifacts

The universe is full of the remains of earlier civilizations, both human and alien. Some of these are truly unique and even magical. Psychics swear that occult power seeps from certain structures found in ruins, while the Church whispers about demonic or angelic powers.

While these artifacts are objects, they skirt the line between the animate and inanimate, between non-sentient and sentient. Anunnaki artifacts are more like NPCs: they often exhibit agency and the ability to get player characters into trouble.

Gargoyles

Found in the form of brutish beasts, these objects are in ruins throughout the Known Worlds and beyond. They're always associated with the Anunnaki. They come in many artistic styles, most notably statuary or bas relief, and their images adorn many Ur ruins.

Known to be efficacious against evil occult effects, they're often placed on buildings or on the prows of starships to defend against evil influence. Sensitive psychics and theurgists all aver to a Gargoyle's power. Indeed, no ship with a Gargoyle prow has yet encountered a Void Kraken (see below).

Gargoyles are rare but still found frequently enough to spark fights for ownership between the emperor, nobles, priests, and merchants. They sell for an ungodly amount of firebirds, and every faction is a willing buyer, although those who miss out on the sale will hold a grudge against the seller — a good way to make enemies.

Scholars disagree about the purpose of these Gargoyles. Some claim they're depictions of the Anunnaki themselves. Others say they are but images from the Anunnaki's fancy. Still others claim they're images of horrors the Anunnaki fought, while many insist they're guardians against even worse horrors.

Those with some form of mystical vision (such as Wyrd Sight or Second Sight) can tell that Gargoyles are not merely stone or alloy; they exude a mysterious, unreadable aura. They also hamper the actions of Urge and Hubris, although to a varying degree; some Gargoyles are more efficacious than others. The most legendary Gargoyle, called Urzenkai and found in the wastes of Nowhere, is said to generate omens to certain individuals. People come from all over on pilgrimage to see it, despite the dangers of the nearby Stigmata system.

Traits: The power of a Gargoyle is rated from 1 to 10. It will completely dampen Urge or Hubris levels equal or lower than its rating; dark twins will be put back to sleep and Hubris effects will not reveal themselves.

Soul Shards

Psychic crystal shards are powerful artifacts. Studied extensively by Second Republic scientists of the Phavian Institute, they were deemed to be elements, not alien-made artifacts. Arguments ensued over how such elements were created: Are they naturally occurring, or do they require an alchemical process using Pre-Adamite superscience? Evidence exists for both arguments, although the evidence for the former only occurs near Ur ruins. These crystals are highly sought after by not only psychics, but also by the Church, as priests seek to hide them.

Traits: Soul Shards act as a wyrd point coffer. The storage capacity depends on the size of the crystal: A hand-held shard can hold up to 20 WP, while a menhir can hold over 100 WP.

In addition, each Shard can be attuned to one psychic path, boosting any use of powers in that path. A handheld shard will give +1 to goal rolls, while a menhir may provide +6.

Finally, Soul Shards are known to be helpful in healing psychological wounds or neuroses. They can aid in balancing an imbalanced personality, giving favorable rolls to *shake it off* attempts as well as any therapy (such as the Empathy *minister* and Focus *rally* maneuvers).

Philosophers Stones

The most powerful of all Pre-Adamite artifacts is a Philosophers Stone. This is a catch-all term for a class of powerful items: They come in many shapes and sizes but universally allow their wielders to break the laws of reality. Each stone is unique, and they are all greatly sought after. Philosophers Stones are neither strictly technological nor purely occult; instead, they're something transcending both paradigms.

Traits: You should feel free to make up whatever power you see fit for a Philosophers Stone. Each stone should be allowed one power, but this can be an incredible one. As an example, the most sought-after stone in history was found by Emperor Vladimir. It allowed any ship it was placed on to jump between stars without the use of a jumpgate — a never-before known phenomenon. The stone was instrumental in allowing Vladimir to create the office of the emperor. It was hidden by him before his coronation and has yet to be discovered again.

Philosophers Stones are worth any price. Rumors exist of crafty peasants lucky enough to uncover one in some forsaken alien ruin; these lucky few have attained peerage (noble status) by gifting one to a lord with the power to grant such boons. Despite this, most people believe that anyone finding such a treasure would be killed as others rushed to seize it.

Myths and Legends

In an atmosphere of superstition, many myths and legends have arisen. The interpretation of strange and alien phenomena by authority figures is often considered more important than the phenomena itself. Fact is rarely separated from opinion, for the perceptions of the qualified observer (i.e., an Inquisitor) are considered part of the truth. The question becomes not whose facts are right or wrong, but whose are more valuable, worthwhile, or "safe." The Church is the near-universally acknowledged leader in this arena. Non-Church approved interpretation of phenomena can be dangerous, and those spreading it may find themselves sought by the Inquisition. Below are some of the more prevalent mythologies of the people who populate the Known Worlds.

The Fading Suns

It is a true and universally acknowledged fact that the suns are fading. Even the vau recognize this. But why? There are as many answers as there are opinions. The Church is undecided, and many sects battle over interpretation. In general, however, a consensus has emerged: The suns are dying because history is over. The passion play is coming to an end. Man's time in the universe is nearly done, and what he has done with it will be tallied at the end and judged for good or ill. Many fear it will add up to more ill than good. Thus, humanity must unite to save itself, showing a united front of penance — hence, confirming the importance of the Universal Church.

But different voices whisper other meanings when the Inquisition's collective back is turned. Some say the vau or symbiots are causing the suns to fade, insisting that secrets should be wrested from outsiders and aliens. Others dare to say it is the jumpgates that are at fault, claiming that with every jump, a star loses its vital energy and begins to die.

THE REBORN SUN

A heresy is at work among the people, spread by a mysterious and mystical sect. It dares to bring hope to the people — but that hope, says the Church, is clothed in dreams of Imperium and totalitarian rule. For this heresy says that, upon the day of the Emperor's coronation, a distant star was reborn. Seen as a sign of renewal amid the dying of suns, this star has become a symbol of rebellion for many disgruntled people.

Fierce arguments can be heard across the Known Worlds: This supposed star is small and insignificant. Some say it did not exist before, that its birth was only happenstance. Others use ancient lore to back their claims, insisting that the star's distance belies any direct involvement, for its birth/rebirth would have happened many years ago; its light is only now reaching the Known Worlds. Still others, citing even more ancient lore, insist that all things are interconnected in nonlinear time; events today could theoretically influence events of yesterday. Star maps are consulted, proving the star did not exist before, while other maps clearly show it did. Rare maps show that the star has always been as bright as it is now, while contrary records claim it is dimming.

The birth of this “new sun” remains a confusing and as-yet unprovable issue. The debate is complicated within certain intelligence agency circles by rumors from Kurgan space claiming a similar phenomenon — or perhaps it is the same star?

The star has birthed the heretical Emperor cult of the Reborn Sun, whose members see Alexius as the universe's savior and Pancreator-ordained ruler, wielding

spiritual authority exceeding that of the Church. Lately, a schism has formed within the cult. A new candidate for Universal Savior has appeared: Princess Aurora. Some see her as the true subject of the star's message, claiming that Alexius was only the gateway to bring her to a desperate universe. For now, the debate is theoretical. Both sides see the Imperial Family as holy, but should the needs of the father ever conflict with the daughter, cultists will surely choose sides.

The Dark Between the Stars

Inimical to the Pancreator's ever-generous light is the Dark, a force that dwells in the void between star systems. The Dark dwells out past the jumpgates, where it is eternally night and cold beyond measure. A patient and potent force reaches out to possess and animate the sinners and cultists who summon it, struggling to snuff out the light of each and every soul.

The Dark takes many forms: Antinomist warlocks, the reanimated dead (called *husks*), and malevolent entities that possess the unwary and sinful: demons, in name and deed. Some Church occultists believe that the Dark is an entity that distantly directs its servants, while others think of it as an unthinking force that acts to pull things apart, returning creation to the utter stillness and cold that existed before the first star ignited. Either way, none can deny that there are beings out there who act against the interests of the living.

VOID KRAKENS

There are... things... in space. Inimical things are seemingly alive in the void, where no life should exist. Never glimpsed in full and never leaving direct proof, these things have nonetheless left their mark on the hulls of battered starships. They've left evidence of their existence in the seas of floating crewmen flooding from ruptured hulls, leaving a graveyard of unburied dead preserved forever in the chill vacuum. Perhaps as a result of humankind's reacquaintance with magic, or perhaps merely as a delayed reaction to the Second Republic's vast expansion, these creatures began to appear between the stars in the very void of space soon after Alexius' coronation. Monsters came from out of the inky blackness and devoured starships whole... or leaving very little behind to tell the tale. A new terror descended on humanity. Space was no longer safe.

Once the matter had been researched, scientists discovered that these mysterious ship destroyers had been around for a long, long time. Reports of disappearing ships were common during the Diaspora, but the voices of the few witnesses claiming to have seen monsters went unheeded, their words regarded as the prattling of insane minds suffering from oxygen

deprivation. The reports soon died down, but panicked accounts reappeared during the Second Republic's frontier search and terraforming craze. Again, the eyewitness accounts were unheeded. Instead, vau were blamed as the culprits, allegedly using ships of a new, unknown design. Before the matter was ever resolved, the attacks ceased.

But now, in an age of extreme superstition, new reports are traveling among the populace like wildfire, igniting fears and legends. Some are convinced that these assaults are the work of a mysterious new race from worlds far beyond. Their cyclic activity implies that they either leave for long periods or go into hibernation. Whatever the reason, they returned at the end of the Emperor Wars. Luckily, it seems that, during the recent years of the Pax Alexius, they have once again gone into hibernation. Is it the increased star travel that deters them? Or, as the cult of the Reborn Sun claims, does the light of Alexius' rule turns them back?

Vau have been questioned (diplomatically, of course), but they know no more than humans. It is clear, however, that they have suffered similar assaults throughout history, posing many of the same questions as humanity. The stars lanes are now deadly paths to tread.

THE RUNEDARK

There is an unknown, shadowy threat in Vuldrok space. Vitkar runecasters whisper among themselves of the "Runedark," a phenomenon or entity that cannot be perceived or acted upon by their runes, but which is obvious by its absence, as if it leaves a void or empty space within the higher or mental dimensions that some runecasters can perceive. It leaves behind swaths of destruction: destroyed villages, missing or altered geographical features, and mad or unresponsive witnesses. Survivors cannot seem to speak of it or even form coherent thoughts about it when questioned.

So far, this whispering has been kept quiet, even among most of the Vuldrok. Those very few Known Worlders who have heard tell of it dismiss it as a fire-side ghost story. Some, however, notice that certain Vuldrok, Duchess Eldrid among them, seem to give it more credence. Tongues wag that one of her reasons for seeking alliance with Alexius is the need for help in combatting this menace. If this were true, surely Questing Knights or Imperial Eye agents would have been dispatched to investigate, but no such record has come to light. Still, not every Questing Knight or Cohort can be fully accounted for....



INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING



CHAPTER 3: PLACES



SAINT DORAMOS THE WORLD ARCHITECT

Hail Doramos, most enlightened of us all. Pilgrim, it is to Doramos that we pray when the ground shakes, the winds rise, and natural calamity threatens. He was the master terraformer whose divine insight shaped the Known Worlds into blessed, stable havens amidst the dark of the void.

While our bodies were wrought aeons ago upon Holy Terra, the mystical science of Doramos allows us to walk on other worlds as if born to them. Although many who follow in his footsteps are considered heretics, courting hubris by attempting to modify the ancient's terraforming, his work is sacrosanct, accepted even by the Orthodoxy. Likewise, the works of his pupil, Gilgar, who carried on his master's labors despite his lack of Doramos' enlightened insight.

Doramos bears the astrolabe of Constant Faith and the sextant of Pathfinding, and his heel rests upon the globe of Incandescent Truth that is said to lie at the central core of all sanctified worlds.

— Charioteer Captain Zelina Hamid-Sandor, *The Pilgrim's Path: How to Read the Omega Gospels*

All the Worlds are Stages The Role of Place

The places where a drama takes place — its setting, its environment, its stage — are often characters themselves, lending their unique contributions to the story. They don't have the overt agency or ability to communicate that living characters do, but they nonetheless convey emotions, moods, and thematic concepts, presenting obstacles to the troupe's activities.

Certain classics of sci-fi storytelling have used hyper-extreme environments — whole desert or ice planets, animate jungle worlds, cities in space — to heighten the mythic qualities of their narratives. You don't have to rely on these singular locations to present dramas of import and emotional heft — a strip of desert on a world's equator is often quite big enough to challenge the troupe without needing the entire planet to be a sand-blasted wasteland. Still, these world-size environments do make for memorable settings.

Fading Suns does some of the work of world creation for you. Most of the Known Worlds are, well, *known* and described in **Chapter 3: The Known Worlds** in the **Universe Book**. As well, some of the inhabited systems outside of the Empire are briefly mentioned, enough to give you a starting place if you decide to incorporate them into a drama. Below, we present some details on the newest world to enter the fold: Hargard. It's a planet in transition. As the Empire moves in to stake a claim, many of the locals are either jockeying to join in, seeking positions of power in the new regime, or resisting it until their dying breaths.

But first, let's discuss some principles of place, along with some pointers to keep in mind when you're thinking about the backdrop for your dramas.

There's an endless variety of roles your setting can play in supporting your drama. Let's examine a few of them:

- **Place as antagonist:** Also known in literature class as “man vs. nature.” The place acts as the primary obstacle for the troupe, presenting a testing ground against the horrors it throws at them (feral creatures, devouring insect swarms, ghosts, ancient golems), a constant struggle for survival against environmental catastrophes (earthquakes, tornados, flooding), or just a place to get lost in its trackless reaches. It may not be possible to “win” against this place; the story might be all about surviving it. Victory in this case counts as successfully traversing it, getting to its calm center (the ancient ruins protected against the extreme weather), or surviving its dangers until a drop ship arrives for an extraction. There are all sorts of reasons to risk these dangers: rescuing travelers, finding treasure, confronting an enemy's hidden base, and so on.
- **Place as gatekeeper:** As above, but the place's role is less central. Its dangers might serve to distract only part of the troupe, or it threatens the whole troupe during only a fraction of their endeavors. The environment might be a smokescreen hiding the real conflict — the enemy's fortress, the nomadic tribe of mutants, the crashed spaceship. The place is a gatekeeper preventing easy access to the final obstacle, but an NPC (or group) acts as the real antagonist.
- **Place as grace:** Dramas aren't always about the endless struggle; sometimes the troupe needs a breather and a place to hide or in which to stand in awe. In fantasy literature, this would be the mystical

woodland home of the elves, providing respite on the quest. In **Fading Suns**, this could be a humble chapel or a glorious cathedral, a local lord's manse, an Amalthean's hospice, or even a hidden alien enclave in the jungle — someplace no one will find you.

The idea here is to avoid even a shade of risk or threat. This place is sacrosanct. Leaving it involves diving back into all manner of troubles, but while the troupe is there, the place is immune to the conflicts waiting out in the world. These places are important for providing breathing room in your drama before the troupe tackles the hellish zone of a final battle against their hated enemy.

- **Place as puzzle:** There's a deep mystery to the environment that drives the curious to unlock it. This could be an utterly alien environment, such as the vau territory on Vrill-Ya or deeper within the Hegemony, or something more familiar yet still unknown, like the woodlands of the vendi wildmen on Hargard. It could be an Anunnaki facility, buried for millennia, waiting to yield its secrets to whomever can survive its incomprehensible security protocols. More mundane, but still challenging, is the hedge maze the troupe must traverse to reach the Li Halan warlock who has destroyed their reputations.

This could even be an advanced city that acts like a maze to anyone not born to it, whether that's the urban canyons of Criticorum or the labyrinth of streets and alleys in the Istakhr market. The challenge here is to get from one place to another without getting hopelessly lost.

