

# MERCHANTS of The JUMPWEB



FADING SUNS™



# MERCHANTS of The JUMPWEB



by  
Bill Bridges, Brian Campbell, Andrew Greenberg,  
Sam Inabinet, Ross Isaacs, James Moore, Chris Wiese

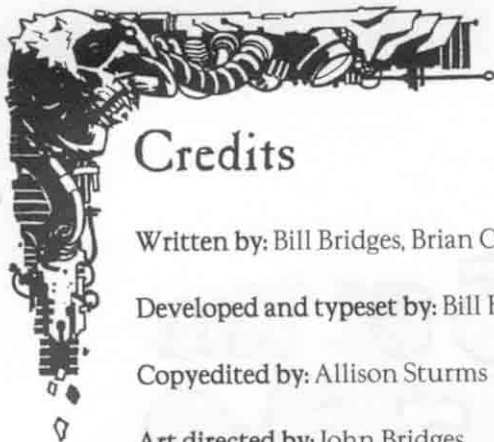


>> Merchants of the Jumpweb <<

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Found by the Scravers  
Edited by the Engineers  
Provided by the Charioteers  
Debt paid by the Reeves  
Protected by the Musters.



## Credits

Written by: Bill Bridges, Brian Campbell, Andrew Greenberg, Sam Inabinet, Ross Isaacs, James Moore, Chris Wiese

Developed and typeset by: Bill Bridges

Copyedited by: Allison Sturms

Art directed by: John Bridges

Art by: John Bridges, Darryl Elliott, Sam Inabinet, Brian LeBlanc, Larry MacDougal, Ron Spencer

Cover art by: John Bridges

Chapter title inspiration: Warren Zevon's "Lawyers, Guns & Money" and "Jungle Work"

## Emblems:

The emblems on the front cover represent some of the new character roles presented in this book. They are: Academy Interatta, Brewers, Bureaucrats, The Oubliette, Purgers, Stewards

## Pilgrims:

Beware the sin of Republicanism! That you believe all sentients are free and equal is a sign of ignorance. The Pancreator raises some above others, and for right purpose. The merchant is a necessary evil; do not mistake his station for one of glory or liberty. Deny his honeyed words when he says that you, too, are free to do as you will. If all acted upon such a thought, the universe would be mightily different indeed.



Holistic Design Inc.  
5295 Hwy 78, D-337  
Stone Mountain, GA 30087

Visit Holistic Design's web site at:

[www.holistic-design.com](http://www.holistic-design.com)

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Printed in the US of A







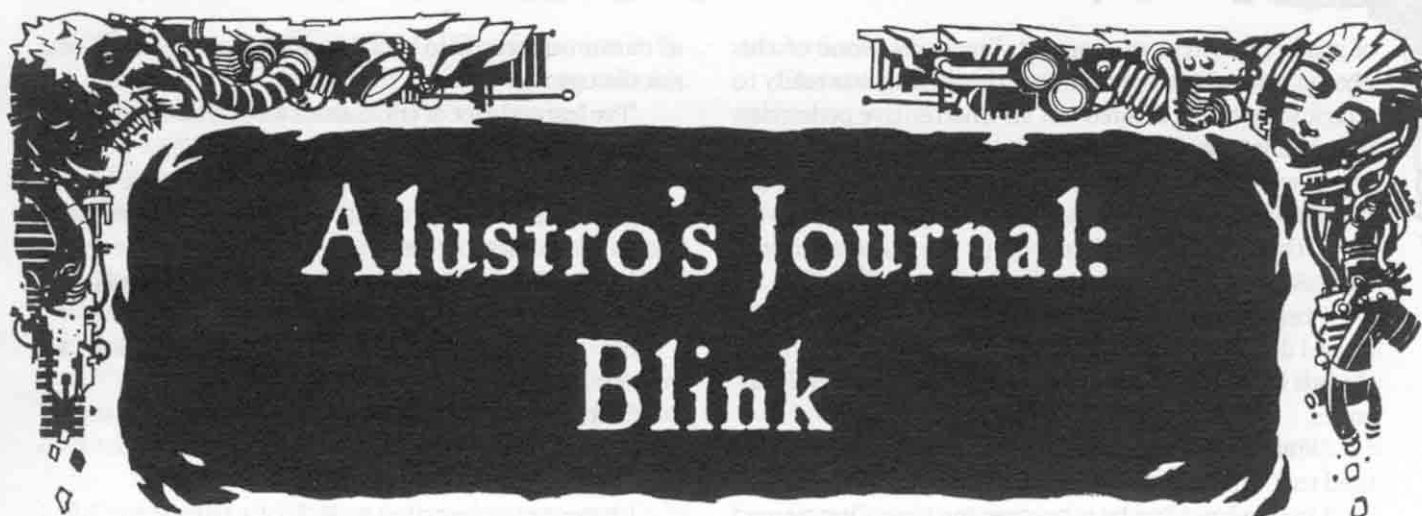
# MERCHANTS of The JUMPUWEB

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# Alustro's Journal: Blink

December 17, 4997 (Holy Terra calendar)

I had always heard about Leagueheim and its decadent ways. By what my Church instructors taught, I was lead to believe it was a veritable Gehenne of sin. I believed that once I could see it for myself, such an overblown reputation would, like so many other Church fallacies I had been taught, crumble.

I was strangely right, although in a way I never expected. Even here among the smooth ceramsteel spires and flashing lights I found a spirituality of sorts.

We arrived here in time to catch one of Erian's al-Malik allies before he left on some undisclosed mission. Before leaving, he provided us with information on an unknown lost world where the answers to our quest may await us. I will write nothing of it here, until we are closer to our goal.

In his absence, he allowed us the use of his suites. We have used this needed rest to make some additions to our new starship, the Resurgent. Julia demanded a neutrino sensor array, but the prices we discovered were outrageous. We voted against it. That's when she revealed that she knew a place where we could find one cheaper, but she would have to go there in person to arrange the sale. We all thought it promising and agreed.

"I want Onggangarak to come with me," she said. "In case of trouble. And Alustro, too."

"Me?" I said. "I know nothing of commerce. What can I do?"

"Even the most desperate thugs think twice about hitting a priest. You're my insurance against... hasty opinions."

"Wait just a minute," Erian said. "This trip is dangerous? Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

Julia rolled her eyes. "Everywhere on Leagueheim is dangerous, Erian! This is just... more so."

"Then I forbid it. I will not have Alustro put into unnecessary danger."

"Hold on, now! He'll be fine. Like I said, he's just there to sooth bruised egos and such."

"Erian," Cardanzo said, "They will be fine in Julia's care. We could really use that array."

"Then I'm coming too," Erian said.

"Oh no you're not!" Julia yelled. "They'll know you for the royal brat you are the second you step off the lift! You're staying here."

"How dare you! I can go wherever I want. Whenever and with whomever!"

"Not here you don't. They'll jack the price up at least three times more than it's worth when they smell your privilege."

"Please," Cardanzo said, "there is no reason for raised voices. Julia is right, Erian. You and I must stay here and let them do their work."