- **Place as hell:** A Cadavan prison complex that nobody has ever broken out of, the depths of the Ungavorox jungle, an abandoned asteroid-mining complex overrun by husks — these are all places nobody wants to be trapped in. The place itself can wear someone down and even kill them, or it may test them to their very limits until they unlock unheralded reserves of strength and resolve.
- **Place as last stand:** When invading forces are marching on your parents' village, when Inquisitors are scouring your neighborhood for the illegal tech your family needs to get by, when Vuldrok raiders descend from the sky to take everything you've ever worked for — that's when you need to take a stand in the place that is dearest to you. You'll defend your home against all who threaten it.
- **Place as mirror:** The environment reflects the characters' own internal turmoil... or even vice versa. On a spiritual level, this might be the mythic story where the land and the king are one. Perhaps the fief's local lord or presiding priest is mystically tied to the land, so their sins become manifest, expressed as animal attacks, plagues, dying crops, and cataclysmic seismic activity. Or maybe their

virtues enlighten the land, making it a place of plenty — a place the troupe must help defend or hide from outsiders, lest a paradise become a hell.

- **Place as power:** Whether this locale takes a literal form ("magic" powers from an Anunnaki ruin) or a symbolic one (a Royal House's ancestral land), the place gives the character(s) their power. When you threaten to remove them or destroy the place, you threaten their claims to power. Unlike "place as last stand", the place doesn't need to be beloved by the troupe. Its power might even be portable, if the troupe can successfully extract that hidden Anunnaki device or gain a grant of rank without laying claim to the land that bestowed it.

Environments

Certain types of geographical features lend themselves to different themes. Let's review some of them.

- **Desert:** On the surface, it's a barren wasteland, but in truth it holds secrets that outsiders cannot imagine, serving as a symbolic — or even literal — crucible of rebirth.
- **Oceans:** The sea is a font of limitless forms of life, holding infinite depths; it's often symbolic of the deep past, as well as what's hidden within it.
- **Jungles:** Impenetrable, untamable, ever wild, the archetypal jungle far from all civilized habitation serves as the lungs and heart of life itself, where the bold who survive it can find themselves.
- **Forests:** Unlike a jungle, the forest is the track of wildlands near to civilization; it sits on the edge, promising secrets unavailable to civilized life. It's a place of ancestral connections, memory, and spirits of place. The Forest is the in-between place where humans and Other can meet.
- **Ice:** Inhospitable, symbolic of death and the Underworld, this frozen domain is a place where the will to live is challenged, where the emotionally dead and wounded retreat.
- **Magma:** The crucible for re-forging and remaking oneself, this incendiary realm is a hothouse where life constantly teeters on the edge of annihilation.
- **The City:** Cities contrast the heights of human achievement with the depths of squalor and depravity — the extremes of human civilization; there is almost no place in the middle. In **Fading Suns**, cities are more commonly dystopias than utopias.
- **The Town:** Peace-and-quiet is broken by scandal; endless gossip boils beneath a bucolic surface; people are never what they seem. (What happens when the respected burghers are really cultists?)
- **The Hamlet:** Here is a place of beginnings and endings. Those raised here yearn to get out; those burned-out by life yearn to go back.

Traits

Places don't get traits like NPCs, but there are some topics that should be determined for the places in your dramas. The following questions should be answered for each locale.

- **Ruler(s):** Who owns/runs the place?
- **Cathedrals:** How is the Church represented?
- **Agorae:** What and where are the markets where people go to trade?
- **Tech Level:** What is the generally available tech level of goods and services in the place? This is different from city to city (with typically very low TL in the country).

Getting Around

Most people in the era of the Fading Suns rely on their own feet to get them from place to place, which is one reason why most people rarely go far from home. Some have access to beast carts and can get to the nearest markets, but they still want to be back the same day or the next night. (They rarely travel by night, since banditry is rife.) The wealthier locals have landcraft of one sort or another, whether that's antigrav skimmers or

wheeled, powered vehicles, giving them far more range. (In watery places, substitute watercraft.) Even wealthier residents can call upon aircraft to get them from city to city or even across continents. Places with good infrastructure (a rare occurrence) might even have train systems still working, allowing for regular far travel and commerce. Rarest of all are those with access to space-ships, whether that involves in-system craft or jump-capable ships that open the jump roads to them.

Transport determines the diversity of environments in your drama. Its relative scarcity tends to keep the troupe in place long enough to complete the drama, but it's still available enough to give them options within and between dramas.

So, make sure you know what sort of transportation is available to the troupe. Decide how you'll open up or limit access to it, based on the needs of your drama. Don't railroad them here (even if there's no rail system), but do try to come up with plausible reasons why they can't just hop in a skimmer and rush off to save the day, especially when you still need them in town to interrogate the kidnappers' agents and give the antagonist time to set his trap. (See *Transports* in **Chapter 4: Technology** in the **Character Book** for details about various forms of transportation.)

Sample Setting: Hargard

*Boldly breaking into fell battle,
Borgarr the Brave bellowing
"Stórlátr-drengir are doomed,
Wreck now their shield walls,
Slaying all who surrender,
Clearing these lands of old lieges,
Hargard now is home to our heroes,
So speaking he seized spear,
Clearing a path to Chanakya,
They fell to fierce fighting,
Struck the killing blow,
Placing it on a pike,
Ere Borgarr's berserkers
In fury slew Chanakya,*

*Bringing bright bloodshed
Above bursting blasts,
Dying in droves
Bring woe to their women,
That is our sword-law,
Calling kin and clans to us,
"Let the haughty folk flee,"
Striking and slaying
Commanding the enemy camp
Until Chanakya in fury
Cleaving off Borgarr's head
He composed Borgarr's death poem
Breaking through their foe's bodyguard
With their hands and their swords*

— Sigvata's Saga, or The Battle for Hargard, by Skjaldulf the Seer (4515?)

*My footsteps keep following me
 Through the fields, under the stone of old bridges,
 By the sad crumbling statues of old Urth Devattas
 And rune carvings on hoary pines,
 Are you here, Freya's promise?
 Are you under the heavy pollen blossoms of apple trees?
 Where are you, Parvati's dream?
 In the abandoned lemon grove, run wild
 And unkempt as my desire?
 Where are you, my Imperial Eros?
 Regal, handsome, your foot across the stars,
 You once said we are all in this garden,
 But only our footsteps can find us.*

— *“Parvati Followed Through Lemon Groves Abandoned” by Kirya Ramakrishna, from Imperial Whispers: An Avvaiyar in the Emperor's Court of Long Afternoon and the Mead Halls of Lovers and Berserkers (Six Constellation Press, Byzantium Secundus, 5018)*

Encountering Hargard

Hargard, a planet formerly contested by the ancient Ramakrishna dynasty and the Vuldrok Star-Nation, is now a world in transition. A new player in planetary politics has arrived — Emperor Alexius. With his marriage to Freya Eldridsdottir, daughter of the great war-thane Eldrid the Wise, the Emperor of the Known Worlds has claimed the world as his dowry. The continent of Jyandhom became an imperial fiefdom, under the rule of Eldrid the Wise, now a vassal to her son-in-law.

Queen Sura Ramakhrisna, who aided in the delicate marriage negotiations, also swore fealty, as her family gained recognition as a noble house, albeit a minor one.

Opposing the imperial presence is old Thane Sigfaddir Firestorm, once the terror of the Known Worlds, now blind but still a master of intrigue. Holding the continent of Ostmark, he supplies weapons, advisors, and clandestine operatives to Vuldrok thanes resisting the Imperial authority. Other players from deep within Vuldrok space — and even some discrete conspirators in the Known World — support him.

To complicate matters, the Universal Church is holding reunification discussions with a Hargard offshoot, the Orthodox Zebulonist Church of Ostmark, formed centuries ago by Known Worlders brought to Hargard as thralls. The Universal Church's desire to save the planet from “pagans and followers of splintered idols” has not gone over well with the two main faiths on the planet: the followers of Erdgheist, the highly adaptive Vuldrok religion (which incorporates many aspects of core Gjarti beliefs), and adherents of Tertha in Vijayanagar, the various branches of the complex and philosophical schools of Neo-Hinduism.

Added to the already versatile situation, a brushfire war has erupted on the small continent of Dagnir. A colony of sentient aquatic mollusks, the Nizdharim, has been spreading their worship of their ten-tentacled cephalopod god, Nidderdak from Beyond the Stars, to remote fishing communities, alarming the Vuldrok thanes. Other happenings, barely whispered save among traders and isolated communities, speak of even stranger occurrences on what was once a violent, if predictable, world. Hargard now leans towards chaos as great social and political upheavals rock the planet. A field of dry leaves waits for the embers to fall.

Hargard Traits

Hargard is the third world circling a medium-sized sun named Naksara (by the inhabitants of Vijayanagar) or Aldrnari (or Ald, by the Vuldrok). Suitable for life, Hargard's lifeforms followed an evolutionary path similar to that of many mid-sized planets set within the habitable zones of their solar systems.

Rulers: Emperor Alexius Hawkwood claims the planet, although he has yet to secure it. Duchess Eldrid the Wise rules what is now the Duchy of Jyandhom. Count Richyrd Ascania-Hawkwood is the Royal Governor of the planet. Queen (now also Duchess) Sura Ramakrishna rules the Duchy of Vijayanagar.

Thane Sigfaddir Firestorm still claims Ostmark, along with his various thanes and earls.

Major Cathedrals: Tertha (Neo-Hindu); Tarn (Vuldrok Erdgeist); various Zebulonist faithful in Ostmark

Major Agorae: Achiharta (Vijayanagar), Elfhome (Jyandhom)

Capitals: Achiharta (Vijayanagar), Elfhome (Jyandhom), Valholm (Ostmark), Volm (the Althing of Dagnir)



Jumps: 2 (Byzantium Secundus Leminkainen Hargard)

Adjacent Worlds: Leminkainen (dayside), Khotan (nightside), Abydos (nightside; Vuldrok runes prevent Symbiot ships from easily entering Hargard's system)

Solar System: Ayodhya (0.4 AU), Fyren (0.8 AU), Hargard (1.5 AU, Hatan), Sigefest (2.7 AU, 2 moons), Vrindavan (gas-giant; 6 AU, 7 moons), Udal (12 AU), Aesir (23.5 AU, 2 moons), Diyan Din'e (35 AU), Jumpgate (49 AU)

Human Population (est.): 91 million

Alien Population (est.): 250,000 (most are obun or ukari in Vijayanagar; a new shantor colony struggles in Jyandhom; a rough estimate of 40,000 Nizdharim lurk in the seas)

Resources: Contraband, weapons, spaceships, ores, wood, livestock, agrarian food, petroleum, gold, silver, phosphate

Exports: Slaves, weapons, gold, copper, silver, wood, aircraft (Vijayanagar), weapons, beer, wine, gems, precious stones and metals, petroleum, fish, mercenaries, ales, clothing, contraband

Landscape: Vijayanagar possesses tropical and temperate forests, while other continents possess tundra zones in the northern extremities. Conifer forests thrive in the middle regions. High, inaccessible mountain ranges line the planet. Most of the Vuldrok

are from the Drenjar Nation with a smattering of Lakol and other nations. Southern to mid-Dagnir is temperate and known for its high mountains.

Continents

DAGNIR

The island-continent of Dagnir is ruled by many clans of the Drenjar and Lakol nations. Earl Bjorn Draugr-Bane and Chief Wowakhan Anunkassan possess the greatest authority. The majority of the Dagnir thanes swore fealty to Eldrid the Wise and gained Known World noble titles, which they use when meeting with Known Worlders, but they still retain their old titles for home use. A few thanes in the northeast allied with Ostmark. So far, the sparring thanes of Dagnir have maintained an uneasy truce, fearing that a war between Eldrid's thanes (now nobles) and the northeastern jarls would bring in outside armies that would raze the continent.

Their attention is focused on local unrest: the creeping threat from some of their fishing communities, who have taken on alien Nizdharim beliefs and cultural practices. Violence has broken out between the Nidderdak-worshipping fishing folk (the *myrkr-flotnar*) and interior Vuldrok communities.

The Nizdharim and their origins are shrouded in mystery. Although they were initially thought to have fled from Abydos, subsequent intelligence leaves this in doubt, pointing to a lost world.

JYANDHOM

With the wedding of Emperor Alexius and Freya Eldridsdottir, this continent fell under the authority of the Emperor and his new Empress. Eldrid the Wise ruled as a duke over all but the southern portion. Eldrid granted her loyal thanes Known World titles, beginning their transition from Vuldrok jarls and thanes to titled Known World nobility.

The early efforts to place a largely free society into the Known Worlds class structure have met with uneven success. Alexius has been cautious about disrupting the traditional culture too greatly, but the arrival of Universal Church missionaries has caused tensions to rise.

In southern Jyandhom, the two Sreumar principalities of Siddis and Rochirion, along with a mixed Vuldrok-Vijayanagar populace and culture, welcomed the imperial authority. The head of Siddis, Duchess Vayatadr (formerly Queen), and the ruler of Richirion, Duke Rajan (formerly Prince), were among the first to do so.

In the extreme north, some clans, resenting the incursion of the Known Worlds and valuing their ancestral freedoms, have taken to open rebellion.

VIJAYANAGAR

Vijayanagar is ruled by Duchess (formerly Queen) Sura Ramakrishna. Allied now with Emperor Alexius, the Ramakrishna dynasty has been granted noble status in the Known Worlds. Although Ramakrishna is not one of the five Royal Houses, their formidable military, supported by their vimana-class starships, has seized a powerbase for this minor house on Hargard that cannot be ignored. Originally rulers of the entire planet, the house's troops were pushed back to the Vijayanagar continent by successive Vuldrok invasions. Nonetheless, Ramakrishna nobles rule over a sophisticated and devout populace.

OSTMARK

On the northern continent of Ostmark, Sigfaddir Firestorm sits on the Chair of Thanes — old and blind but exceedingly cunning. He rules with the aid of his two sons, Alric the Angry and Runolf Sword-Ready. The various thanes of Ostmark, related to him by blood or sworn by oaths, follow him, although in the extreme south, the native Zebulonist faith has autonomy in the Bishopric of Ostmark.

History

CYCLES OF INVASION

Historians believe that an age of reptiles was cut short when a great comet shower struck the world, bringing invasive viruses and destruction. The earlier reptilian and amphibious giants perished, replaced in their niches by avian and mammalian animals, previously scavenging creatures active in the nocturnal and arboreal ecosystems. The dominant mammals resembled Urth marsupials, while the placental clade rapidly became extinct, except on the isolated continents of Vijayanagar and in the high mountains of Dagnir.

Invasive microorganisms were not the only pre-human visitors to Hargard. Anunnaki ruins on the Ostmark continent, particularly in the southern Nalda region, attest to the presence of the ancient starfarers. The Anunnaki left a colossal statue of a Hargard sea scorpion called *panbicchu*. Carved in limestone, it stretches 75 m long and roughly 16 m high. Its positioning lines up with the constellation Jyeshtha (known as the “Scorpion Constellation” on Hargard) as it rises at the dawn equinox. To this day, the Vuldrok boast that “Hargard is a scorpion,” and the ruling thanes of Ostmark bear the mark of the great scorpion on their banners and skin.

Later human colonization brought many invasive species to Hargard, resulting in the decimation of many native nu-marsupial and nu-placental mammals. Some nu-marsupials managed to remain in the far northern reaches of Ostmark and Jyandhom, among them the great iss-bear, a gigantic carnivore of extreme cunning, and the bipedal, tool-making, primate-like vendi. The vendi stand slightly smaller than humans, relying on opposable thumbs, the rudiments of speech, and tool making to survive. Second Republic xenologists speculated they were on the verge of a proto-sentient culture before human colonization. The females carry their young in pouches. Now few in number, living as hunter-gatherers in the northern mountains, they are largely left alone by the Vuldrok settlers, who name them “wild men,” although legends persist of the vendi aiding stranded trappers in the far north.

Humans are not the only offworld colonizers. Around 4680, the sentient, star-faring, 12-tentacled mollusks, the Nizdharim, arrived in the oceans from an unknown world. The Vuldrok fishing communities made alliances with them. The Nizdharim search out schools of fish for the Vuldrok fishers in exchange for safe waters to live in. Recently, much to the chagrin of the greater Vuldrok community, the worship of the Nizdharim god, Nidderdak from Beyond the Stars,

found a toehold in some of the remoter fishing communities. Since the Nizdharim-Vuldrok alliance has proven extremely profitable, coastal thanes have not acted swiftly on what many see as a darkness creeping upon the remote coastal regions.

COLONIZATION

Led by the twin sisters, Queens Dalia and Siry Ramakrishna, colonists from Shaprut arrived circa 2850 and introduced humans to Hargard. The colonists (who referred to themselves as Bharatans) became the successors of the Ramakrishna culture after Shaprut entered the al-Malik fold. Throughout the dynasty's history, there has been a series of succeeding sister monarchs bearing the names of Dalia and Siry. Twin girls of royal birth are seen as a good omen, said to usher in golden eras of culture and learning.

The initial settlement on Hargard centered on the southern continent of Vijayanagar. The Bharatan colonists practiced Neo-Hinduism, originating from the Indian diaspora. This was the foundation of the later Praktri (Second Republic-era) and Tertha faiths. Tertha, which emerged from Praktri (c. 4650), recognizes a diversity of schools united by a core belief in the cyclical nature of the universe, its creation, preservation, and destruction, as well as a conviction that the Creator resides within all beings.

The Ramakrishna dynasty remained the rulers of Hargard during the Second Republic, along with the Samsad in Siddis standing as the local planetary parliament (now partially destroyed). With its light population and peaceful rule, the planet was largely unprepared for the advent of the New Dark Ages.

VULDROK ASCENDENCY

After the collapse of the Second Republic, the fleet of unique spacecraft known as vimanas protected Hargard's jumpgate, keeping hostile forces at bay. Planetary unity crumbled when civil war broke out between the ruling dynasty, which had settled in Citrakuta, and a cousin branch, the Chandra Princes of Jyandhom (then named Kurujangala). Starting in the 4300s, both sides recruited mercenary armies from the Drenjar peoples of the emerging Vuldrok worlds.

During the 4400s, these proxy armies mostly fought battles between the two houses. From 4450 onwards, thanes supporting both dynasties were rewarded with lands, creating buffer states between the Ramakrishna and Chandra territories. In 4483, two thanes supporting the rival dynasties, Eilif One-Ear and Ragnar the Enraged, made an alliance. Realizing that their combined forces held the greater military strength, they rose in arms against their native patrons. In a bitter 30-year

war, the Chandra dynasty was utterly annihilated. The Ramakrishna forces pushed south, leaving Ostmark and most of Jyandhom to the victorious Vuldrok.

Wanting to cement their conquests, the Vuldrok thanes called on their kinsmen from the worlds of Raven and Wolf's Lament to join them. A great migration of Vuldrok peoples followed. A poetic but highly accurate description of this period is given in *Sigvata's Saga*, an epic poem composed by Skjaldulf the Seer. The dynamic of the planet — now named Hargard, or Hargard's Hama, after the first clan to settle in Ostmark under Ramakrishna patronage — changed to one of unceasing war, not only between Vijayanagar and the Vuldrok, but with blood feuds among the conquering thanes.

Hargard was briefly part of the empire of the great star-spanning Vuldrok warlord, King Froljir the Ill-Fated, the sole unifier of all the Vuldrok worlds. Invited by two Ostmark thanes, he smashed all planetary opposition (4541-48). The Ramakrishna nobles were made to swear fealty, but when Froljir died in battle, his empire collapsed. The subject worlds broke free, returning to their querulous conflicts.

Contact with the Known Worlds came largely through pillage. As Vuldrok ships brought back slaves from the Known Worlds, Zebulon's teachings were introduced, carried by thralls and passed on to their freed descendants. By 4600, the Bishopric of Ostmark emerged with its own "Little Father" or Patriarch of the Faithful. Cut off from the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun, the Ostmark Church developed an emphasis on what its priests believed were the original teachings of Zebulon. They call themselves *Pistos Ekklisia*, the Faithful and True Followers of the Prophet.

By 4900, the continent of Ostmark largely fell to the Thord thanes (descendants of Thord Thane Slayer). A cold war between Ostmark and Vijayanagar ensued, as both allied with lesser thanes to compete for influence on the rest of the world. The exploits of Thord Thane-Slayer were not lost on Eldrid the Wise, and his example set the stage for the current conditions on Hargard.

RECENT HISTORY

In the past three decades, the continent of Jyandhom, once the warring provinces of the "seven thanes," was united by the marriage of Eldrid the Wise, a female Fheykrig warrior of renown, andthane Vidar Vigirson of Seggrhame. Together they conquered their divided opposition one by one, turning the thanes and Sreumar principalities into tributaries. Only the small portion of Jyandhom around Bushin Bay and the city of Kanakala remained united with Vijayanagar, the Ramakrishna's only toehold outside Vijayanagar.

In the wars of unification, Eldrid and Vidar lost their son Bivor the Brave, leaving their daughter Freya Eldridsdottir as their sole heir. The unification of Jyandhom shifted the balance of power upon the world, and opposition from Sigfaddir Firestorm, the thane of Ostmark, sent Eldrid in search of allies. She found relief from an unexpected quarter: Queen Sura Ramakrishna of Vijayanagar.

Eldrid had dreamed of conquering Ostmark and uniting all the Vuldrok peoples of Hargard under her rule. Some hold that this was but the prelude for her true goal: becoming warlord of all the Vuldrok worlds. A cult of personality grew around the victorious warrior queen. However, whispered rumors say that she began to suffer symptoms of a deliberating illness, forcing her to shift her strategy. Sidestepping her plans to invade Ostmark, she conspired with Queen Sura to begin overtures of alliance with Emperor Alexius, eventually offering her daughter's hand in marriage. In return, she received a peerage, becoming the head of a mighty and hereditary house that bears her name (with her loyal thanes as her titled vassals) as she rules over the duchy of Jyandhom. She ensured that her daughter and grandchildren would gain something even greater than the fractious Vuldrok worlds: an empire.

In talks with Queen Sura, Sigfaddir Firestorm laughingly compared the two of them as a quarreling married couple using Jyandhom as "our chessboard." Eldrid's conquests changed that. Was it the hope of tipping the balance from Ostmark that caused Sura's overtures, or was it fear of Eldrid's battle prowess and growing followers? Both conclusions surely swayed her decision, but the undertones heard among her envoys went deeper and struck at more ominous rumors. Something was amiss in the Vuldrok worlds, a rumor of a great terror striking from beyond their space. Queen Sura was playing a deadly game, but on a larger chessboard than Sigfaddir Firestorm imagined.

Her niece Kirya, Princess of Achiharta, became Queen Sura's secret envoy to both Eldrid's Hall and the Imperial Court of Emperor Alexius Hawkwood on Byzantium Secundus.

Kirya was a wise choice for an envoy: young, intelligent, with a sly sense of humor, and already a poet and singer of some renown (*The Cardamoms of Summer Past*). She was a student at the Imperial College of Aberwold on Byzantium Secundus, then later attached as a minor cultural functionary to the Ramakrishna representatives at the Imperial Court. More importantly, she was childhood friends with Freya Eldridsdottir. Utilizing "vimana diplomacy" with secret flights to Eldrid the Wise's Hall in Alf-hame, she united a curious triad of interests: the Ramakrishna Court in Vijayanagar, the united thanes of Jyandhom, and the Emperor of the Known Worlds.

While Kirya Ramakrishna's visits to the Emperor could not be kept in complete secrecy, those who knew of their private meetings assumed a dalliance on the Emperor's part. Those with more suspicion suspected a favorable trade and military agreement with Vijayanagar was in the making. Nobody outside a handful of people knew the truth about the delicate negotiations between the young poet and the Emperor of the Known Worlds.

When it was announced that Queen Sura Ramakrishna and a representative of Eldrid the Wise — her daughter, Freya — would visit the Imperial Court for the cementing of a trade and military treaty, the materialist cynics won the day, while the aficionados of scandal and love felt betrayed.

It is said Kirya managed to smuggle Freya into Alexius's royal apartment. Some claim this is a fanciful invention of royal poets and bards, no doubt to create a courtly romance, while others believe that Princess Kirya was quite capable of managing such a highly delicate diplomatic maneuver, eluding the spies of her rivals. A few cynical wags state both stories are propaganda for the masses.

What came as a shock was the later announcement of the betrothal of Freya Eldridsdottir to Emperor Alexius, offering a "bride-price" of the world of Hargard to the Emperor of the Known Worlds. His alliance with Eldrid brought him Jyandhom, and Queen Sura offered the continent of Vijayanagar; the fact that neither could actually offer up Ostmark is considered a mere detail. The planet was now, in most regards, Imperial territory.

In return for Vijayanagar, now a duchy, and their role in the wedding negotiations, the Ramakrishna were given peerage as a noble house of the Known Worlds, as Queen Sura Ramakrishna exchanged her title for that of Duchess (and head) of House Ramakrishna. (The title of prince is only viable for the Royal Houses.) Eldrid the Wise and her husband Vidar were also ennobled, rising in power as the Emperor's viceroys on Hargard.

Even Kirya benefitted. Her next book of poetry, *Imperial Whispers: An Avvaiyar in The Emperor's Court of Long Afternoon and the Mead Halls of Lovers and Berserkers*, became a best seller, and for a season, she became the toast of high society.

With his enemies benefitting at his expense, blind Sigfaddir Firestorm vowed to end the Known Worlds' presence on Hargard. His arm, aching again for battle, led ambushes against small Imperial scouting parties and Ramakrishna traders. Many thanes bent knee to the Emperor, but blind Sigfaddir was heard to whisper, "Check... but not checkmate."

Present Conflicts

The marriage of Emperor Alexius to Freya Eldrids-dottir and the birth of their daughter Aurora created a combustible situation on Hargard. Long-standing feuds boiled to the surface, and many thanes became torn in their loyalties. Most either chose Eldrid the Wise as their liege-lady or maintained their traditions as a free people opposed to centralized authority.

To gain noble status for her new house, Eldrid had to swear fealty to her new son-in-law. Once she gained the title of duchess, her lands were declared a duchy, although she certainly exults in using the title “Queen Mother” when dealing with Known Worlders. She has awarded titles and lands to her loyal thanes, although converting the proud thanes into landed feudal nobles was not easy at first. Many thanes refused — and are now fighting to defend their holdings against House Eldrid — but most went along with it. It remains to be seen whether this steadfast loyalty can take root hereditarily.

The main cultural challenge to this new form of rule is that the Vuldrok are not serfs — they’re freemen. House Eldrid nobles need to enter into contracts with them for labor. This whole “noble” thing is a bit new to all of them, lord and vassal alike, and the newly titled counts, barons, and knights still behave as thanes, which means they win loyalty through charisma and force of arms. Titles simply don’t mean much to Vuldrok, although they bear weight when dealing with Known Worlders.

Behind the unrest of the resisting thanes, one guiding hand is obvious: Sigfaddir Firestorm. Once the Imperial nuptials were announced, he immediately sent emissaries to the Vuldrok Althing on Raven, calling for unity among the Vuldrok nations in the face of the encroaching Imperial presence on Hargard. His agents encouraged rebellion to the Imperial presence. The Emperor is aware of his actions, but so far, he has refrained from open war. Sigfaddir also has avoided direct confrontation, needing time to build alliances. Some of Alexius’ councilors hope some kind of bargain can be made with the old warlord. If not him, they whisper, then one of his sons must strike a deal. His eldest, Alric the Angry, is ruled by his mercurial temperament. His youngest, Runolf Sword-Ready, is more cunning and far-sighted. He is also more amenable, some say, foreseeing what many predict is the inevitable result of the Imperial presence on Hargard.

Alexius has established an Imperial Governor to oversee the planet’s transition into the Known Worlds’ fold. Count Richyrd Ascania-Hawkwood of Ravenna was a childhood companion whose loyalty is beyond question, although he is under pressure

from his house to force the world to make amends for the decades of pillaging the Vuldrok waged against Hawkwood worlds. So far, he has resisted using his post for his house’s personal enrichment, but even he rankles at the Vuldrok’s pride in their past deeds against his family’s holdings. His need to represent Alexius’ interests in the face of Eldrid and Sura’s own machinations keeps him on his toes.

The office of the governor has established six major areas of current unrest and conflict. These places are in need of Questing Knights and their Cohorts to patrol and protect Imperial interests — which means keeping the peace in an even-handed way.

OSTMARK

FJOLTRBORG RELIGIOUS RECONCILIATION

Reunification talks between the native Zebulonist Church of Ostmark and the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun are underway in Fjoltrborg, a small city in the Bishopric of Ostmark at the southern tip of the Ostmark continent. Negotiations point to a likely return of the Ostmark Church into the Universal fold as a recognized sect, retaining certain of its native rites. Most Hargard Zebulonites rejoice at reunification with the star-spanning Universal Church. These talks are currently the focus of intense attention.

Architecturally, Fjoltrborg is noted for its eclectic bric-a-brac Mid-Regency and Vuldrok architecture. Held by Bishop Roland, the “little patriarch” of the Hargard faithful, it is surrounded by farmland, supporting rich agricultural yields and wool. Currently, Fjoltrborg is filled with dignitaries from the Universal Church and Imperial Court, as well as other interested parties.

The recent murders of two Ostmark priests caused Governor Ascania-Hawkwood to order stepped-up security; soon thereafter, he sent investigators to discover the party (or parties) responsible. It is a volatile situation. Opponents to reunification still exist. A small, vocal presence in the Ostmark Church opposes it, believing the Ostmark Zebulonists, untainted by Universal Church politics, possess a purer “Original Zebulonite” faith.

Some Universal Church authorities hold Sura Ramakrishna’s court responsible. Their suspicions are not entirely unfounded. Disturbing intelligence reports revealed meetings between representatives of Archarya Yajna, high Braham of the *Bhakt Dastoor Tethra* and one of the few outspoken voices in the Ramakrishna court against Known World influence, and Magni Lore-Master, chief *hofgothi* to the Vuldrok war god Kurmda. These meetings, taking place under Sigfaddir Firestorm’s protection, formed a broad consensus against the outworlder Church, one that

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

could lead to an alliance against the Church's goals on Hargard. Already elements of both faiths — including some revered Mahasiddhas of Vijayanagar — are open to further talks. Although the Ramakrishna dynasty and the Vuldrok have fought numerous wars, they never fought over matters of religion. Both sides cultivated a “live and let live” attitude, as they tolerated the small Hargard Zebulonite community.

THE PANBICCHU ANUNNAKI STATUE, NALDA REGION

Classified reports state that the Scravers are seeking permission from Sigfaddir to explore the caverns beneath the great Anunnaki sea-scorpion statue, the Panbicchu, in the southern Nalda region of Ostmark. Imperial Navy geo-mapping systems discovered a network of deep, ancient tunnels below the desert sands around the massive landmark, and speculation about possible subterranean Anunnaki weapons and tech reached interested ears. No known entrance to the tunnels exists, but a search is underway for possible concealed openings.

The Scravers are racing to get there first, before the Emperor or Sigfaddir learn the extent of their operations. Already the locals don't like the attention, believing the old maxim “the scorpion brings bad luck to those who prod her.” Of course, other interested parties are also investigating, including miscellaneous Eskatonics, Engineers, Ramakrishna resistors (seeking weapons), local thanes, and Questing Knights.

An independent group hired by Lissa Adeline, a freelance salvager, is forming in Valholm, hoping to reach the great Anunnaki statue first. Unaware she is being funded by the Imperial Eye through middlemen, her group will have to use stealth and speed to get to the tunnels first. Once they reach the tunnels, they have no qualms about violating thane law, deceiving the Scravers, and ignoring standards of archaeological practices.

VALHOLM SPACEPORT

The Valholm Spaceport, where ships constantly arrive from Vuldrok Space and the Known Worlds, is close to the Great Hall of Gunnar the Grim, where Sigfaddir Firestorm rules, overlooking the city of Valholm. A small town nearby, Laxdale, originally consisted of warehouses and energy stations. The town has quickly expanded around the Valholm Spaceport (Valholm Stiarna-höfn), becoming a sprawling untamed backwater where gambling, contraband, weapons, alcohol, exotic wildlife, currency exchange, prostitution, and entertainment draw money from weary space travelers. Called “Laxdale the Lawless,” the town has an open economy specializing in contraband goods, slaves, undocumented currency

exchange, and brutal weapons. This prosperity has made its overlord, Sigfaddir's son, Runolf Sword-Ready, conspicuously wealthy through his “thane tithe” on all transactions.

Recently, the Questing Knights learned of a secret Muster/Scraver delegation arriving to conduct negotiations with Sigfaddir Firestorm. While both guilds publicly approve of the Imperial presence on Hargard and profit from it through various contracts, they secretly fear certain consequences. The Muster fears loss of revenue from the possible closing of the Valholm Spaceport to the slave trade, while the Scravers want a stake in any Second Republic and Anunnaki relics found on the world.