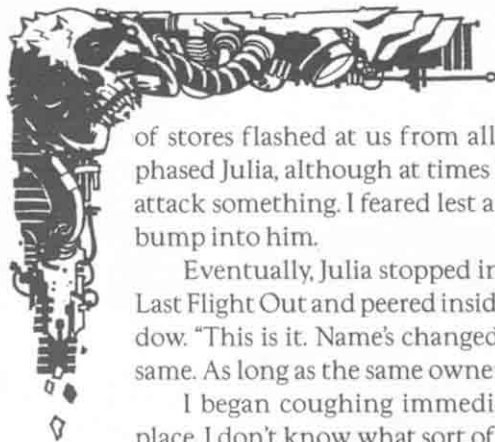
"Why do you stay?" Julia said, looking surprised. "I could use you there."

"A bodyguard does not leave his charge," Cardanzo replied. "Besides, Ong is more than capable of providing all the muscle or threat you may need."

Julia looked annoyed but nodded. "All right, then. Let's go, you two." She picked up her belt, loaded with her blaster and all manner of tools, and headed for the door. Ong and I got up to follow.

She lead us through a dizzying maze of sidewalks, escalators, tubes and cargo lifts until we reached what I believe was the ground level of Leagueheim. At least, it seemed like the ground. It was dark even though slight patches of daylight shone through openings in the soot layer above and innumerable fusion signs from hundreds





of stores flashed at us from all directions. None of this phased Julia, although at times I think Ong was ready to attack something. I feared lest an unattentive pedestrian bump into him.

Eventually, Julia stopped in front of a bar called the Last Flight Out and peered inside through the grimy window. "This is it. Name's changed but the place is still the same. As long as the same owner's here, we're fine."

I began coughing immediately upon entering the place. I don't know what sort of burning weed was in the air, but it wasn't tobacco or even one of the milder narcotics.

"Yimbun," Julia said. "Cover your mouth and you'll get used to it. Smells awful but tastes great."

I nodded, pulling my robes over my nose. Ong seemed undisturbed by the smell, even though his senses were keener. I assume that the legendary Vorox resistance to toxins held true here.

Julia led us through the crowded room to the bar and rapped on it, trying for the bartender's attention. "The owner in?"

The sweaty fellow glared at her. "Who wants to know?"

"Julia Abrams. He knows me."

The man nodded and picked up a small palm squawker. He whispered something into it, which I could not hear over the crowd's conversations. He looked at Julia and nodded, smiling. "Wait here. He'll be right out."

As we lounged against the bar, I noticed a few men across the room looking at us and talking. They seemed to know Julia, but were not too happy about it. As I was about to ask Julia who they were, a yell came from the rear of the bar.

"You! How dare you come into my establishment!"

Julia turned to the man and went white. "Yours?! Where the Gehenne is Lark?"

"Lark's dead," the man said, now backed up by a number of thugs gathering around him. "Left the place to me."

"He would. He never did have a good eye for character. Leaving his pride and joy to Sobol Hetch. So what now?"

"We settle up, that's what. Decide here and now who's best."

Ong began to growl deep in his throat. Sobol's thugs began to look nervous, their hands reaching for their holsters.

"Here and now," Julia said. "Let's go."

"Wait!" I cried. "There's no need for violence! Whatever your dispute is, surely there's a calmer resolution!"

Julia and Sobol both looked at me like I was mad.

"Violence?" Julia said.

"What's the harm in a game of Blink?" Sobol said.

"Blink?" I stammered. "What is Blink?"

Sobol pulled out a deck of holographic cards and slid them towards us across the bar. "That's Blink. Best damn game of chance in the Known Worlds is what."

I could see Julia's eyes roll up. "Say's you. But since it's

so damn important to you, let's play. No way you'll beat me, though."

"I've learned a lot of tricks since we played last, Abrams. I think this one's mine."

Sobol went over to a table and shoved some empty glasses off it, scattering them across the floor. None of them broke. "Have a seat. All of you."

Julia walked over and sat down, but motioned for us to stay behind her. "They'll stand."

Sobol, seating himself, shrugged. "Fine. Let's play. Can your boy shuffle cards?"

"Sure," Julia said, picking up the deck, which one of Sobol's men had fetched from the bar. She handed it to me.

I have never handled a deck of cards in my life. I looked at the ones I now held in my hand and caught my breath in awe. They were stunningly beautiful. Lush, three-dimensional images leapt from the card surfaces as I peered through the deck. Impossible patterns of color and texture mixed together as two cards were connected and broke apart again as they separated. I shook myself from the reverie and placed the deck on the table, trying to remember what shuffling looked like from having seen it done.

"They're mesmerizing, aren't they, priest?" Sobol said. "Banned on most of the Known Worlds by the Church. Your even touching them would get a reprimand from your superior and a call for confession. But here on Leagueheim, who is going to police such things? No priest with any wits would step foot in this district. Except you, and you're only here because Abrams here was looking for an element of surprise."

Julia frowned. "My confessor goes where I go, Sobol."

"Yours? Or does he belong to some haughty royal you're screwing?"

Julia stared at Sobol with utter hatred and the tension returned.

"Uhm... I think I've got them randomized," I said. "Is this good enough?"

Sobol did not take his eyes off Julia. "Fine. Go ahead and deal us seven cards each — without revealing them."

When they had the cards, I stepped back behind Julia to see what was in her hand. It made no sense to me, but I was awestruck again at the intense images. They almost portrayed something, and it was maddeningly tempting to stare at them until the image they were hiding revealed itself.

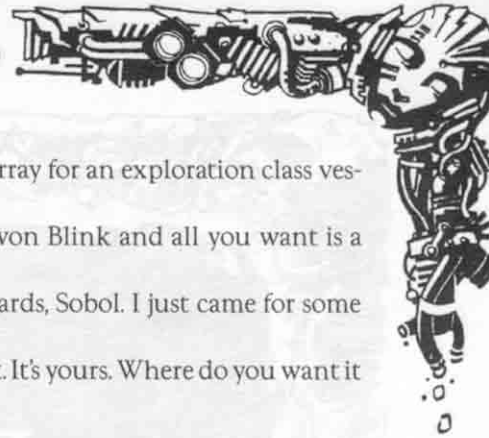
Julia hid the cards, looking at me. "Don't stare too long. That's the trick. You'll try for hours — years, even — to put the cards in the right combination to reveal 'it.'"

"It?"

"The secret they hold. The image just on the edge of consciousness. If you ever saw it, it would solve everything. Or so everyone thinks. It's all just a load of crap. A bunch of random holograms generated by a field. As long as the cards are in a certain range, they're affected by the field."







"But what generates the field? Where's the power?"

"Who knows? That's what makes them so valuable. Can't make them anymore."

"Enough talk," Sobol said. "Put down a card."

Julia looked through her hand again and placed down a bluish card with a slowly revolving vortex. Sobol quickly laid a green card with rising lines on top of it. The two images combined to create a weird effect, somewhat like a jumpgate, with lines of force radiating from a spirals. Sobol smiled. Julia frowned.

This went on for some time. About an hour into the game, Julia sent me to the restaurant next door for some food. One of Sobol's men came with me to help carry the bags.

Three hours after it began, however, it was over. Julia placed a red card with intermittent flashes on top of Sobol's yellow, pulsing mist. The effect was to destroy all the images, leaving a momentary void in the space where they had been. The effect lasted for perhaps less than a second, but I could now understand why Sobol was so obsessed with the game.

Staring at that blank moment, it seemed that something leapt in to fill it, some deep feeling of...contentment. Julia sighed and had a look on her face unlike any I had seen her wear before. For once, the tense jaw slackened and her eyes softened and she had a fleeting glance of peace.