The Governor is swiftly forming a small group to infiltrate and discover what the clandestine meeting holds. Rumors abound, but one troubling lead, picked up by multiple sources, is the presentation to Sigfaddir Firestorm of a Pre-Adamite tech weapon discovered in the Ur-ruins on Velisamil, originating from the time of the primal obun-ukar wars. Named “the Voice of Dark Winters” and “Storm-Screamer,” the ancient artifact is said to give its wielder control over planetary weather patterns. In return, the Scravers desire access to various Ur ruins on Ostmark, and the Muster wants a cut in the prisoner/thrall trade from deep Vuldrok space.

One advantage outside agents have is the very lawlessness of the town, where fortunes are made and lost daily. The huge debts and losses leave many broke, willing to trade information for monetary gain.

The contact for anyone seeking intelligence in Laxdale is Galti Bergthor, often called Gabbert Grog Master, the proprietor of the Universal Meade and Meat Hall. A former surveyor, scout, and purveyor of Second Republic armaments, Gabbert runs his giant inn with military aplomb. An expert in Vuldrok and Known Worlds alcohols, cheeses, and choice meats, his inn smells of roasting boar and the aroma of hundreds of beer and mead barrels, along with more rarified wines and harder alcohol. It is a busy hub for space travelers waiting for their next flight, deal-making in the back rooms, and entertainment, usually provided by minstrels, bear-baiters, and drunks. An adjoining hall sees physical sports of wrestling, ball-smash, Stomp the Scryer, and other popular Vuldrok pastimes.

Numerous contacts lurk in the establishment. Robie (Rodmar) the Unruly, who does a brisk trade with Vijayanagar, is often found here. Some think he is connected to the Ramakrishna spy agency, the Kohara. He has contacts among the Hrafan, the Brotherhood of the Crow, and the spies of Sigfaddir.

Professional sellers of information — the *Bragi* — can provide their clients with beautiful recitations of

Vuldrok sagas, elaborations on epic histories, scathing verbal put-downs of troublesome foes, or for more money, information. Since they are treated as a priestly caste, they are not slain for their risky knowledge — at least, not openly, but the spies and servants of the various Vuldrok thanes take a dim view of them, quickly creating laws forbidding their presence in sensitive locations. Braver and cleverer Bragi assume disguises and enter those forbidden areas; the monetary rewards are greater there, but so is the danger of instant execution if caught. Rumor has it that the greatest Bragi in Laxdale is Alvida All-Knowing, but none know for sure of her whereabouts... or even her true appearance.

In addition, Vijayanagar agents recently detected two individuals rumored to have links to the Jakovian Agency: Lidka and Adrik Antipinov Van Gelder. What they are doing on Ostmark is unknown. Their presence creates a considerable challenge. The brother and sister team tend to leave a trail of unexplained and accidental deaths behind them.

JYANDHOM

NAKIR MOUNTAIN REBELLION

The greatest concern to the Emperor and House Eldrid is the embryonic rebellion in northern Jyandhom. Among the “Eldrid hostages” — thanes who were defeated in battle by Eldrid but swore oaths to her afterwards — there is great unrest. Two of them, Rollo Red-Beard and Gustav Rollosen, removed themselves to the northern Nakir Mountains and planted the flag of rebellion. Joined by growing bands

of sympathizers and armed by Sigfaddir Firestorm, their forces began attacking Eldrid loyalists.

Scouts have reported odd signs — weapon caches from Delphi, tech from Severus, and Known World “advisors.” Recently, the Imperial Governor and Eldrid sent negotiators into the region. Unknown forces ambushed one earlier peace party, and the survivors fled deep into the desolate northern wilderness — home only to the primitive nu-marsupial vendi peoples, iss-bears, and unforgiving winters. A high advisor to the Emperor was among this party — one whose true identity must be shrouded, and unfortunately for Jyandhom, one who the governor has ordered rescued at all costs.

DAGNIR

KIRBORG CULTS

A meeting of the continent’s thanes and jarls in Dagnir produced a unified front against a simmering situation that risks breaking into open warfare: the rising of the remote fishing communities who worship the Nizdharim deity, Nidderdak from Beyond the Stars. The great mollusk god of the Nizdharim, resembling a one-eyed cephalopod with 10 tentacles, is believed by Vuldrok shamans to be a “dark devouring” (*ljós færbjódr*) deity hostile to humanity.

Recently, strange conical-shaped churches appeared in certain isolated fishing villages. It was only after the slaughter of the inhabitants of Kirborg by the human followers of Nidderdak that action was taken. The slaughter was in retaliation for Kirborg’s farmer’s destruction of a coastal Nidderdak temple constructed by the converted fishing clans. Thane



Asband Aundonsonn's warriors reported bodies with suction marks on bloodied skin, as well as heavy carts and objects tossed about as if by a mighty storm. The local temple to the Vuldrok goddess Vinnspara was destroyed, its pillars pulled down.

When they entered the central seaside Nidderdak temple from the hastily abandoned coastal village of Gruinhöfn, they discovered an intricate beacon device of non-human construction that emitted a series of high-pitched codes only discernable by Gudvaer, a tech-shaman of the Maghtaw Nation and priest of Gottun the crafts god. Shamans and priests from the Lakol, Skey, and Drenjar Nations delved deep into their crafts and practices, while Maghtaw wisemen and women studied the tech-lore, persisting until they discovered a rough outline of its purpose. It was indeed a beacon to the distant stars, revealing the temple's location to whoever was receiving the signal in deep space.

Then the questions began. Was this the work of the Nizdharim, calling more of their kinsfolk? Or are they in league with unknown allies from beyond Vuldrok space?

The worried thanes sent word to Eldrid the Wise. A full-scale attack began on the remote fishing villages by the combined thanes, and the slaughter spread to innocent villages. The fishermen and their Nizdharim allies fought back, wielding hitherto unknown weapons. A series of small-scale bushfire wars engulfed the continent's shores. Vuldrok shamans now sense that another beacon on Dagnir exists, but they cannot pinpoint its location.

LIVING ART, SNJAR MOUNTAINS

After the Emperor-Wars, "drop-out" cultures found sanctuary on the Dagnir continent of Hargard. Small religious, political, and artistic sects, finding little acceptance in the Known Worlds, set up communities

as a safe haven to practice their beliefs. Granted remote settlements by Dagnir thanes in the unpopulated Snjar Mountains, settlements of Incarnates, the Children of Zuran, and hesychasts found the freedom to practice their beliefs in exchange for taxes on the agricultural yields, domesticated farm animals, and the alcoholic, medicinal, and tech equipment they produced.

Smaller groups of artist-colonies followed, rebelling against "Academian influence" and "the Subjectification of the Object." The anarchistic Two/Thirds Republic, the Social Unrealists, the Sir Realists, Neo-Minimalist Muralists, and the Knights of the Isosceles Triangle all founded remote art communities.

One anarchistic artistic colony, the Symbolist Synchronism Syndicate, utilizes the "cast-off" mediums of old tech, Anunnaki artifacts gathered from Pre-Adamite sites, vanished Second Republic vibration-focused frequency accumulators, and readings of religious rites and theurgy gleaned from proto-obun/ukari beliefs. Working with these tools and media, they activate "Sentient Art" or "Sans Critic Art," which they have dubbed *Via Ars Anima* or "Living Art." Their ritualistic calling of energies to "Objectify the Subject" worked far greater than they dreamed: their eclectic art gained sentient life and the power of mobility.

Autonomous pieces of their eclectic artwork — now breathing, moving entities — began attacking neighboring communities. This "living" art includes Second Republic corporate mascots, statues of gigantic entertainment figures from various epochs of human history, and plant/human hybrids. Artworks designed to shock the viewer into the space "beyond subjective critical reflectivity" into "a hyper-awareness of art (Art) as a subject-less, object-less expression of fracture-ism of the psyche" now terrorize the region.



INTRODUCTION

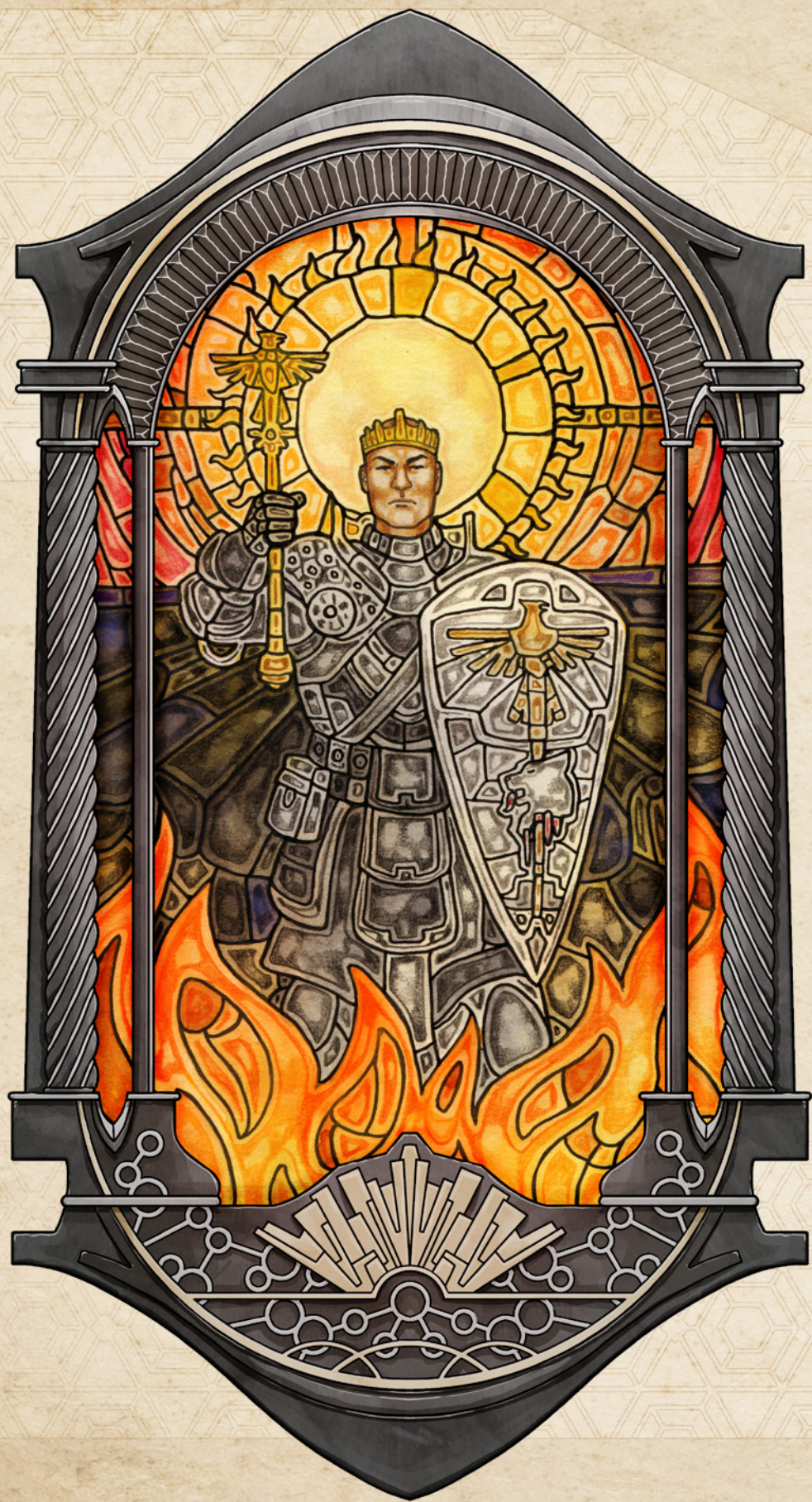
DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

CHAPTER 4: PLAYING THE GAME



SAINT VLADIMIR THE UNIFIER

Hail Vladimir, boldest of us all. Pilgrim, it is to Vladimir that we pray when the wolves are at the door and we must rally together to turn the tide. Vladimir united the Known Worlds against the barbarian hordes, taming a fractured universe into an empire under the banner of the phoenix exultant.

Just as the Prophet unified his Disciples and miracle players unite their troupes, so did Vladimir Alecto unite us all. He apportioned his power among ally and enemy alike, and so quelled discontent.

His right hand proffers a Royal Scepter, holding the power to ordain an emperor, while his left bears Wolfsbane, his sturdy shield. His robe flows in the wind, like the wings of the phoenix. His head is wreathed by the Coronation Flame, the fiery aura that was the cause of his death and martyrdom.

— Charioteer Captain Zelina Hamid-Sandor, *The Pilgrim's Path: How to Read the Omega Gospels*

Example of Play

You've read the rules in the previous chapters. Now we'll see how they work together in a game session, step by step.

You can play all sorts of different dramas with **Fading Suns**: courtly intrigues, guild machinations, tests of faith — the stars are the limit. The sample drama provided after this Example of Play, "Nightmare in Yngmark," provides a mystery for the troupe to solve. But first, we'll divert our troupe into a drama of exploration, rife with danger and suspense.

Dramatis Personae

Bill is running a **Fading Suns** game, so he's gathered some friends around the table at his place. The troupe's archetype is the noble entourage. Our cast members are as follows:

- Tim is "Oliverus," a Hawkwood Duelist and the leader of the troupe.
- Andrew is playing "Lady Tirza Legrace Gargarin," a Decados noble Psychic (who conspires to become the troupe leader).
- Ian is "Mouse," a Scriver Reclaimer.
- Nydia is "Vinkur," an ukari yeoman from the Dispossessed mercenary society.
- David is "Tyrzith," a vorox Brother Battle priest — a rare and unusual combination.

They're all 1st-level characters, just beginning their escapades.

Setting

Bill's game is set on Hargard. He's planning for the troupe to play through "Nightmare in Yngmark," the sample drama presented in this chapter. The PCs

have arrived at the starport in the capital city of Elfhome, each with their own reasons for heading to Yngmark to help the Hawkwood lord there.

Following some time spent haggling for goods in the local agora marketplace, they've heard rumors of an ancient ruined town called Ghosthame. The place is said to be haunted and cursed. Long ago, the gods rained down fire from heaven, razing the place to the ground to punish the residents. But it's also said to hold a vast hidden treasure, the hoard of an ancient Vuldrok warlord who raided the Known Worlds in the time before the reign of Emperor Vladimir.

It turns out that Ghosthame is located about halfway to Yngmark. Thinking that legends of ghosts, curses, and treasure probably hide something very interesting, the troupe decides to take a side trip on their journey, so they can solve the mystery behind the locals' fear of Ghosthame.

Let's Begin

The troupe finds the disused dirt road that leads to Ghosthame. This begins a scene that Bill calls "Entering Ghosthame." He doesn't tell the players any of this, though. He chooses to just let play commence without heralding the title of the scene.

Each character's bank is full (5 VP for 1st-level characters), thanks to the VP they gained in Elfhome — except for Lady Tirza, who spent all of hers in the Elfhome agora befriending local gossips (using her Charm-skill influence), leaving none in her bank.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

David asks if Tyrzith can see any recent tracks on the road. Bill asks him to make a *spot* roll. This is an Observe-skill maneuver; it's resolved against Resistance in a blind bid: David has to guess how many VP he'll need to spend to overcome Resistance, and that will depend on how obvious the tracks are (if there are any). Bill knows that there haven't been any recent travelers... from this direction. He sets the Resistance at Hard but doesn't tell David that.

David's goal number is 10. He currently has 5 VP in his bank, due to rolls he made back in Elfhome. He could use those VP to add to a precision bonus to his goal number, but he chooses not to do that. He rolls a 9, a success. He takes 9 tokens from the well and puts them into his cache (a space or a cup on the gaming table next to his character sheet). Bill asks him how many VP he's spending to overcome Resistance. David asks if he can get some sort of clue.

David: "If the road is really disused, any sign of travel should be obvious, right? Unless someone is intentionally taking care to hide the tracks, right?"

Bill nods and says: "Yes, judging from the growth of weeds through the beaten-down dirt, you'd probably notice if some of them had been pressed down by boots or landcraft of some sort."

David sees no reason not to spend all of his cache's 9 VP. If he were expecting an attack, he might want to save some to boost his Resistance, but since his cache will be emptied out at the start of his next turn, he'll lose whatever he doesn't spend. (Since his bank is already full, he can't keep any of them by putting them in there.)

David takes the 9 tokens from his cache and puts them into the well. "What do I see?"

Since the blind Resistance was Hard, 9 VP is well enough to succeed and meet the action's benchmark.

Bill: "No sign of travel. No boot prints, no disturbed flora, no out-of-place scents. You're sure nobody has come through here for at least a few weeks."

David: "Great! But I don't let my guard down! I keep sniffing the wind and listening for twigs cracking and stuff like that."

Bill: "Got it. You're on alert."

The troupe proceeds down the road. After about an hour of walking, as they round a curve, they see the woods open up ahead. The shapes of buildings become evident. As they move closer — cautiously, all the players note — they see those buildings are not simple Vul-drok longhouses or huts. They're ancient maxicrete blocks... in utter ruin.

Bill informs Ian that his character, a Reclaimer, can easily recognize Second Republic buildings. They look like they

were pulverized by orbital bombardment. Roofs and walls are crumbled in, revealing scorched and decaying maxicrete and melted metals. This happened at least a few decades ago; trees and bushes now grow within the exposed walls, some of them quite tall.

SNIFFING OUT THE COMPETITION

Bill had previously collected a list of each character's Perception ranks to use for instinctual perception tests. He now checks the list and sees that both Ian and David's characters meet the benchmark (Demanding Resistance) needed to possibly notice the mutant feral dogs sneaking up on the troupe. He asks each of them to make a blind-bid *spot* roll. No one else in the troupe has a high enough Perception to beat the instinctual perception test, so they don't get to roll.

Ian's roll fails, so he can't even bid against the Resistance to notice the dogs. David (goal 10) rolls a 5, a success, and collects 5 tokens from the well. He then spends all of those on the blind bid. The Resistance was 6, based on what Bill figured the dogs' Sneak skill to be, and David didn't spend enough. His *spot* action failed. None of the PCs notice the stealthy dogs.

Bill: "For a moment there, you thought you smelled something rank, but it's gone now... and then there's a growl. A beast appears out of nowhere, leaping at Tirza!"

Tirza is Andrew's character. She's the smallest among the troupe and has the least threatening appearance.

WHEN MUTANT FERAL DOGS ATTACK

The Mutant Feral Dogs are 1st-level Agent NPCs. There are three of them.

These poor creatures are lab experiments who have escaped into the wild, but they haven't left the area where they were once held in suspended animation



(see below). They're very hungry, but they're also a bit scared. Only one of them has gained the courage to try to bring down prey; the other two hold back and wait to see what happens.

Gameplay now enters Instantaneous time. Actions are measured turn by turn in rounds.

MUTANT FERAL DOGS

Agent (creature) • Level: 1 • Size: 4

Clearly the result of genetic engineering, these "dogs" look like a cross between Alsations and panthers. Their teeth are especially large and sharp.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	2	Pre	5
Dex	4	Per	7	Int	5
End	6	Will	5	Faith	5

Skills:

Fight	6
Sneak	6
Vigor	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
--	------	--------

Bite	12	4 dmg
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Resistance: Body 2 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Surges: rating: 7 | number: 1

Since the dogs surprised everyone, they act first.

Bill rolls the lead dog's attack; the goal is 12, and he gets a 5. He gets to collect 5 VP from the well and place the tokens in the dog's cache.

Tirza's Body Resistance is 1 (from thick robes). Andrew declares he'll boost his Resistance... but then realizes that his bank is empty. He spent what little he had back in the Elhome agora befriending local gossips (using Tirza's Charm-skill influence).

He could draw 1 WP (or more) from the troupe coffer and convert that into VP, but the coffer is also empty — nobody has done anything to earn WP yet.

His other option is to try to *dodge* in reaction to the dog's attack. This is a reflexive action, performed in reaction to an attack, so he can do it even though it's not yet his turn in the initiative order.

Andrew says that Tirza will definitely *dodge*. Her [Tirza is female] goal is 7; she rolls an 11: a miss.

Andrew does have another remaining option for boosting Tirza's Resistance: she can use her sole surge to get fresh VP. This will give her VP equal to her Surge rating.

David interjects: "Hold on. Tyrzith will inspire Tirza." Tyrzith is a priest with the Inspiring perk. This allows him to give other people VP from his own cache. He transfers his 5 VP from his bank to

his cache, marking them off of his character sheet and taking that amount in tokens from the well, which he gives to Andrew.

Andrew spends all 5 VP to boost his Resistance up to 6 (remember, Tyrzith already had 1 Body Resistance from her thick robes). Bill asks David and Andrew to describe how this happens.

David: "I cry out. 'Stand tall!'"

Andrew: "I do! She stands tall! Well, as tall as she can. She's pretty short."

Dog #1's cache has 5 VP, which is not enough to overcome Andrew's Resistance. While he could use a surge to get more VP, he's only got one of them. Bill decides to save it for later.

Bill: "The dog just can't get a bite in. You do some awkward acrobatics as you duck and weave, avoiding the snapping jaws. The dog whines and shuffles back."

Andrew: "Phew! Thank the Pancreator!"

Bill: "Good teamwork. You each acted pretty selfishly back in Elhome, but Tyrzith's generosity might help cement your troupe's bond." Bill takes 1 WP from the well and puts it into the troupe coffer. This is what we call applause: the GM claps for the cast's performance.

ROUND 2: FIGHT!

It's a new round. On the last round, only the dogs got to take an action (Andrew's spending VP to boost Resistance didn't require an action), since they had the drop on everybody and surprised them.

Bill asks the players if anyone has an initiative edge. Ian declares that Mouse is using his Marksmanship perk, spending 1 VP from his bank to gain an initiative edge with his gun. Since nobody else — including the dogs — has an edge, he gets to act first.

David: "Hold on there. I'm going to step in and hit the dog. I want to chase it away before Mr. Trigger Finger here harms it."

Ian: "But I've got the edge."

David: "Yes, but Tyrzith is a Brother Battle. I can interrupt with a combat action so long as you haven't acted yet."

Ian: "Jeez. Not fair."

Bill asks David to describe just what he's doing.

David: "Tyrzith strides over to the dog and swings one of his middle limbs at it." (Vorox have six limbs. Tyrzith stands on two, leaving the other four free.) Bill asks him to roll.

David's goal for a Fight-skill *strike* maneuver is 12. He rolls a 6, a success that gives him 6 VP from the well. Bill tells him that the dog's Body Resistance is 2. He spends 2 VP to overcome it. The blow delivers 2 points of damage.

Bill: "Are you going to spend any VP to increase the damage?"

David: "Nope. I'm hoping he'll take the hint and run."

Ian: "If he's still alive after that I fry him. I'm shooting him with my laser pistol."

David (speaking as Tyrzith): "Violence shatters the attacker as well as the attacked."

Ian: "Oh, go preach to a peasant. I fire!" His Shoot-skill goal is 12. He rolls a 16, a miss. "Damn it!"

Bill: "Okay, since nobody else has an edge, Ian gets to nominate who acts next. Remember, Ian, you can nominate the dogs, too."

Ian (turning to Nydia): "Why don't you take a crack at it?"

Nydia: "Hell yes. That thing is going down. I draw my medium revolver and fire." Her goal is 14. She rolls a 15, which misses. "Oh, to hell with it!"

Bill: "Just to let you know, I'm using the optional rule for accenting die rolls. You can spend 3 VP to subtract 1 from the die result, which would give you a success. However, by doing so, you can't get a critical hit, even though the result matches your goal number. Also, you won't get VP from the roll, but it will succeed."

Nydia, who has 5 VP in her bank (from influence rolls she previously made in town), transfers 3 VP into her cache and then into the well. "Done!"

Bill: "Okay, your shot hits. It's got a Body Resistance of 2."

Nydia transfers the last remaining VP from her bank, which goes into the well as she spends it to overcome Resistance.

Bill decides that the dog won't boost Resistance against the shot (since he hasn't acted yet, he has no VP in his cache; he'd need to use his surge to get some). "Your bullet hits, delivering 5 damage. You don't have anymore VP, so you can't increase the damage."

Nydia: "Doesn't matter. What happens? Do I kill it?"

Bill has been tallying the damage against the dog's Vitality. It has 10 Vitality but has suffered a total of 7 wounds (5 from Nydia, 2 from David). "It yelps and whines as blood spurts from the bullet wound, but it's still up."

Nydia: "Darn it. Oh, well." She turns to Tim. "Your turn."

Tim: "If I brandish my sword at it, can I scare it away?"

Bill: "Sure. That would be an influence attempt. I'll let you use either Impress or Animalia, plus Presence."

Tim does some addition and realizes his goal would be 11 if he used his Impress skill or 7 if he used Animalia. Obviously, he opts for his commanding demeanor. He rolls and gets a 3. It's a success, earning him 3 VP from the well.

Bill: "The dog's Mind Resistance is 0, so you put it into a Spooked state."

Tim: "I let it act next in the initiative order then."

Andrew: "Hey! What about me! I haven't acted yet. Dodging that attack didn't count."

Tim (speaking as Oliverus): "Honor requires I let the poor, hungry beast yield the field."

Andrew: "But I'm poor. And hungry!"

Bill: "The dog, scared by Oliverus' sword brandishing, breaks away and runs into the woods, followed quickly by its two companions."

Andrew: "Oh, well. At least I'm healthy and whole."

The turn ends, as does the combat. David transfers his cache's 4 VP into his bank before the cache is emptied out. Tim's bank is full, so the 3 VP in his cache go back into the well.

The troupe continues to search the ruins. Bill could have ended the scene once the dogs ran away, but Bill decides to keep the tension (and the scene) going, even though he knows there are no immediate dangers. The players don't know that, so the tension is an excuse for them to keep on their toes. Once they take a real breather or there's a lull, Bill will end the scene. (If any of the players had activated perks or powers that lasted for the scene, they would end when the scene ends.)

FAST FORWARD

For this example of play, we're going to fast forward a bit through some of the activity.

The troupe spends time searching the ruins. They eventually discover a handful of intact buildings that survived the orbital assault. The remaining buildings are made of tougher material; their electronic security systems are still intact and powered.

Ian spends time rewiring the system. This action takes place in Present Tense gameplay; Bill isn't counting down the rounds, so rolls can occur without worrying how much clock time is used up. Ian's character is performing the Intrusion-skill *pick lock* maneuver. Bill tells Ian that he needs the Tech Lore TL7 capability. Unfortunately, he doesn't have it. That means his roll is unfavorable. His goal is 10. He must roll twice and use the worst result: He gets a 5 and a 9. Against the odds, both rolls are victories. Since he uses the worst result – the one that awards the least VP, in this case – he gets only 5 VP from the well. The Resistance to rewire the keypad is Demanding; Ian takes 5 VP from his cache and 1 from his bank (he had 5; he now has 4 VP left) and deposits them into the well. The system's ancient electronics hum to life and open the door.

This ends the "Entering Ghosthame" scene and begins a new scene titled "The Past Isn't Even Past." It's all about investigating the ruins to piece together the story about what Ghosthame really is.

Long story short: Ian's character hacks into a think machine (using the Interface skill) and discovers that this place was once a scientific facility researching a variety of projects. After the Fall, it was shuttered, but someone seems to have opened it again a few decades ago. During the early years of the Emperor Wars, someone at this facility began experiments involving the genetic engineering of flora and fauna.

Exploring further, the troupe finds the old animal pens where the mutant dogs were bred, as well as cryogenic chambers that are now empty... except for two that were recently opened. One is clearly where the dogs came from. The other chamber's resident seems to have escaped the building. The only clue about its nature is the snakelike skin it shed: a massive husk that's the length of three humans.

Further exploration of other buildings reveals a hydroponics facility deep in the earth, still operating and being run by golems (i.e., robots) that glide around with anti-gravity. Programmed to repel intruders, they pose trouble for the troupe.

This begins a new scene: "The Harvesters of Eternity."

DOMO ARIGATO

The troupe encounters three golems: a 3rd-level Agent NPC and two Extras. The scene begins in Instantaneous play.

Ian once again spends 1 VP from his bank to gain an initiative edge using the Marksmanship perk. He shoots a golem (goal 12) and rolls a 9. He takes 9 VP from the well. Its metal plating proves hard to penetrate: It's got Body Resistance 8, and it's Laserproof, so it gets to use that full amount against Ian's laser pistol. Ian spends 8 VP to overcome the 8 Resistance; his damage is 5. He's only got 1 VP left in his cache, which isn't enough to raise the damage. He decides to put that 1 VP into his bank. He scorches the robot with his laser pistol but doesn't appear to harm its functioning.

Andrew: "I got an idea! Let me go next!" Ian, who gets to choose which player or NPC acts next, gives Andrew the go ahead. "Okay, Tirza wants to use her Lifting Hand psychic power to knock that thing over on its side, so it can't skim around anymore."

Bill: "Okay. It looks heavy, but I'll give you a break because it's already floating on its own anti-gravity."



INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Andrew currently has no VP, so he calls on a surge. His Surge rating is 8, so he gets 8 VP from the well.

He spends 1 VP to activate his power. His goal is 9. He spends 3 VP for a precision bonus: +3; his goal is now 12. He rolls a 7: a success. He collects 7 VP from the well; his cache now has a net of 11 VP.

He then reaches into the troupe coffer for the 1 WP that's sitting in there. He looks at his fellow players for their assent. They all nod, giving the okay.

He spends that WP to give his power the Force attack property, which will halve Resistance.

Bill: "This thing weighs about 200 kg. The Resistance is normally 1 per 25 kg for that power, which would mean 8 Resistance. But since it's floating, I'll halve it to 4. Your power's wyrd-point-enhanced attack property halves that again to 2. You'll need to spend 2 VP to knock it over."

Andrew takes 2 VP from his cache and plops them into the well. "Done!"

Bill: "Okay, tell me what it looks like when you use your power. Remember, you empowered it with wyrd energy."

Andrew: "Yep. Normally, my telekinesis is invisible, but it now crackles from my hands like electricity, shooting out and slamming into the golem."

Bill: "... which topples it over. Since its anti-grav plates no longer have a surface to repel against, it's stuck in place on its side." The golem conceivably could have spent VP (from a surge, since it hadn't acted yet to gain VP from a roll) to boost its Resistance, since the wyrd's force property made the Far Hand power visible, but Bill figures the golem wouldn't been programmed to deal with such a fantastic ability coming from a human.

The two golem Extras are quickly dealt with by the other troupe members, and exploration of the room continues. They discover a large conveyer system where the harvested food is delivered to somewhere up above. They decide to ride it up, crouched among the bins of fresh, genetically modified fruits and veggies.

They emerge into a wooded grove on the surface. Bill ends the scene and begins a new scene: "The Good Earth."

BOUNTY OF THE GODS

The place is festooned with handmade fetishes hung from the trees. Burning incense wafts from cups placed on a wooden table. A group of local peasants stand around the table, clearly surprised to see the troupe.

They're in the middle of a ceremony. The lead priest chants: "We give thanks to thee, oh spirits of the earth, for this bounty that comes unbidden from the earth. We honor thee — but... but... who are *you*?" This last question is directed at the troupe.

Andrew: "I strut forward and proclaim, 'We serve the spirits! They demand that you lead us to the treasure!' I want them to believe me. What do I need to roll for that?"

Bill: "It's an outright lie, so that's Knavery skill. A *deceive* maneuver."

Andrew: "Excellent! My Decados training pays off. I'm good at that."

Bill: "Now, that sort of influence is usually directed against an individual, not a group. If you want to affect more than just the leader, you'll have to spend 2 VP per extra target. There are six of them, in addition to the priest, so that would be 12 VP. You don't need to spend it until after the roll, but just know it'll be expensive."

Andrew: "Yeah, but if I convince the priest, he'll surely tell the others to believe it, right?"

Bill: "Maybe."

Andrew: "I'll try it. I'm deceiving the priest. My goal is 14. I'm going to spend 2 VP to raise it to 16." His bank is now full (after that fight with the golems); he spends 2 VP for the precision bonus. He rolls a 13 and takes 13 VP from the well.

Bill: "The priest isn't the dumb hick you think he is. He resists your crazy story." The priest's Mind Resistance is 2 (based on his Wise One perk). He boosts his Resistance by using his surge, which gives him 6 VP. "His Resistance is 8."