Sobol looked like he wanted to cry, for he obviously had not recieved the full effect. Was it possible that it affected the winner differently than the loser? If so, what form of technology was this?

After a moment's silence where nobody made a sound, Sobol gathered the cards together, held them close to his body and stood up. "What's it going to be, Abrams? Name

your price."

"A neutrino sensor array for an exploration class vessel."

"That's it? You just won Blink and all you want is a lousy sensor array?"

"I don't want your cards, Sobol. I just came for some hardware."

"Okay. Yeah. All right. It's yours. Where do you want it delivered?"

"Charioter Bay 33."

"It'll be there. It'll take a day or two at least, though. You understand that?"

"If it's not there in three," Julia said, standing up. "I'll coming looking for it."

Ong seemed to sense his cue and growled a short, gruff bark.

Sobol nodded. "It'll be there."

Julia turned toward the door and began walking. We followed, although I kept glancing over my shoulder back at Sobol to see what his reaction was. I suspect this was a violation of exit etiquette for it implied that I expected a blaster at our backs. But he was slumped in the chair again and looked like a loved one had died. I couldn't even begin to fathom such an addiction.

We said little on the way back, for Julia was obviously in no mood to talk. On the lift upwards, however, I know I saw a tear in her eye. She wiped it away quickly to hide it from us.

How can it be that a mere toy of the Second Republic can elicit a religious response in one who has denied it from even the Church? Such a thing is alien to me. To find faith, no matter how elusive, in a thing rather than a being is... All to human, perhaps?



# Introduction: Risky Business

"Bring the accused forward to hear her sentence!" the judge cried, leaning over his high perch to peer at the crowd gathered below. The bailiffs grabbed Manager Melissa Bulgakov and dragged her roughly to her feet. The chains around her wrists and ankles rattled loudly, echoing through the chamber. The peasant crowd beyond the barriers hushed expectantly.

"Manager Melissa Bulgakov of the Scravers Guild," the judge said, "you are found guilty of the crime of Republicanism."

A murmur went through the crowd but Melissa just smirked.

"Does the accused have anything to say for herself?" the judge said, eyes squinting at Melissa.

"Yeah, I do," Melissa said. "Can these brute-kissers let me go long enough to say it?"

The judge frowned and slowly nodded. "Release her." The bailiffs let her go and stepped away, ready to use their frap sticks at a moment's notice.

"Thank you, your honor," Melissa began. "I came to Malignatus seeking only to improve the lives of the wretched, to provide some comfort to them in their toil. In this, I was only following the moral guide of my now-deceased confessor, Father Lophius of Madoc. He said 'If there is but one person who shivers on a cold night, then all of us are cold. Is there no one to place a blanket around this poor soul and thus warm all of our hearts?' You see, your honor, I was simply trying to ease the burden of the freezing poor. I do not see how selling them blankets and parkas could possibly harm them. I especially cannot understand how such an act could promote Republic values!"

"Ah, but they were not simple blankets and cold-weather jackets, were they, manager?" the judge replied. "They were tapestries depicted the labor unions of the Second Republic, in an art style which I believe is called New Emancipation? And those parkas? The very jackets of those union members of old, bearing patches and phrases which promote insurrection! I quote: 'Proud to Be 353.' Referring, I believe, to a particular branch of the so-called labor union. This quote is followed by a picture of a man planting a flag into the back of a corporate leader, with the fur-

ther quote 'Thus Always to Bosses.' Simple blankets? I think not."

"What?! I didn't know any of that! I just sell the stuff!" Melissa said. "They were part of a bulk purchase on Manitou! I can't read! If I knew what the damn things said, I would've dumped them in space!"

"Lack of literacy skills is no excuse. As a merchant, you have a responsibility, just as does a priest and a noble lord, to look out for the welfare of one's flock. Your customers are that flock."

"But... This is ridiculous!"

"I'm going to be lenient with you, since you at least claim to follow the scriptures of the Church. Thus, you may choose your sentence: imprisonment or severe penance, to be chosen by the local Orthodox bishop. What shall it be?"

Melissa slumped and sighed. "The gulag or the rack, eh? It's not the first time for either. Go ahead and give me the penance."

"Penance it is, Father?" He turned to look at a priest standing in the crowd, smiling an evil grin.

"Branding," the priest said. "I think it shall be branding."

"No!" Melissa yelled. "You can't do that! It'll ruin me! Nobody's going to buy from a branded merchant!"

"Exactly the point, you guild scum..."

## Life of a Salesman

Life just isn't fair for members of the Merchant League. If it's not the Church peering into your daily affairs, it's a noble lord demanding a discount on some item you'll never make a profit on anyway. Sometimes, one wonders "Why bother with it?" Why not just join the priesthood instead and lose oneself in the nodding, sheepish crowd? Or perhaps the life of a simple farmer?

Merchants know better: a priest's life isn't simple or free, and the farmer is in no way immune from a lord's lash. Even with all the troubles a merchant encounters, he at least has a right to representation and self-sovereignty. Well, as long as he's got his guild to back him, he does. Of course, there are dues to pay and palms to grease,



but when all is said and done, there is nothing like the freedom of open space, or knowing that those rubes you're selling to today will never see you again and can't even hope to follow you to your next port of call.

The stars may be rough, but so is every other place. At least these you can own...

### What's In This Book

#### Alustro's Journal

Another excerpt from Brother Guissepe Alustro's journals, recounting an outing with Julia Abrams and Onggangarak.

#### Introduction: Risky Business

What you're reading now.

#### Republican Idyll

The history of the rise and fall of the Second Republic and the creation of the guilds and Merchant League. Also, Third Republic conspiracies and a review of Known Worlds law — especially where it concerns freemen.

#### Fellow Travelers: Charioteers

The history and culture of the star-pilots and star-merchants guild. Whether flying the flagship of a noble fleet or skimming along in a freetrader vessel, Charioteers know how to make the most of any situation.

#### Welcome to the Machine: Engineers

Extensive background on the guild of high invention and technological redemption — including the secret heresies within the guild. While the populace is creeped out by these "mad scientists," the nobles, guilds and Church need them to keep their worlds running.

#### Survival at Any Price: Scravers

While the guild is officially a reclamation organization, it's all just a cover for a vast, intergalactic network of crime and blackmail. This chapter details the crime families involved and what it takes to join them.

#### Strength, Muscle & Jungle Work: The Muster

Sure, everybody knows the Muster is a slavers guild. But its members prefer to see themselves as labor procurers, whether it's managing highly-skilled Muster mercenaries or procuring slaves stolen from some backwater fief.

#### Lawyers, Guns & Money: Reeves

Lawyers may be reviled, but everybody wants an expert Reeve advocate when their day in court comes. They're not just lawyers, though; from loan making to loan enforcement, Reeves can be tough allies or enemies.

#### On the Edge: Yeomen (Freelancers)

Outside of the guilds, there are a number of professions freemen can aspire to. Those with an entrepreneurial spirit may want to go it alone, creating their own businesses free from guild hassle. But they better be smart or tough, 'cause the local guilds don't like competition.

#### Minor Guilds

From the grimy Purgers to the stately Bureaucrats or the Oubliette mind-doctors, there are a number of professions with guild backing to be found throughout the Known Worlds.