Andrew puts 8 VP from his cache into the well. (He has 8 left, and he puts 2 of those into his bank to restore it to full capacity.)

Bill: "At first, he looks doubtful, but then he smiles and opens his arms in greeting. 'I know not how the Hawkwyrd come to serve the spirits, but it is a good sign. Welcome!'"

Andrew: "*Hawkwood*? I'm a Decados."

Tim: "Hawkwyrd. It's what they call all Known Worlders. My illustrious family was the sole bulwark against their raids for many years."

Andrew: "Hmph. Then maybe you'd better do the talking."

Before Tim can answer, Bill interrupts: "A voice erupts from the woods: 'Yes, you've got some talking to do, all right!' Out steps Sir Lionel Darden Hawkwood — Oliverus' old nemesis! Immediately behind him, a squad of five marines appear, all armored in chain mail and bearing rifles. You're outnumbered and outgunned."

A TEST OF METTLE

Bill (speaking as Sir Lionel, addressing Oliverus): "Let's decide this, you and I, once and for all. Sword to sword!"

Tim: "What terms?"

Bill: "Lionel sneers. 'Oh, I would not dream of killing you. Not yet. You need to suffer first. To the yield, then!'"

Tim: “I draw my sword. I tell my entourage, ‘Everybody stay out of this. This is between Darden and me.’”

David: “I certainly accept and understand his honor duel, but I keep a close eye on those marines. If one of them so much as twitches, I’ll interrupt.”

Nydia: “I scowl. This honor bullshit doesn’t impress me.”

Andrew: “Two Hawkwoods fighting each other? Where’s the popcorn? I guess I’ll have to settle for an ear of corn from the conveyor belt.”

Play becomes Instantaneous. Both Oliverus and Sir Lionel share the same rank (as knights), so Tim and Bill each roll a d20 to determine who can act first. Tim gets a 16 and Bill rolls a 9, so Tim goes first.

Tim performs a Melee-skill *strike* maneuver with his rapier. His goal is 14. He spends 2 VP from his bank to raise it to 16. He rolls a 15 — a success! He collects 15 VP to put into his cache.

Sir Lionel’s Body Resistance is 4, thanks to his synthsilk tunic. Bill decides that Sir Lionel will boost this by spending 5 VP from his bank (he’s a 2nd-level Headliner, so he has a bank with 10 VP), giving him a modified Body Resistance of 9. Tim spends 9 of his cache’s VP to overcome it: Oliverus’ sword easily beats back Lionel’s attempt to parry it and delivers 5 damage.

Tim: “This guy’s my nemesis, so surely we’ve fought before. Does he have a hidden energy shield?”

Bill: “Funny you should ask. Yes. You know that his brooch hides a dueling shield.”

Tim: “Thought so. I pull my blow to slip under that thing.” Tim spends 1 VP to use his Fencing perk (Duelo style) to *restrain* his blow, subtracting 1 point of damage. (Without that perk, restraining the blow would have cost him 2 VP per 1 damage restrained.) The reduced damage of 4 does not set off Lionel’s e-shield — first blood goes to Oliverus.

Bill: “Lionel scowls in frustration and swings his rapier at you, slashing at you with the edged tip.” His goal is 13. He rolls a 3, giving him 3 VP. Oliverus’ Body Resistance is 2 (leather jerkin), but Tim decides to boost it by spending the 5 remaining VP in his cache. Bill spends 7 VP for Lionel to overcome the Resistance (3 from his cache, 4 from his bank, leaving him 1 VP in his bank). His sword pierces Oliverus’ defenses and inflicts 5 damage.

Tim: “Damn it.” He marks the Vitality loss on his character sheet.

The round ends and a new one begins. Tim and Bill roll again to see who goes first, but Bill wins this time.

Lionel sneers at Oliverus and whispers: “You can’t win. Just as your father fell before my lord’s blade, you shall fall to mine!” He’s attempting to throw Oliverus off with an Impress-skill *daunt* maneuver. His goal is a 10 and he rolls... a 10! A critical hit gives him 10 VP plus 1 wyrd point. Tim groans.

Oliverus’ Mind Resistance is 2. Since a critical hit ignores Resistance, Tim can’t spend VP to boost his defense.

Oliverus is in the Daunted state. Lionel has seriously rattled him. Bill advises him to roleplay the state and remember that the terms of the fight are that the first one to yield loses; a Daunted character is likely to yield if things keep going poorly.

Bill: “If you roleplay the state well, I’ll go easy on letting you decide if or when you yield.”

Tim: “I step back, sweating. ‘My father died a hero!’” (Tim’s voice quavers as he says it, hamming it up.) “I think to myself: *What if he’s right? What if he’s better than me?*”

Bill: “Good. Sir Lionel smiles as he realizes his jibe has hit home. And because you bought into this setback with excellent roleplaying....” He takes 1 WP from the well and places it into the troupe coffer. “I won’t do that every time you succumb to influence, since you’re *supposed* to play it out, but if you do it well, every now and then you should get some applause.”

Tim acts next — but Bill interrupts. He asks Ian and David to make reflexive secondary-action *spot* rolls. Only those two characters have a Perception rating high enough to beat the instinctual perception test’s Resistance to see what’s coming next. Both miss their rolls.

Bill: “Okay, I’m going to roll a d20 here. A result of 1 to 10, Tim, represents Oliverus. An 11 to 20 will favor Sir Lionel.” He rolls 13. “Before Oliverus can react to Lionel’s unsettling remark, something large drops from the forest canopy onto Sir Lionel.”

Bill hands Tim 1 VP from the well, the cost for using a GM initiative interrupt. The large shape is a Giant Mutant Snake, a 4th-level Headliner creature. Bill rolls for the snake: It wraps its coils around Lionel and begins to squeeze. Lionel’s dueling shield activates, protecting him from the damage — at first. But the broad-area attack (the coils are all over his body) causes the shield to burn out. Lionel gasps as the air is pressed from his lungs.

The marines begin to fire haphazardly. David, who was ready for them to act, uses his Brother Battle initiative interrupt to attack one of them, taking him down with a charge.

The rest of the marines still get their shots off. They fire at the snake (forgetting that Lionel is in the line of fire), but the bullets don’t seem to harm the monstrous thing.

Bill: “Okay, Tim, *now* it’s your turn. What do you do?”

And we’ll leave it there, ending on a cliffhanger. Will our intrepid troupe survive the coils of doom and reach Yngmark?

Drama: Nightmare in Yngmark

The troupe is on Hargard, sent by their patron(s) to rid an Imperial nobleman's fief of a marauding evil. For months, the Yngmark realm has suffered monster sightings and attacks, and the local lord has called in every favor to enlist help. The troupe, beholden to those who answered the lord's petitions, arrives in the wilderness realm to troubleshoot the crisis on their patrons' behalf.

Player Info

There's a monster loose in Yngmark; a tall, stilt-like, and very thin humanoid creature the locals call the *Moorgaunt*. Skulking nearby moors and forest, the Moorgaunt has stolen several sheep and slain a young herdsman. Lord Hector [use the name of a noble house associated with a player character; see below] of Yngmark is a retired Questing Knight who received this barbarian realm as compensation for Imperial service. He doesn't have a militia he can use to neutralize threats; Agnar, the thane who once ruled the region, set that as a condition before giving it to one of the Emperor's nobles. Hector also doesn't have enough resources to hire mercenaries, so his realm's survival hinges on friends and patrons sending him help. *You* are that help.

GM Info

Lord Hector is a member of whichever house is most likely to play an allied role to one or more troupe members. If someone in the troupe is a Hawkwood, then Lord Hector is a Hawkwood. If more than one PC is a noble, then choose the house based on whichever character is most likely to feel bound to aid a fellow house member like Lord Hector.

The source of Yngmark's troubles is a symbiot parasite inside Lord Hector's father's brain. (The GM should draw attention away from this fact; the hamlet's guilders, priest, and barbarian locals should serve as likely suspects). Old-man Archibald, once a commando in Alexius' Regency force, unwittingly caught a symbiot brain-slug at the Siege of Sylan (4991). Archibald's symptoms were erroneously diagnosed as an onset of dementia, forcing an early retirement. Hector, who had squired for his father, stepped into Archibald's shoes, and when Alexius made his call for Questing Knights (4996), Hector was among the first to answer. When Hector retired a few years ago, he was awarded the Yngmark fief on Hargard, to which he brought his wife and father.

The symbiot, while not itself sentient, observes the world through Archibald, slowly draining life-force from its host and surroundings. For the most part, it rides passively inside Archibald, assuming control only when panic strikes the senile man (who is frightened by loud noises, violent weather, and fire) or to hunt, nest, and spawn.

When panicking, Archibald's fears trigger the symbiot's fight-or-flight responses. This transforms Archibald into the Moorgaunt, a hybrid form adapted from a stilt-insect bio-matrix stored in the symbiot's lifeweb pattern. The symbiot-Moorgaunt flees the manor under cover of weather to run about in a panic.

The symbiot's hunting behavior, on the other hand, occurs every fortnight or so, usually on calm, dark nights when the symbiot deems it safe to leave the manor to stalk the village sheep pens. Archibald's family is oblivious to his nightly wandering and nobody suspects the frail oldster. (Both Archibald and the symbiot happen to be expert prowlers.)

Deep in the moors lays the Moorgaunt's lair, a dark, wet hollow where the symbiot nurtures brain-slug tadpoles in a shallow pond. The Moorgaunt brings its kills thither as spawn fodder. Typically, the Moorgaunt is only seen when panicking around the hamlet (interpreted as a rampage by frightened witnesses) or when observed stalking prey.

Act I: A Hinterland Hamlet

The drama begins as the troupe is received by Lord Hector, Baronet of Yngmark.

While he belongs to the same house as one of the player characters (see above), Hector is not a close relative. In fact, no one in the troupe has ever met him before now, and they may be from different worlds entirely. Nevertheless, blood and culture are thicker than water. Hector and the player character(s) may share patrons, or their patrons might have dealings above their heads. Whatever the reason, the troupe is here because their bosses said so. (Of course, while the drama assumes otherwise for simplicity's sake, the GM is free to tie Hector closer to the troupe; perhaps they served together at one point or met at a common nemesis's elaborate wedding.)

YNGMARK

Yngmark is a backwater fief of cold, dark forests and foggy moors, located several leagues northeast of the easternmost peaks of the Nakir Mountains on the

continent of Jyandhom, Hargard. It was established in the 49th century by a raider lord named Yngi Steel-Eyes, only to be abandoned by his people shortly after his death. Since then, Yngmark sat undisturbed for generations until it was finally added to the quota of realms the Jyandhom thanes were obliged to surrender to Emperor Alexius. The Emperor decided, in turn, to award many of these lands to his Questing Knights for their retirements.

The local thanes sworn to Eldrid the Wise have not yet fully adopted the Known Worlds noble-title nomenclature for their new positions within House Eldrid. They still use their Vuldrok terms, including thane and jarl. Yngmark is nominally subjugated under the rule of Jarl (Earl) Agnar Iron-Leg of Dwimmerwood, who answers to one of the regional thanes (a count), who ultimately answers to High Thane (Duchess) Eldrid the Wise, who answers to Alexius, the Phoenix Emperor. Locally, Hector is often named Shieldman Hack-Thor, “shieldman” being a Vuldrok rank approximately equated with “baronet.”

Lord Hector arrived a few years ago to clear the land for agriculture and build a hamlet of 15 farmstead families. Eleven of them are Vuldrok settler families who relocated to Yngmark from elsewhere on Jyandhom, while four are Known-Worlder households who immigrated here along with Hector (retired men-at-arms and the like). Initially, the land promised a comfortable living, but soon, crops mysteriously began to fail and sheep started disappearing in the night.

Scene 1: The Grateful Lord

What: The troupe meet Baronet Hector, his family, and his local aides over dinner in his feast hall.

Who: Baronet Hector, Lady Cristal, Father Fortis, L.V.X.

Where: Lord Hector’s manor house in Yngmark.

DESCRIPTION

In Yngmark, it is winter. Light snow covers the land and thick furs cover its people. Baronet Hector’s manor is a simple two-story brick house dominated by a ground floor feast hall. Here, the walls are decorated with Hector’s polished armor and weapons, Imperial medals, and memorabilia of the Emperor Wars. Behind the lord’s seat hangs a poster showing Emperor Alexius rallying troops at the Siege of Sylan; it is signed “to Sir Archibald, my comrade, from Alexius Rex.”

Lord Hector — a middle-aged man with graying beard and tired eyes — sits at the head of the table with his wife, Lady Cristal. The PCs are arrayed down the length of the table on both sides. Next to the farthest PCs, sitting across from one another, are two additional

dinner guests who are unknown to the troupe. One is a young red-robed priest, his head a black mane with a shaved crown; the other is a delicate woman in a leather apron emblazoned with an Engineers’ hammer. Her skin is soft and unblemished, and her hair is stylishly short. At the far end of the table, opposite Hector, sits Archibald — the lord’s hoary and demented father — making feeble-minded horse sounds.

Hector greets the troupe formally and introduces the other dinner guests: “Allow me to introduce Father Fortis of the Urth Orthodox, our parish priest, and guildswoman *Iux*’ of Tethys, our blacksmith.” (Her name is spelled L.V.X.) While there is obviously no love lost between the two, both behave civilly.

There are no servants, so Lady Cristal (née Justinian) serves the food herself: a small-game stew with sheep cheese and bread and pickled-fruit pie for desert. She also sings for the feasters’ entertainment. Archibald makes a mess of his meal.

After dinner, Baronet Hector dismisses Fortis and L.V.X., then thanks the troupe for coming as he presents glasses of berry-flavored grain liquor. He offers his horses, “my last remaining luxury,” as payment for slaying the Moorgaunt. At this, old-man Archibald hoots sadly, “Nooooo! Horsey!” and weeps like a child. “Forgive my father,” Hector says. “The Emperor Wars took its toll on us all, and father’s love of horses is all he has now.”

After answering their questions, Hector warns them. “Before starting your official investigations, you must first present yourselves to Agnar Iron-Leg of Dwimmerwood, within whose jarldom Yngmark lies. While we’re an Imperial fief, the land was leased from Agnar, and we’re subordinated to his regional rule. Dwimmerhall is a day’s ride west, so you should set out tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, feel free to familiarize yourself with my hamlet.”

The meeting adjourned, Lady Cristal sees the PCs to their rustic upstairs quarters. She apologizes for her household’s inadequacies. “This, you see, is what years of Imperial service buys,” she snaps. “One sacrifices health and loved ones for *his* Imperial ascension, only to be rewarded with a hovel in the mud on some barbarian hellhole! Forgive me... I speak out of turn.”

ADDITIONAL INFO

PCs may learn more through roleplaying and certain actions they can take:

- **L.V.X.’s Sphere:** Any PCs with a TL5+ device that can connect to a wireless network notices an encrypted network in the mansion called “L.V.X.’s Sphere”. If asked about it, Hector or Cristal reveal it’s the mansion’s high-tech security system. Father Fortis wouldn’t approve if he knew it existed.

- **Reading the Room:** A successful Perception + Empathy roll (Easy Resistance) during dinner or drinks afterward can reveal the following:
 - Hector is frustrated and anxious, feeling inadequate in his post.
 - Archibald is senile, confused, and frightened, but loves horses.
 - Cristal is bitter; she hates it here! (To a priest, physician, or female PC, Cristal might admit she's as barren as this accursed land.)*
 - For reasons unknown, the realm's harvests steadily deteriorate. All was well at first, but now crops dwindle yearly.*
- * *GM Info:* The symbiot siphons Yngmark's lifeforce.

NPCS

BARONET HECTOR



Agent • Noble 5 • Lord

[Fill in his noble house faction based one of the PC's houses (or a house allied to one of them).]

"Welcome to Yngmark. Welcome... to my home."