#### Leaguchheim: Den of Iniquity & Freedom

The capital world of the Merchant League is one of the most cosmopolitan planets in the Known Worlds. Its high spires host private agoras unlike any seen elsewhere; its back alleys and streets provide forbidden pleasures at competitive prices. Whether high or low, however, danger threatens any mover and shaker who tries to deal on this savvy world. Here also can be found the Academy Interatta, famed institute of learning — or heresy.

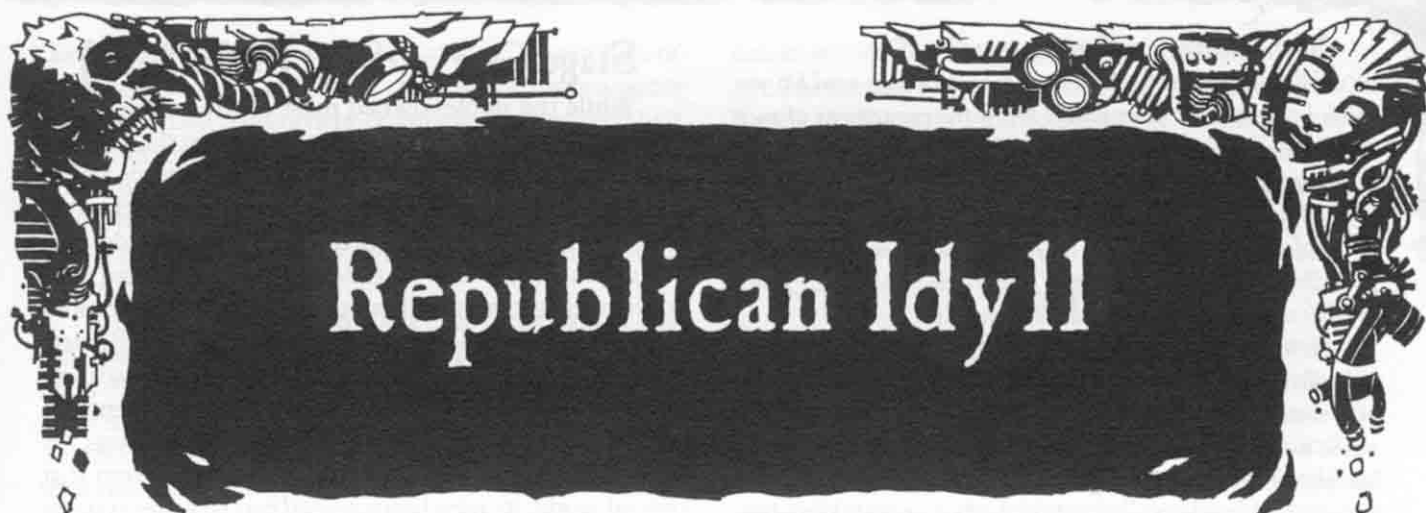
#### Appendix: Costs of Goods & Laws

Provided here is a comprehensive list of the prices for many items found in previous *Fading Suns* books, in addition to many new items. By comparing prices of common items listed here, a gamemaster should be able to figure the price of just about anything; players will know how much they are being overcharged by a greasy merchant — or how much they can overcharge themselves.

In addition, there is a long list of crimes and punishments for all sorts of behavior the characters may get involved in. Is the Hawkwood character trying to sue a Decados rival over disputed land wrongfully stolen during the Emperor Wars? Or are the characters charged as accomplices in some heinous organ harvesting operation? This list provides gamemasters with the punishments to levy, and players with some idea of what sorts of behavior to avoid — or which ones to be especially discrete with.







# Republican Idyll

by Bill Bridges

The Adamantine Hawk swooped fast and low over the pirate frigate, letting loose all guns on the raider's top side. The shields sparked and gave out under the barrage.

"She's all yours, Emancipation," Captain Fargo said into the com, banking deftly away from the pirate's blaster barrage.

"Thanks, Fargo," came the reply, "With her shields down, we can tear her hull up pretty bad. I think they'll see the error of their ways and surrender first. You've saved yet another system from the Daukor Gang."

"Just doing my job for free trade, Admiral." Fargo steered his superfast, agile fighter back to New Istanbul. He knew the Emancipation would beam the details of his exploits back to the world before he arrived and that a hero's welcome would await him. But he preferred a quieter return home, to the secret mountain cave where Doctor Exasperus had built the amazing proto-type fighter he flew, the one which allowed him to perform maneuvers once only dreamed of in ancient Terran holovids and books.

While the world knew him as Captain Fargo, his real name and identity had remained a secret. If his enemies knew that he was really —

"What in the name of Gehenne are you reading?!"

Canon Yostoi jumped at the loud voice and quickly tried to hide the library think machine in his desk drawer.

"Don't bother hiding it, Yostoi," Priest Epfemus said, walking into the small, tight room that was the nervous canon's quarters. "I know what it is. You've been reading Second Republic adventure stories again, haven't you? Which one this time? The Street Saint, Crimefighter of Criticorum? Or Captain Fargo, Space Ranger? Hmm?"

Yostoi could not meet the older priest's eyes. "C... C... Captain Fargo."

Epfemus said nothing but took the viewer from Yostoi's sweating hands. "No good will come of this, you know. I've told you that before. You're just lucky it was I who discovered it. Others would summon an inquisitor to determine the depth of your sin."

"It's not evil!" Yostoi yelled, but then looked down at his shuffling feet. "I like them."

Epfemus's glare softened. "I know you do. But they are not good for you. Can you not understand why? Even now you dream of joining this fictional captain among the stars. But where would that lead? To your doom. There are deeper dangers among the stars than pirates; hubris and pride among them."

"But... the heroes in these stories. They do good, don't they?" Yostoi said, his eyes pleading with Epfemus.

"Of course, they do. Or so they think. None are ill-hearted. But they suffer from the sin of their age, the invisible cancer which ate away at the heart of human endeavor. They believed they were the measure of greatness in the universe, not the Pancreator. Their technological feats blinded them, allowing them to believe that they were the supreme creators, forgetting that they themselves were the creation of another, greater being."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," Yostoi said, pacing about the small corner between his tiny cot and desk. "But their sense of adventure... is it not akin to Questing?"

Epfemus looked at his friend and felt sorrow for him. "When you joined the priesthood those many years ago, I had such high hopes for you. Here was a man, I thought, who will go far. But you should have reached deacon long ago. You are still but a canon, despite your early enthusiasm. Where have your wits gone, Brother Yostoi? Smothered in Second Republic rhetoric! I should have never removed you from the country parish. Your proximity to the city has brought you into contact with bad elements. Who sells you those filthy stories, anyway? What black marketer deals in such trash?!"

Yostoi sat on his bed, weary and defeated. "You're right, Father. I should not be reading them. They only distract from scripture. It is just... It is just so hard. They... stir things in me. Thoughts and desires."

"I know," said Epfemus softly. "For I once fell under their lure myself."

Yostoi looked at him in startlement. "You?!"

"Why do you think I have been so lenient with you? Do you think I care not for your soul? I know the excitement of such dreams. For me it was the holovids. That time is past, however. I overcame my affliction."

"How? How did you put them aside?"

Epfemus opened his robe and withdrew a lash. "With much pain, Brother... with much pain." He handed the lash to Yostoi and left the room, closing the door behind him.

He waited for a while outside the door until he heard the slap of leather on skin and the yelp of pain. He then returned to his own room, locked the door, and quietly removed the loose stone in the wall. Inside was a small, handheld Second Republic-era holoplayer. He dimmed the fusion lights and pressed the power button. The room became lit only by the flickering, three-dimensional images projected into the air...

While the Church considers the Second Republic to be a time of immense hubris and a moral vacuum, many in the guilds of the Merchant League look back upon this time in human history as if it were an Eden, an era of peace and fulfillment for all. In a way, both viewpoints are correct. The complexity of that era allows for many interpretations, for something as large and expansive as the Second Republic affected many people in a multitude of ways. For some, it was the peak of human endeavor, where science seemed to answer all the material problems of existence. For others, it was an era of gross materialism, where nothing that could not be pointed at with a fusion microscope was granted any reality or value; spirituality was considered an ignorant pastime.

Yet the Church grew during this time, as more and more recognized a need for spirituality in their increasingly meaningless lives. Those who could not find justification for their lives in pursuits of science, exploration or money-making, sought such answers in religion. While the Universal Church was not the only spiritual institution catering to the needs of a vast, intergalactic citizenry, it was one of the few with any roots in human history.

And for those who lived in both worlds, exalting the wonders of science and the sublime wisdom of religion, the Second Republic was an institution unequalled in history. But regardless of the ideals birthed from scientific discovery or spiritual insight, the Second Republic began with the all-too-human pursuit of something at first more concrete than the former ideals and yet ultimately as intangible as either: Money.

## History

The 43rd century Church historian, Linaeus Costainus, broke the Second Republic into distinct historical stages of development, based more on the liveliness of its culture than on its progressive rise in technology:

### Stage One: Advent (3500-3600)

While the nobles owned most of the worlds of the Diaspora, merchants were never as powerless then as they seem to be in the New Dark Ages. Indeed, many worlds were run by mercantile-oriented governments, such as the Peltan Oligarchy on Criticorum, a council of aldermen and capitalist barons. Over the centuries, many Diasporan governments rose and fell, but the merchant organizations seemed to outlast most of them, building strong alliances with neighboring worlds, going about their business largely unaffected by local or planetary governments.

The strongest of these interstellar alliances was the Market Authority, centered on New Istanbul. From that central world, its merchants spread out to other systems and created outposts and even governments (on those democratic worlds where they could influence elections). They were soon allied with another powerful organization, the Liberty Confluence of Leagueheim. These two powers set an example widely imitated by independent worlds, some of which forged mercantile governments of their own, some governing a mere province, others an entire world, while some grew to encompass one or more systems.

With the immense profits to be made from interstellar trade, many noble houses got in on the act. The al-Malik especially saw the advantage of engaging in trading with these mercantile leagues.

While humanity was increasingly becoming unified by the Universal Church — whereby far flung world could now, for the first time in centuries, speak of shared experiences and values — the merchants moved in to exploit this, forming de facto pilgrimage routes with starliner tours. This increased travel cemented the Church's intergalactic reach but also ensured the merchants of steady trade routes and the trade treaties and pacts that went with them.

With the increased travel and contact between hundreds of worlds, it was perhaps inevitable that the merchants would rise to the top, for many worlds' most lucrative endeavors became tourism and interstellar trade.

When the Market Authority and the Liberty Confluence, and a host of satellite leagues, declared the Second Republic on New Istanbul, it was only a matter of time until the rest of human space joined up, fearful of being left without a piece of the pie.

The Second Republic constitution set up a central senate consisting of representatives from each member world. Each of these worlds in turn set up local senates and legislatures to govern their worlds within the strictures of the Republic Senate. At first, however, election to the senate was not universally democratic. The constitution gave each member world the right to determine its senatorial representative by its own customs.

Certainly, many worlds initiated democratic reforms, copying the systems of the Market Authority and Liberty

Confluence. Others, however, instituted oligarchies of noble families, who alone had the power to vote a noble into the senate. And others, of course, maintained their noble dictatorships, with the ruling noble choosing who would be his senator — or electing himself to the office. On such worlds, the local senate or parliament mandated by the Republic became a figurehead institution with little actual power.

Such sub-cultures within the overall mercantile culture could not last. Eventually, centralization overruled them. Whether because of the influence their senators came under on the cosmopolitan New Istanbul or the persuasiveness of the traveling merchants who traded with them, the vision of riches for all — not just a few — could not be kept from the people.

Some worlds only came to democracy after violent revolt, aided by the refusal of Republican armies to come to the rescue of the failing dictatorial powers, who often kept vast resources from being opened for exploitation and thus gained few friends among the merchant leaders. The savviest noble houses knew that their best bet to remain in power was to coddle the new democracy of the Republic. Many relinquished power and began election campaigns to become senators, using their voluntary hand-over of control to the local senate to cement popularity. These families built generations-long cults of personality, with sons and daughters finding their way consistently into elected office, despite the numerous scan-

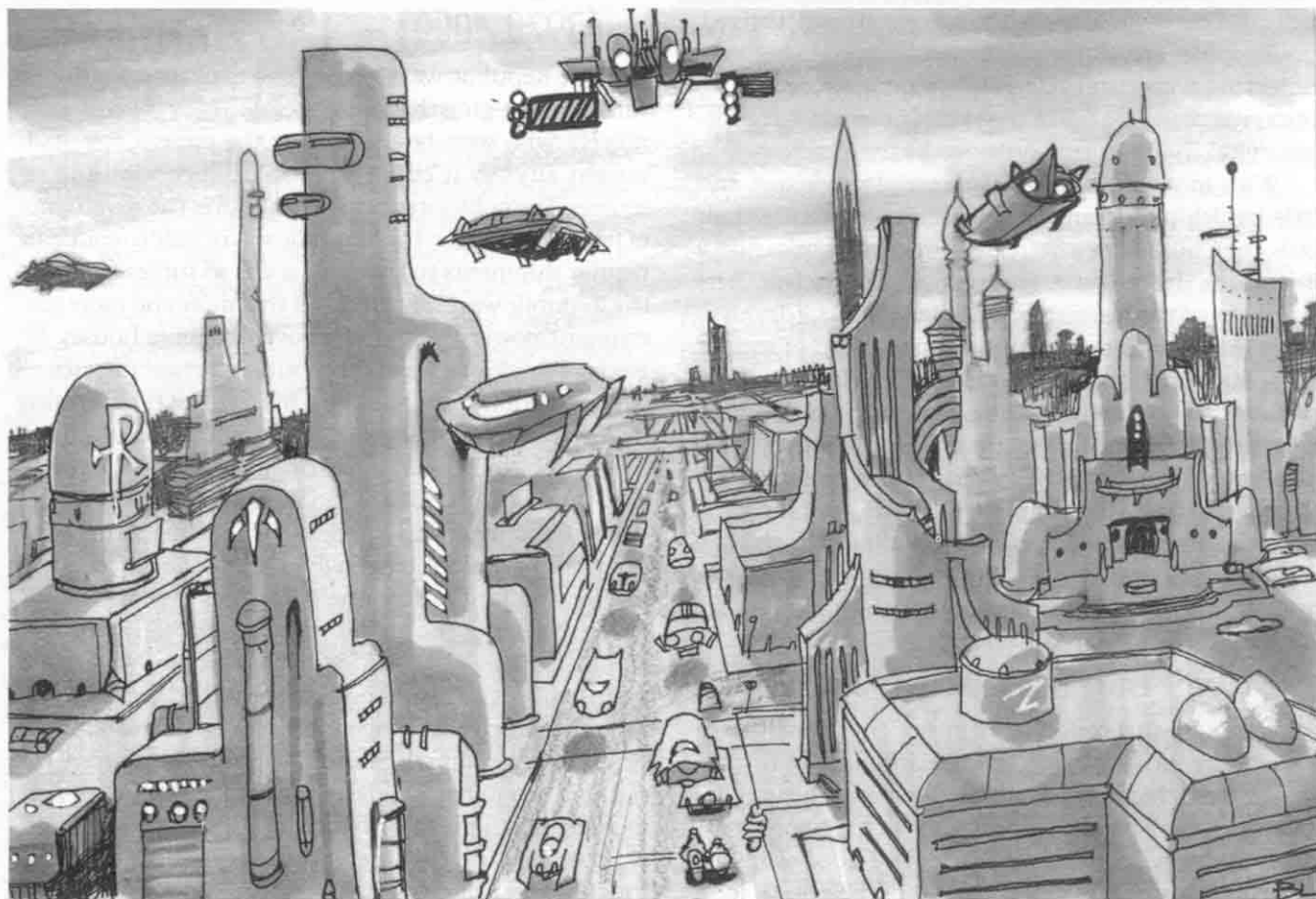
dals in which such nobility inevitably partakes.