Description: A weary middle-aged man with graying beard and tired eyes, Hector often wears his battered chainmail for ceremonial occasions, such as greeting guests.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	4	Pre	8
Dex	4	Per	5	Int	4
End	4	Will	5	Faith	7

Skills:

Charm	4
Impress	6
Melee	8

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Command</i>	14	Target is Commanded.
<i>Daunt</i>	14	Target is Daunted.
<i>Entreat</i>	12	Target is Entreated.
<i>Shake it off</i>	7 8 10	Removes a state.
<i>Sword strike</i>	14	6 dmg

Perks: Fencing (Swashbuckler), Imperious, Noble Title (Baronet)

Resistance: Body 7 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 15

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

Equipment: Sword, chainmail

LADY CRISTAL

Extra

"I hope your stay here is... productive." (*heavy sigh*)

Description: A middle-aged noblewoman with once-smooth skin, Lady Cristal has a face lined with stress. She dresses in Known Worlds noble fashion that is at least five years out of style.

Actions:	Goal	Impact
<i>Entreat</i>	11	Target is Entreated.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Jewelry (worth 100 firebirds on the black market)

ARCHIBALD

Extra

"Horsey!"

Description: An old man, clearly a former campaigner, clearly has evidence of dementia in his eyes.

Actions:	Goal	Impact
<i>Evade</i>	8	Use VPs to boost Body Resistance.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: None

FATHER FORTIS



Agent • Priest 2 • Orthodox • Friar

“Heed not the prattlings of the locals about their pagan gods and spirits. Cleave to the Church’s teachings in this place of testing.”

Description: A red-robed priest with a black mane and shaved crown, Fortis is not afraid to get his garb dirty in the pursuit of his duties.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	4	Pre	6
Dex	3	Per	3	Int	4
End	4	Will	5	Faith	8

Skills:

Impress 5

Actions:

Goal	Impact
<i>Castigate</i> 11	Target is Castigated.
<i>Shake it off</i> 7 8 11	Removes a state.

Perks: Church Ordination (Canon), Inspiring

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Surges: rating: 8 | number: 1

Equipment: Crude crozier that doubles as a staff (4 dmg).

L.V.X.



Agent • Merchant 2 • Engineers • Tech Redeemer

“I do what I can for these people. We’re rather far from civilization, you know.”

Description: This delicate woman wears a leather apron emblazoned with the Engineers guild’s hammer. Her skin soft is unblemished, and her hair is stylishly short.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	7	Pre	3
Dex	5	Per	3	Int	5
End	3	Will	4	Faith	4

Skills:

Crafts (Blacksmith)	5
Interface	5
Observe	5
Tech Redemption	6

Actions:

Goal	Impact
Blacksmithing 8	See Craft-skill <i>make craftwork</i> maneuver.
<i>Jury-rig</i> 13	See Tech Redemption-skill <i>jury-rig</i> maneuver.
<i>Shake it off</i> 6 7 7	Removes a state.

INTRODUCTION

DRAMA

PEOPLE

PLACES

PLAYING

Perks: Craft Energy Device, Guild Commission (Apprentice), Ingenious

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Surges: rating: 9 | number: 1

Equipment: Multi-tool, derringer (3 dmg), heavy apron

Scene 2: Priestly Scolding

What: The troupe witnesses local tensions.

Who: Father Fortis, 4 Vuldrok peasants.

Where: The hamlet of Yngmark.

DESCRIPTION

Exploring the hamlet (or when saddling up next morning) the troupe notice Fortis wearing his muddy robes and rubber boots. They witness him scolding some locals for pouring ale on the village tree. “Repent! You half-beast infidels with sullied soul-mirrors, repent your heathen ways!” The scolded Vuldroks scoff and walk away.

Fortis detests the villagers observing Vuldrok traditions (such as pouring a libation to the ancestor tree). Furthermore, he hates L.V.X. If asked about her, he describes her as “a vile technosophist naming herself after the holy word for light! Hadn’t we needed a blacksmith so badly, I’d have driven her from Yngmark years ago!” As for the Moorgaunt, Fortis suspects his parishioners’ heathen rituals conjured up this devil.

Fortis invites them to a midnight sermon at the “temple,” a small wooden shack with a painted eight-spoked wagon wheel fixed to the roof. (It resembles the Charioteers’ emblem as much as a jumpweb cross.) Should they attend, the troupe is treated to a rambling speech on spiritual fidelity in the face of barbarian unbelievers. “Piety alone can chase demons from our midst!”

NPCs

VULDROK VILLAGER

Extra

“The crops aren’t going to gather themselves. You’ll ’scuse me, then.”

Description: Villagers have a mix of body types, but all seem hale and hardy. They wear simple linen and wool clothing.

Actions:	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
Fist <i>strike</i>	7	2 dmg

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Farming tools

Scene 3:

Village Gossip (Optional)

What: The troupe queries a local.

Who: One of the locals (see below).

Where: The hamlet of Yngmark.

DESCRIPTION

Despite warnings not to take official action in Yngmark before given leave by Jarl Agnar, the troupe might want to gossip with the locals. There’s time for a single interview before nightfall. You can jump to either *Scene 8: Peasants of Yngmark* or *Scene 9: The “Blacksmith”* (both listed below) for what villagers might divulge.

Act 2:

Suspects & Denizens

Scene 4:

Through Dwimmerwood

What: The troupe travels to Dwimmerhall.

Who: Apprentice Bogdan Kovac, Hjalm (stableboy)

Where: The road to Dwimmerhall through the Dwimmerwood.

DESCRIPTION

Next morning, Hjalm, the manor’s (Vuldrok) horse-whispering stable boy, helps the troupe select and get acquainted with their mounts. The number of horses is two more than the size of the troupe. They’re fine-mannered, if somewhat difficult, beasts.

The journey to Dwimmerhall is long, cold, and nearly uneventful. (No rolls are necessary for simply traversing the land, although poor riders will be stiff and sore upon arrival). A few hours into the ride, the troupe spots a young man beside the road repairing telegraphic lines strung between Yngmark and Dwimmerhall (which came down in the last blizzard). He waves enthusiastically and runs over.

“Bogdan Kovac of Bannockburn, milords, free-man-apprentice to Engineer L.V.X. Say, could I trouble you for a hand with this mast?”

Whether they help or not, Bogdan will beg for a chance to inspect any high-tech gadgets the troupe

possess. “Oooh, is that an [insert name of device]? May I inspect it for you, milord/milady? I never get to play with tech of this magnitude out here — it’s all free of charge, of course!” He graciously accepts any decision they make.

NPC

APPRENTICE BOGDAN

Extra

“Hello!”

Description: This young man wears a simple apprentice’s outfit with a leather apron.

Actions:	Goal	Impact
<i>Jury-rig</i>	9	See Tech Redemption-skill <i>jury-rig</i> maneuver.
<i>Skulk</i>	12	Spend 2 VP per +1 Resistance vs detection attempts.

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Smithy tools

Scene 5: Jarl Agnar Iron-Leg

What: It’s time to meet the Big Man, the Vuldrok noble whose legal jurisdiction Yngmark falls under.

Who: Jarl Agnar Iron-Leg, 9 retinue warriors

Where: Dwimmerhall, the longhouse of Jarl Agnar Iron-Leg.

DESCRIPTION

Dwimmerhall is dark, warm, and rustic. Fire pits run down the hall’s length and pelts cover every seat. All surfaces are covered in woodcarvings, none more impressive than the jarl’s massive throne. Upon it sits Agnar, bare-chested and wild-haired. His right leg is a delicate, chrome prosthetic several inches too short. To his side, a magic lantern holoshow displays heroic movie combats with Agnar’s mien crudely overlaid over the action-heroes’ faces. “A gift from Yngmark’s blacksmith,” Agnar boasts.

Agnar hears the troupe out and appreciates their mission, but he emphasizes that the problems started when the foreigners arrived; therefore, it is the “Hawkwyrd king’s” (i.e. Alexius’) business. If treated respectfully and offered gifts, however, the jarl defers to Vuldrok customs regarding hospitality, which dictate he must repay such kindness. In response, Agnar gifts them winter wools and furry boots, swords, and three small barrels of barleywine. In any case, Agnar agrees to the Moorgaunt hunt. The troupe is housed in the Dwimmerhall for the night and treated to a Vuldrok feast with the jarl and his warrior retinue.

NPCS

AGNAR IRON-LEG



Agent • Noble 4 • House Eldrid • Lord

“More Hawkwyrdlings? Can’t get enough of our world, eh? Go ahead, then. What is your business here?”

Description: Bare-chested and wild-haired, Agnar favors his right leg, a delicate chrome prosthetic several inches too short.

Characteristics:

Str	7	Wits	4	Pre	6
Dex	5	Per	3	Int	3
End	6	Will	7	Faith	6

Skills:

Impress	8
Melee	8
Shoot	7
Vigor	6

Actions:	Goal	Impact
<i>Command</i>	14	Target is Commanded.
<i>Daunt</i>	14	Target is Daunted.
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 10 9	Removes a state.
<i>Sword strike</i>	15	6 dmg

Perks: Conscript, Imperious, Noble Title (Earl), Untouchable

Resistance: Body 7 | Mind 8 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 14

Surges: rating: 11 | number: 2

Equipment: Sword, chainmail

AGNAR'S WARRIORS

Extras

(*stony silence*)

Description: All of these brawny Vuldrok have fighting scars. They glower at strangers.

Actions: *Goal* *Impact*

Sword *strike* 10 6 dmg

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 10

Equipment: Sword, studded-leather jerkin

Scene 6: Nightmare by Day

What: The troupe gets a short glimpse of the Moorgaunt. However, it does everything in its power to avoid them.

Who: Moorgaunt

Where: The moors of Yngmark, just off the road to Yngmark.

DESCRIPTION

Riding back the next day, the journey is uneventful until the troupe reaches the moors near Yngmark.

Across the soggy fen (i.e. just out of long range), they see a twisted creature stalking the woods: vaguely man-like but twice as tall and with skin stretched thinly over a willowy, almost arboreal frame. The naked monster howls frightfully and disappears among the trees.

Even the troupe's horses are powerless when chasing the stilt-legged Moorgaunt through the marshes (a terrain he is entirely unhindered by). Should they investigate, the troupe finds long-striding toes-and-ball footprints but soon lose the trail. (The Moorgaunt slowed down and stealthily crept away.)

Scene 7: Trouble Brewing

What: The villagers have been riled up by sightings of the Moorgaunt.

Who: Villagers, Baronet Hector, Father Fortis, L.V.X.

Where: The hamlet of Yngmark and Hector's manor.

DESCRIPTION

Riding into Yngmark, the troupe encounters pitchfork-wielding villager patrols. Three hours ago, the Moorgaunt was spotted near the Ormen (Vuldrok) farm and a lamb is now missing. Tiptoe prints lead off from the pens, disappearing in the woods. It's too late to question everyone now, but the troupe might manage one or two inquiries before dark. (See *Scene 8: Peasants of Yngmark* for what villagers might divulge.)

Soon, Lord Hector calls the troupe inside for a drink, asking about their journey. Did they see any

signs of the monster along the way? Before long, the conversation is interrupted by shouting outside. Father Fortis is arguing with L.V.X., demanding she submits to salvation: "Repent, tech-wife, or you'll damn us all!" Hector orders the argument disbanded, but PCs might run negotiations if they wish. (See *Scene 2: Priestly Scolding* and *Scene 9: The "Blacksmith"* for info on Fortis and L.V.X., respectively.)

Scene 8: Peasants of Yngmark

What: The troupe can question the villagers about the Moorgaunt.

Who: Villagers (see below)

Where: The hamlet of Yngmark.

DESCRIPTION

The next morning, the troupe can finally question villagers in an official capacity. The hamlet counts 11 Vuldrok families (locals starting anew in this virgin village) and four Known-Worlder households (free-men settlers who served Hector in the war).

Clues available through roleplay and influence actions include:

- The Mykle family (Vuldroks) lost five sheep in several attacks. The attacker always left "tiptoe" footprints.
- The Haskell family (Vuldroks) lost a shepherd son (Gynnr) and a lamb last month. Again, tiptoe prints were found.
- The Wilson-Hawkwood sisters (Ava and Mia) encountered the Moorgaunt while mushrooming some months ago. "Tall and gruesome it was, a man's skin stretched over inhuman bones, its manhood dangling. Fortunately, it ran away."
- Last week, Oldfather Eolf (Vuldrok) chased off the Moorgaunt when it tried to grab a sheep from his pen. "Terrible it was, a troll in a man-suit," he calls it.
- All villagers confirm that whenever there's a tempest, blizzard, or thunderstorm, the Moorgaunt runs shrieking through the hamlet.
- What's worse, the demon has cursed Yngmark with failing harvests and weakling births for years.

Scene 9: The "Blacksmith"

What: The troupe can question L.V.X about the Moorgaunt.

Who: L.V.X., Apprentice Bogdan

Where: L.V.X.'s smithy

DESCRIPTION

When the troupe comes a-calling, L.V.X. invites them in for coffee and stew (boiled-up army rations from her considerable stock). Apprentice Bogdan serves the food... and stares at the troupe's high-tech items.

The workshop is a low-tech smithy. Spades, horse shoes, plow blades, and wheel rims are heaped along the walls, but the furnace looks unused. (If asked, L.V.X. claims to have just cleaned it). A heavy steel door with three padlocks (and alarms) leads to her backroom laboratory; even Bogdan isn't allowed entry. There's no sign of high-tech equipment, although the troupe's high-tech timepieces and gadgets detect the "L.V.X.'s Sphere." (See *Scene 1: The Grateful Lord*.) If questioned about it, L.V.X. admits to the network and to Iron-Leg's holo-projections, urging the troupe's silence: "Father Fortis hounds me already."

While eager for news and sophisticated conversation, L.V.X. seems nervous. If pressured, she admits she hates it here, feeling insecure in her post and longing for civilization. As for the Moorgaunt, L.V.X. doesn't believe in demons: "I reckon it's just an unclassified, local predator." Furthermore, she admits to refusing Fortis' services and sacraments. (PC priests and guilders realize that as a tech-martyr, L.V.X. is legally obliged to accept regular sacraments from a private or parish confessor. If confronted, she asks any PC priest to take her confession instead; while legal, this challenges Fortis' jurisdiction.)

PC ACTIONS

- **Interview/Interrogation:** Successful influence actions can yield the following confessions from L.V.X.:
 - She admits to unsanctioned high-tech use (think machines, security systems, and holo-programming). "I guarantee it's all safe."
 - She also confides about her secret affair with Lady Cristal: "We both hate Hargard and find solace in one another."
- **Tech study:** Examining L.V.X.'s products (Perception + Tech Redemption vs. Hard Resistance) reveals them to be too seamless and even to be reproduced from casts or shaped in a forge. L.V.X. refuses to explain: "Don't you worry about my trade secrets! Just know that I fulfill my duty and supply whatever metalcraft the hamlet requires."

Her secret is a TL5 3-D printer, brought to Yngmark without the parish priest's sanction. Fortis would regard this tech as a gateway to hell!

Act 3: Enemy Within

Scene 10: Priest and Apprentice

What: Father Fortis preaches against barbarian religions and attacks Vuldrok traditions.

Who: Father Fortis, 6 Vuldrok, Baronet Hector, L.V.X., Apprentice Bogdan

Where: The hamlet of Yngmark, the village green.

DESCRIPTION

That evening, Fortis — torch in hand — addresses the hamlet from the village green, claiming the Moorgaunt is divine retribution for their paganism and calling L.V.X. a "tech witch" best shunned. Then he pours lamp oil on the central tree and sets it ablaze. Villagers hurl mud and curses at the priest; some run for buckets and water. (Let the PCs intervene and negotiate as they wish.)

When the situation reaches its boiling point, Hector emerges from the manor, demanding order and obedience. The villagers bow before their lord. Fortis shouts for all to turn their hearts to the Pancreator, but Hector dismisses the priest and organizes the firefighting. Suddenly, wailing klaxons shriek through the hamlet, sounding from both L.V.X.'s smithy and the manor.

"Thieves!" L.V.X. shouts, sprinting to her smithy. Back inside the smithy, apprentice Bogdan floats in the air (caught in an antigravity bubble while attempting to burglarize L.V.X.'s laboratory). Tearfully, Bogdan admits his crime. "I meant no harm. I just wanted a peek at whatever amazing stuff you keep back there, L.V.X.! I learn nothing sweeping your floors all year." (GMs might run this scene as comic relief to contrast the horrors to come.)

Scene 11: Nightmare on the Loose

What: The Moorgaunt was within the walls... and Archibald is missing.

Who: Baronet Hector, Lady Cristal

Where: Hector's manor.