The Second Republic was officially declared in 3500. It took until nearly 3600 before all the worlds of human space succumbed fully to its system of government. Diasporan humanity was finally converted from fractious, balkanized states to a democratic community of economically-driven progress.

## Stage Two: Rise (3600-3800)

With almost all worlds now part of the Second Republic (with the exception of a few hold-outs here and there), the cultural transformation of human space entered a new phase. The Universal Church used the democracy to build its power even more, becoming the social glue that held many of the often-rebellious worlds together. Indeed, it was perhaps its influence equally as much as economics that eventually transformed the nobles from dictators to senators. Wherever a world rebelled against its master, there was usually a Church priest there to goad the masses on to freedom.

The period Costainus calls the Rise was a time of cooperation between the Second Republic and the Church, a period of shared goals between senators, corporations and priests. The spread of democracy came from both free-trading merchants and liberation-minded priests. This period has been largely forgotten by New Dark Ages priests, wiped from the historical record by later bishops and patriarchs.





This period saw the spread of medicines, food and other needs to those worlds that had before fought over scant resources. The lives of many were vastly improved within a short span of years. It seemed that nothing was unachievable by the human spirit. Moneys poured into scientific research to unlock the secrets that had long baffled humanity, and to improve daily life.

The Rise was a period of expanding borders and growing hope. It could not last forever.

### Stage Three: Plateau (3800-3900)

Costainus's next stage is what he terms the Plateau, or leveling-off of the nascent Republic's growth surge. While its borders had expanded to thousands of worlds (most of which are no longer part of the Known Worlds), its growth could not help but slow. Nonetheless, few but the most forethinking economists and social scientists saw this as a bad thing; for most, it was a time of consolidation. Instead of new horizons, people now settled down to get to know their own worlds better. Urban renewal projects, long stalled due to emphasis on off-world resources (gas giant, moon and asteroid belt mining), now became the focus of the economy for many planets.

Without exploration to distract the citizenry, the entertainment industry boomed. All manner of distractions were devised and sold, including innumerable gadgets based off exploration technology, especially from the tech gleaned from Vau devices. Personal anti-gravity rooms were one such fad, especially for those parents desperate to distract bored children. Although the arts still thrived, vapid popular arts all too often masqueraded as high art, indicating a cultural relativism which, according to Costainus, presages a fall in the values necessary to propagate a vital, living culture ordained by the Pancreator.

With most of the people's material needs met and little hardship to strengthen character or mature their souls, the Church saw a decrease in membership, as many of its flock drifted away from religion entirely; others joined one of the numerous fad religions of the day, usually based around success and fortune instead of insight and compassion. It is in this period that the Church starts souring on the Republic and even on the concept of democratic freedom, for the Republic only proved that, given too much freedom, humans would be swayed by sin as much as by the Pancreator. The Church had yet, however, to turn its hand against technology, which grew by leaps and bounds as scientists set about exploring the ramifications of evidence found among the stars, whether from Vau tech or from Anunnaki ruins.

### Stage Four: Malaise (3900-3970)

Although this period sees some of the greatest leaps in science, from nanite tech, artificial intelligence revolutions and psychic research, it is marked by a cultural decline. With the advent of robotics and other labor-intensive technology, jobs become scarce. The jaded citizenry, raised in an environment where most of their needs were

handed to them on request, lived on the dole. Welfare and its bureaucracy become the focus of the new economy.

The rich — especially nobles individuals — were taxed heavily to fund the welfare system, while corporations weaseled tax breaks and subsidies from the government, enriching their stockholders and CEOs, who found additional tax shelters by charging many of their living expenses to their corporations, thus avoiding the devastating taxes levied against rich individuals. The nobles fumed and plotted a way to turn the tables.

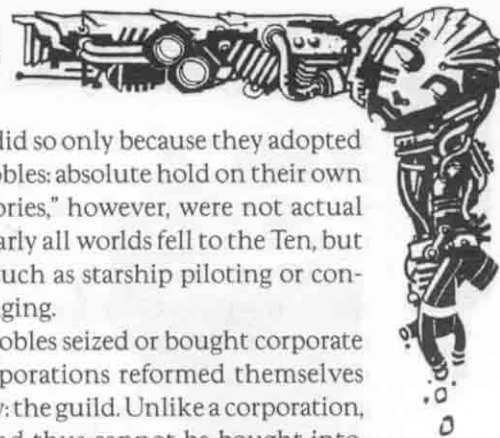
Costainus marks this era with a malaise, a deadening of human endeavor. The mass of the populace, although they lived in a democracy in name, had not the bureaucratic skills to see through the massive system that separated them from the government. Seemingly lacking empowerment, they turned to distractions instead, becoming jaded of all government yet supporting it de facto by refusing to involve themselves in the process. Reform movements died silent deaths, ignored by the mass media, who reported only thrilling news in attempts to keep high ratings and bring in advertising revenue. Those few government-subsidized news outlets were too boring for most people to watch, concerned entirely with academic minutiae rather than meaningful events.

The Church increasingly became a voice of opposition against this malaise, and scapegoated the senate and its bureaucratic network.

### Stage Five: Divestiture (3970-4000)

The Republic was slowly going bankrupt. Unable to shift to a non-growth oriented economy by the corporate powers, who were best served by the present system, it sought anyway it could to prop up its dwindling resources. The nobles stepped in to take over the governance of far colonies when the Republic was unable to continue regular shipments to them. This was so successful (or so the Republic was lead to believe), that more and more government powers were turned over to noble houses. No electoral positions were given, but important infrastructure operations fell into their hands. The terraforming maintenance on most worlds was henceforth organized by the noble houses who had originally owned them.

It was not just nobles who won these pricy contracts; rich entrepreneurs and corporations also sought them out. But the senate was increasingly aware of the de facto control corporations had long held, and they instead fell sway to the rhetoric of the nobles, who spoke of early Republican ideals: the "just man" and "lone noble" who stood against all criticism and odds to speak and act what was right, not to give-in to special interests; a person for the people, not for himself. Since the nobles did not have the outright economic agendas of the corporations, they were looked on as somehow objective, people who stood outside the hectic, goal-oriented society where everyone sought only their own wants, never considering the needs



of others. They had changed little in the years of the Republic, and stood for tradition and righteousness, deaf to the insults of the new, "selfish" man.

In such a way did the nobles work their way back into power.

Not everyone bought such rhetoric, however. Certain worlds sickened of both nobles and corporations, and sought to create their own societies where their own needs could be seen to without consideration for the intergalactic masses. These worlds rebelled, some individually, some in alliance with each other, sparking squirmishes with Republic authorities throughout human space.

## Stage Six: Collapse (4000)

The Rebel Worlds alliance eventually seized New Istanbul, capital of the Second Republic. Had not the nobles intervened as they did, history would perhaps have repeated itself and seen a New Diaspora, another age of balkanization and petty political experiments, from anarchism to despotism. Many nobles houses would surely have benefited from this collapse as much if not more than they did from the present situation. But 10 houses desired to ensure their ownership of all worlds of human space, not just a few planets here and there.

Hence, the Ten took back New Istanbul and, with the aid of the Church, ushered in the New Dark Ages.

The democratic ideals of the past were crushed under royal foot. However, as history shows, they were dead long before the nobles seized them for their own uses.

## Remnants of Emancipation: The Guilds

The nobles first had to suppress the many rebellions which sparked up on almost all the worlds. With the control of the Republic Fleet, they blockaded the jumpgates of their worlds and set about pacifying them, without worry of reinforcements arriving from space. Many of these ground rebellions lasted for years, and even today, remnants of guerrilla forces live on the fringes of Decados and Li Halan worlds. Intergalactically, however, the worlds now belonged to the nobles.

Of course, many systems cut themselves off from such despotism, choosing to seal their jumpgates rather than risk their world's falling to noble forces. In this manner, hundreds of worlds were lost and have yet to be recovered. Some speculate that the Second Republic still exists on a number of these lost worlds, and that a few of them may have even reopened gates between their systems. Such a utopian dream, however, has no proof whatsoever — at least, none the Church can hunt down.

In this madness, the corporations lost billions. With jumpgates blockaded or sealed, trade routes dwindled drastically. Most companies went out of business, their stockholders selling out to the noble houses for pennies, desperate to get some return on their losses. Those corpo-

rations that did survive did so only because they adopted the same tactics as the nobles: absolute hold on their own territories. These "territories," however, were not actual regions or planets, for nearly all worlds fell to the Ten, but were areas of expertise, such as starship piloting or construction, or even scavenging.

As more and more nobles seized or bought corporate stock, the strongest corporations reformed themselves into a new type of society: the guild. Unlike a corporation, a guild sells no shares and thus cannot be bought into. The guild's governing board or leadership has the sole power to decide membership within its ranks. Frustrated from legal ownership, many houses threw out all pretense of civilization and tried to take these guilds by force. In most cases, their moves succeeded, especially those aided by the freelance mercenaries of the Muster. Some guilds, however, held out, knowing that to yield meant selling themselves and their families into virtual slavery.

In this tense environment, Quentin Siegel fought his way to the top of a group of crime families and formed them into a guild called the Scravers, the official scavengers and reclaimers guild. His underworld ties, strengthened by the turmoil of the Known Worlds, gave him access to all sorts of blackmail and other means of leverage to use against his enemies.

But Siegel was not content with underworld rule alone. He knew that, with the nobles in control and Church gaining increasing power to break down doors and burn sinners indiscriminately, such rule could not easily last. He had to go legit. But even the legitimate guilds were on the way out. It was only a matter of time until they were picked off one by one.

Attempts had been made numerous times to form an alliance between the major guilds, but infighting and lack of common goals always brought an end to such talk. Siegel saw a way around this, a means to force an alliance. That means was blackmail.

While League history speak of Siegel's bold entry into the guilds' chambers during one of their fractious attempts to come to terms with one another, it says little about his meetings with the guild leaders one-on-one after that meeting. It is rumored that the real glue which finally brought the guilds together was his threat to reveal a number of sordid details about the merchants' personal lives, details including but not limited to proof of insurrection against noble authority and heresy in the eyes of the Church. It is no wonder the guild leaders were all willing to sign on quickly.

Of course, regardless of the reason for their final acquiescence, the new Merchant League quickly proved its worth. While the incensed nobles immediately began a campaign of fire against individual members, Siegel and other worked behind the scenes to win over Patriarch Jacob I, known for his love of money and the perks that it brings. While the tale of the winning of the Church surely has details that have never surfaced, many priests recog-

nize the wisdom of the Patriarch's decision to support the League's technology use and to petition the nobles to likewise give in by extending such technological powers to them besides.

But there was a price to pay for this newfound freedom: betrayal. The Church and the nobles were extremely nervous about Siegel; he knew too much about their intimate lives and was too canny an enemy. He simply had to go. The final condition for the Church and nobles' support of the League was, unknown to Siegel, the head of Quentin Siegel. The leaders of the major guilds, including Esposito De Caprio of the Scravers, then Siegel's second, met in secret and designated lower members of their guilds to perform the hit.

By the next morning, Siegel was dead, shot fifty times by five different assailants and finally ejected from an airlock. Esposito De Caprio, protected by a well-wrought alibi, took over the Scravers and immediately scapegoated some personal enemies of his, executing them gangland style for their betrayal of Siegel. Most within the League are unaware of the real culprits behind Siegel's death, blaming it instead on Toshiro Katabe and Moyo Greenfield, two mobsters whose crime families soon expired. Indeed, to be called a Moyo is a similar insult to being called Benedict Arnold.

With Siegel out of the way, the League set about normalizing relations with the nobles and Church. Both institutions believed the League was a temporary evil, and that the guilds would never be able to work together for long. Eventually, they would crumble. This would probably have been the League's fate had it not been for Vladimir, who immortalized their power by giving them five scepters, ensuring their role in determining the regents who would rule after him.

Everyone has a theory explaining Vladimir's gross indiscretion, his inviting guildsmembers into the halls of power. It seems most clear, however, that by doing so he ensured his technological superiority: his ships were repaired quicker than his rivals and sported better weaponry. Many regents after him wisely called upon these same resources, although some spurned them, trying to force the guilds' cooperation to much less effect than voluntary alliance. For the most part, nobles have graciously accepted their new political, if not social, peers — those who cooperate, of course.

## Dreaming of a Third Republic

Despite the propaganda of noble house and Church, some believe the Second Republic represented a shining time of achievement that can be had once again — with a Third Republic. The ideals of the Republic just will not die. However, it is not only insurrection to think such thoughts, it is heresy. To act on such feelings is even worse,

and can land the utopian rebel in prison or on the executioner's block.

Nonetheless, there are a number of covert organizations in the Known Worlds working behind the scenes to build such a Republic:

### The Third Era

The largest and most expansive of these organizations is the Third Era, said to have sympathizers even among Alexius's court — indeed, some claim that Alexius himself is a member of this cabal. Such rumors are perhaps spread by the guild leaders, minor nobles and priests who are members of the Third Era. These members in high places work throughout their lives to achieve advancement in their fields, all for the purpose of using their positions to aid the cause. They risk their careers and their lives doing so.

The goals of the Third Era are very much similar to the original mercantile leaders of the Second Republic — they see profit in the establishment of a new democracy, not just for themselves, but for everyone. Whether they are Reeves who wish more control over their own trade or dissident authors who seek the freedom to publish to a literate society, the common goal of all the members is to overthrow the current system. However, few are militant or radical about it. What characterizes the Third Era is a sense of the slow but deliberate pace which they must move at, to slowly set the ground for the eventual transformation of the Empire. Some see Alexius's reforms as the perfect step forward, for once people expect such reforms, they will fight to maintain them.