DESCRIPTION

Tensions eased, Hector and the troupe returns to the mansion, but something's wrong. It's too quiet now. Lady Cristal is found cowering in a closet. "He's here!" she whispers. "The Moorgaunt is in the house!" Calming down, she explains: "The alarm set Archibald

a-screaming, but when I ran to his room, the demon came at me in the hallway, shrieking like a madman!”

Exploring the mansion, the troupe finds the back-door ajar. Tiptoe tracks are visible outside. Furthermore, Archibald’s room is empty, except for his night-clothes scattered on the floor. Before long, villagers bang on the front door: “Milord, your horses! The stables are open and the horses are loose!”

At the stables, every horse is gone (having been freed by the Archibald-Moorgaunt). Moreover, Hjalme the stable boy is missing, and a blood trail leads into the woods. Hector declares he’ll stay behind to guard the hamlet while the troupe hunts the demon down.

Scene 12: The Moorgaunt’s Den

What: It’s time for a showdown with the Moorgaunt on its home ground.

Who: Moorgaunt

Where: The Moorgaunt’s cavern lair.

DESCRIPTION

Tracking Hjalme’s blood trail, the troupe enters the deep moors where a wooded hill hides the Moorgaunt’s lair.

Those examining tracks spot signs of previous gurdvulf habitation, but the vicious sabertooth wolves have evidently shunned the place for years.

A narrow cavern runs 10 meters deep, terminating in a puddle chamber. In the puddle, Hjalme lies among several flesh-stripped sheep skeletons. Unconscious, he is slowly being devoured by swarms of tadpole-like creatures.

Before long, the Moorgaunt stalks in from the night to protect its offspring. It pounces indiscriminately and fights to the death.

NPC

MOORGAUNT

Agent (creature) • Level: 4 • Size: 8

Description: Tall, gaunt, stilt-legged. Thin skin stretches across thick bones.

Special Abilities:

Animal Mind: Immune to influence maneuvers, except those using the Animalia skill.

Drown: After a successful Fight-skill *grapple* maneuver besides the puddle, the Moorgaunt can hold its target’s face down in the water, causing them to drown. Use the Vigor-skill *hold breath* maneuver rules for the victim but assume that the target didn’t have time to hold their breath; thus, the target must make a roll (Vigor + Endurance vs. Tough Resistance) to avoid drowning on each turn they cannot escape the grapple.

Fight-or-Flight: Ignores pain- and exhaustion-based states when cornered or in a desperate situation.

Nimble: +4 Body Resistance.

Characteristics:

Str	8	Wits	2	Pre	3
Dex	7	Per	7	Int	1
End	7	Will	5	Faith	3

Skills:

Fight	8
Impress	5
Observe	7
Sneak	9

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Claw	16	3 dmg
Grapple	16	1 dmg + <i>drown</i>
Hunt/track	14	Find target if VPs beat target’s Sneak Resistance.
Sneak/hide	16	2 VP per +1 Resistance vs being found/spotted.

Resistance: Body 4 | Mind 0 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 17

Surges: rating: 12 | number: 2





DEFEATING THE MOORGAUNT

When the Moorgaunt is killed, its twisted body reverts back to Archibald's frail form. The symbiot brain-slug slithers out of the corpse's ear and attempts to slither to a hidey hole. A well-placed bootheel can quickly dispatch it.

Scene 13: Aftermath

What: Yngmark returns to normal.

Who: Baronet Hector

Where: Hector's manor.

DESCRIPTION

Lord Hector is devastated by his father's tragedy but correctly identifies the situation as symbiot infection. "Father fought beside Emperor Alexius at the Siege of Sytan. He must have caught the parasite there. That's why his senility was so rapid. The symbiot must have destroyed his brain! We never suspected...."

With the lifeforce-siphoning symbiot gone, Yngmark quickly blossoms, turning a good harvest next autumn. Hector aids the troupe as best he can, and Jarl Agnar himself might show interest in the troubleshooters. Yngmark's nightmare has ended... although... stable boy Hjalmdid spend considerable time in that spawning pool....

Appendix: Tech Level

FROM ORIGIN TO STONE AGE (TECH LEVEL 0)

Both the Merchant League and the Church teach their apprentices that tool use is endemic to all life. However, the Church goes a step farther to explain that this initial need to explore and manipulate the environment reflects the divine property of curiosity. As evidence, they point to lifeforms found across all worlds: the termites of Holy Terra build air-conditioned nests; the ape-analogs found in Second Republics travelogues use sound to stun fish; fungi infect and then pilot higher lifeforms like primitive vessels; the shantor carve rudimentary spears with their teeth.

This common shared foundation of invention limits itself to stone age tools or their planetary equivalent. The process is infinitely sustainable and ephemeral, and the tools possess only limited material strength. At this level, it is argued, tool use is harmless to one's soul. In fact, there are still villages, more common in the Vuldrok worlds, that live comfortably at this level. This primitive condition is, however, far from the human norm.

ALCHEMICAL TECH (TL 1–4)

The technological standard for the majority of the Known Worlds deals with creating novel forms out of the fundamental forces of nature. Alchemical technology begins with forged weapons, bronzes at the simplest, and ends with the introduction of electricity. The earliest uses of alchemical tech were for expansion: alloys for weaponry and transport advances like the wheel. This quickly gave way to basic chemistry, including gunpowder, medical compounds, and significantly better material sciences. The most advanced

levels of alchemical technology conclude with a basic grasp of physics, including an understanding of the strong, weak, and electromagnetic forces, along with the observation of gravity. Worlds with alchemical tech require a certain mining infrastructure, which can exhaust local resources easily if not monitored.

Most of the populace lives at this level. Your average peasant has access to a bronzed or ceramic plow, a cart, and a beast of burden to pull it. The magistrate of the nearest town might be in charge of handing out explosives for mining or clearing out hazards. The nearest city might be crisscrossed with pneumatic tubes and copper-wired street lamps. More significant tech would only be found at guild offices that deal with long-distance trade or noble estates. While the guild maintains that these levels of technology are safe for use, the Church is slightly stricter. They believe sin begins to creep into the everyday human experience at this level, as people start to desire access to better tools. Sinful peasants become angry that only the guilds, nobles, and Church have access to better technology.

The Church is quick to point out that a person's access to higher technology is not a sign of special grace. Instead, these people have opened themselves up to the very real risk of falling into apostasy, placing their souls in jeopardy. There's a story still told of a guildsman who used lightning to create life, only to have his unchecked creation destroy everything he cared for, including his sanity. The Church labors to prevent those scenarios.

If it wasn't for the needs of interstellar travel, for safety against the dangers of aliens and alien technology, and for the greater needs of empire, this level is where technology would sit. The Church deems what comes next wholly and completely dangerous.

EMANANT TECH (TL 4–6)

“To light a candle is to cast a shadow.” These words served as inspiration for the Prophet Zebulon as he examined the impact of the technologies drawing humankind to the stars. On the surface, people were loudly touting how far humankind had gotten and what wonders laid in store for the future. Underneath that, a disturbing trend had been steadily growing, even before humankind left its home world: like little gods, humanity was starting to create technology in his own image.

This trend began slowly and insidiously with the desire to have tools that made things for us, whether they were made on assembly lines or with primitive think machines. The Information Age saw an uneven shift from the safe tech of the alchemical era to the technostic dangers of emanant tech. Technology at this level evolved from early aircraft and computers through Diasporan jump-capable craft and ceramsteel to the robust starships and early AIs of the fledgling Second Republic... but it started with the ideals of Babel. If humankind could simply reach out far enough, mentally or spiritually or emotionally or physically, then they could touch the source of creation. They could become, in effect, a god.

As soon as humankind began creating obvious extensions of themselves, their peers recognized a distinct issue that came with it and named it: MAIA. Memetic Adaptive Inanimate Anthropomorphism. They decided MAIA was a quirk of psychology, a potential psychosis where a person identified so strongly with an external tool — a cybernetic extremity, for example, or a thoroughly rendered avatar in a chat room — that it became part of their own internal psyche. They thought MAIA could be treated with drugs or therapy or monitoring, consistently underestimating the influence and damage that was going on. Some First Republicans counseled caution, but others saw MAIA as a fantastic opportunity.

Plans were implemented to have every human outfitted with cybernetic enhancements that allowed direct access to their brains, past the senses and right into a person’s perceptions, influencing the person with a granularity never before possible on behalf of advertisers and their corporate sponsors. Some argue that this was the reason the Diaspora began: People were trying to avoid this horrifying procedure. There’s even an argument that the sole reason this flood of internal-tech failed was due to humankind’s unprecedented encounter with a higher order of technology: the Ur jumpgate.

Meanwhile, despite those who fled, invasive technologies were introduced that were custom designed to their users, regardless of whether their users had interfaces or not. Some technology was even designed to deliberately alter the user, so the user and their technology could be a better match. Somewhere at this time, certain segments of society began their anti-technology crusade. The

Church pointed to the words of Saint Amalthea, whose early works focused on the dangers of these technologies, especially to the psyche. At the time, her texts were largely ignored by the greater public in favor of rigorous regimens that “promoted willpower” in their subjects.

Because this time in history is so reviled by the Church, technology at this level is limited primarily to cities, guild-controlled worlds, and the occasional lost world. Emanant tech is resource intensive, and without the use of extra-planetary travel, a world’s resources can be rapidly exhausted. Controlling this level of technology requires strict segregation and regulation. For instance, beyond the cities, an average person might go through a decade without seeing a magic-lantern show, while a city dweller might have a magic lantern in his home but no air conditioning. A noble house might have a fleet of starships, but little in the way of centralized sanitation. Veterans of cybernetic wars are often kept separate from others of their kind, or they may even have most of their tech deactivated.

IMMERSIVE TECH (TL 7–8)

The problems with technology’s impact on humankind started magnifying when the Second Republic rose to power. The earliest immersive tech included personal energy shields and autonomous non-humanoid artificial intelligences, and later, fully stable terraforming and advanced artificial sentients. Suicides rates started to climb, and planetary-level disasters became more of a norm than a rarity as people tried to implement misunderstood vautech. Because of the lack of response from the higher-ups of the Republic and the obvious needs of its followers, the Church developed the concept and doctrine of “techgnosis,” which it used to determine whether its parishioners were spiritually fit to implement certain types of tech.

Unlike ego and willpower, both common concepts for defining identity, techgnosis refers to the ability of a person to maintain their mental and spiritual boundaries, emphasizing the ability to readily distinguish what is and what is not them. This policy, after the Fall of the Second Republic, morphed into the official canon known as the “Privilege of Martyrs.”

The principal features of technology at this level are extreme material resilience, miniaturization of an astonishing array of everyday items, and a structure that requires interstellar trade to maintain. After the suns began to fade, the overall framework required to maintain that level of technology rapidly fell apart.

Because of its resilience, most Second Republic tech was meant to be durable and/or have the ability to repair itself, so it could be endemic within any given society. In practice, that means that most people in the 51st century have had contact with a Second Republic artifact, but acting out of ignorance, they might have used

it for a purpose for which it was not intended. The most common re-application of Second Republic tech is as a power source, a practice the guilds heartily despise, since it can lead to some truly magnificent explosions. This has also led to some uncomfortable situations involving self-repairing tools, such as the town generator that rose up and walked off to the front for a war that was concluded centuries ago.

It should be noted that at this level of technology, some items just can't be moved. This is often an issue with Ur-tech, whose inner workings are far too alien to understand, but it can also apply to larger installations, like terraforming platforms. Only a rare handful of techs have the know-how to operate them, but they rarely have the time to visit. Often, their visits are only to make sure the place is clean and not breaking down too badly.

Given how common Second Republic tech is, people in power are tempted to hoard or to duplicate the powerful tools of the past. One assassin droid, a couple of interstellar warships, a biotech lab that can aerosolize a pacification gas — any of these artifacts can redirect the course of history. With them, though, comes a fleet of nightmares. There is no high-tech infrastructure to come and clean up the mess after the proverbial genie has been let out of the bottle. As a result, both the Church and the League have hired groups to take care of “sensitive” issues. The Church prefers search-and-destroy missions; the League prefers find-and-preserve missions instead.

Despite these disparate methods, the Church and League continue to hold the line against the spread of technology. The Church operates as the first line of defense, due to its constant presence among the people. The guild acts as 24/7 consultants, ready to identify a threat and then neutralize it for the people, especially if the nobility is involved.

For those who live in the most advanced cities, their contact with extreme tech is highly limited and oppressively regulated. A family may be given sole charge of a water purifier, but nothing else higher than the bronze age, while their neighbors may have access to a food analyzer that neutralizes local poisons. If they train each other to use both machines, they could find themselves on the warming end of a flame gun before the tech is passed on to more “agreeable” families. This hierarchy applies to starships as well. It's considered better to lose two crews to the dark than to train the personnel in tasks to which they are not assigned. More than once, a crew member has saved the day, only to find themselves under scrutiny by the Orthodoxy and League leaders. Curiosity is rarely rewarded when it comes to technology; it's more often punished.

Nowhere is this more aptly demonstrated than with Third Republic sympathizers. Their rapid adoption of Second Republic and illicit vautech makes them

a force for be reckoned with on a number of worlds. However, that same exposure to high technology compromises their technosis, which they loudly proclaim doesn't exist. As a result, the excesses resulting from their psychotic technological obsessions may quickly alert the local authorities to their presence.

TECH USE

As technology advanced, innovators placed more and more emphasis on simplifying user interfaces. After the fall of the Second Republic, this resulted in devices that could easily be used but not easily repurposed, since they relied on proprietary programming languages. On a practical and often terrifying level, this meant a farmer could pick up a smart-gun and, if the farmer was bright enough, the smart-gun would walk him through how to use it. On the other side, it meant that people who show an affinity for languages and puzzle solving, often coming through the Church, are sometimes snatched up, trained as coders, and recruited to open up the secrets of the past.

UR-TECH (TECH LEVEL 9-10)

Ur-tech is life-changing. The jumpgates warped space-time, people's personalities, their mental state, and perhaps even their genetic code — and that was just one piece of tech. The remnants of the Anunnaki's civilization are scattered across known space. Other strange effects of Ur-tech are restricted to only rumors, at least the public at large. Legends hint at alterations on a species level (or at the level of the soul), prophecies of things to come, and cracks in the foundations of reality itself. The adventurous and the desperate make pilgrimages to find or access Ur-relics. The common folk avoid them, except as a source of stories. The truly greedy or wicked who go after relics often become a source of cautionary legends.

The Known World has a thriving trade in fake Ur artifacts; thankfully, that's the closest most citizens ever get to of Ur-tech. Uncommon artifacts that do possess power and are movable end up as the focus of conflict, often local, but sometimes larger in scope. This leaves the League and the Church in a strange state. Artifacts are practically impossible to destroy and certainly should not be gathered together in one spot, no matter how “secure” it may seem. The accepted solution has been to gift them to nobles, which gives nobles a chance to display their possession while keeping the Church and League involved.

NPC CARD TEMPLATE: HEADLINER & AGENT

NAME: _____					
CLASS LEVEL: _____		FACTION: _____		CALLING: _____	
DESCRIPTION: _____ _____					
CHARACTERISTICS:					
Strength	_____	Wits	_____	Presence	_____
Dexterity	_____	Perception	_____	Intuition	_____
Endurance	_____	Will	_____	Faith	_____
SKILLS:					
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

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ACTIONS:		Goal	Impact
<i>Shake it off</i>		_____	Removes a state.
_____		_____	_____
_____		_____	_____
_____		_____	_____
CAPABILITIES: _____ _____			
PERKS: _____ _____			
RESISTANCE:	Body	_____	Mind
		_____	Spirit
		_____	_____
VITALITY:	_____		
REVIVALS:	Rating:	_____	Number:
		_____	_____
BANK:	_____		
SURGES:	Rating:	_____	Number:
		_____	_____
EQUIPMENT: _____ _____			

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NPC CARD TEMPLATE: EXTRA

NAME: _____			
DESCRIPTION: _____ _____			
ACTIONS:		Goal	Impact
<i>Shake it off</i>		_____	Removes a state.
_____		_____	_____
_____		_____	_____
_____		_____	_____
RESISTANCE:	Body	_____	Mind
		_____	Spirit
		_____	_____
VITALITY:	_____		
EQUIPMENT: _____ _____			

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