### Newtopia

Probably the easiest Republican cell to contact and join is Newtopia, said to have groups on nearly every world. Its members are radical and urge near-terrorist actions against the ruling powers in the hopes of forcing concessions from them. They have succeeded more than once: their bombing campaign against the new Li Halan rulers of Rampart caused the Li Halan governor to rescind his curfew laws.

However, some say that their success is planned by the powers-that-be, claiming that Newtopia is a false organization set up by nobles and the Church to catch dissenters in action. The local law does indeed seem to have little trouble finding criminal cells of these rebels when it really wants to.

### The Hidden Fellowship

The most cryptic and secret of Republican groups is the Hidden Fellowship, so secret that many have never even heard of it. Most of those who have believe it is only a rumor. It is very hard to find any real information on it, for once its converts join, they "disappear," rarely to be seen again by those who know them. The rumors that a few have been discovered, involved in insurrection movements on various worlds, seems to point to the truth of this organization's existence and ability.



They are said to have contacts with a group of lost worlds that still carry on the banner of the Second Republic — and sport some of its technology to support their beliefs. It is said that agents of the Fellowship who work incognito among the Known Worlds have a number of amazing devices to help them in their work of rebuilding civilization.

Others, of course, claim that the Hidden Fellowship is nothing but a fairy tale concocted by dissidents too weak to do the dirty work of the revolution themselves, and thus placate their own guilt by inventing superspies to do it for them.

## Legal Codes

The legal codes of the Known Worlds are a royal mess. Every world has its own set of laws, a chaotic concoction of leftover Second Republic laws, noble decrees and Church edicts. It would take a very well-trained advocate years just to sift through all the codes of merely a single world let alone every world in a particular noble houses' fief (say, the Hawkwood worlds). Of course, this is exactly what the Reeves are for, but not every one can afford a Reeve, and not every Reeve is equally competent maneuvering through this morass.

There are a number of things to consider with the law: who is the accused (serf, freeman, noble or priest) and who is the accuser? It makes all the difference for there are different courts for each class. Equal representation is not the norm.

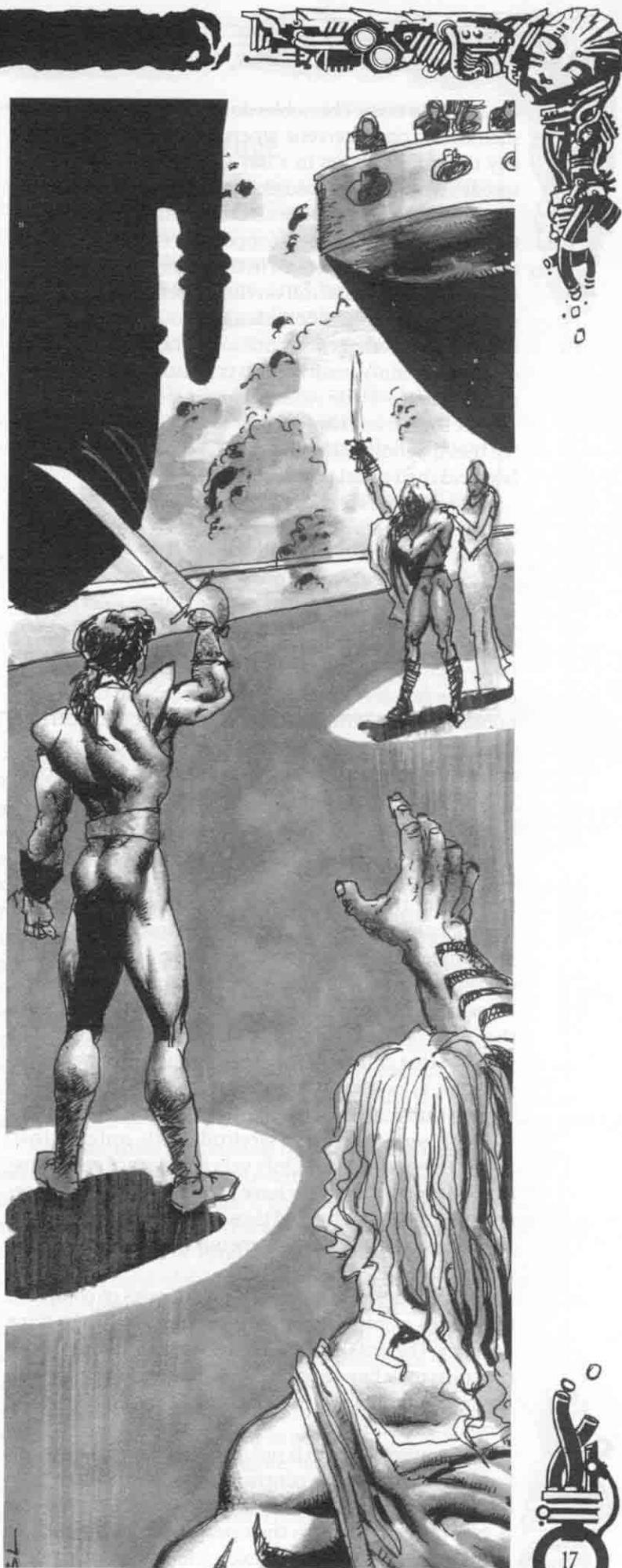
There are three types of law: noble law, Church law, and common law. Noble law solely governs suits between nobles. Common law governs issues of territory, property, murders, theft and taxes; it is considered local, varying with planetary laws. Church Law governs moral law, "thought crimes", heresy and tithes; it is considered universal.

There are four different types of courts:

**Regency Court:** The court in which nobles bring suit against other nobles is called the Regency Court. It includes claims of restitution for insult, stolen territory, lost property and even blood debts.

**Ecclesiastical Court:** Those accused of heresy or other moral crimes, whether noble, priest or freeman, are tried by this Church court, usually run by the Orthodoxy. In extreme cases, the court is considered an Inquisitorial Court, and Avestites often sit in judgment.

**Free Courts:** The court in which freemen (including guildmembers) are tried, even if their accusers are noble. If the crime is a moral crime, they are tried by the Ecclesiastical Court. Free courts include the magistrate courts and the city courts and other courts in which freemen are tried. On the most "civilized" worlds (Leagueheim, Criticorum, Tethys and Byzantium Secundus) these courts really are free: the accused and the accuser do not have to pay to appear before them; the courts are maintained by the local nobles through fealty rights or by city councils



through city taxes. The nobles do not like paying for these; such courts only convene when they have to, and usually try as many cases in a day as they can, making for speedy rather than thorough justice.

**Imperial Court:** Above all other courts, the Imperial Court is becoming a court of appeals for those nobles who feel they have been wronged in the Regency Court. While no one has yet tried to call on the Emperor's mercy when declared guilty by the Ecclesiastical Court, many believe it is only a matter of time until someone attempts it. The court was mainly instituted to try insurrection, treason and to monitor trade violations against the Empire.

See the Reeves chapter for more details on these courts. See the Appendix at the end of this book for a list of some laws and their usual punishments.

So just what are the rights of the accused? Below are some details on law concerning social classes in the Known Worlds:

### Serfs

Most serfs are in the state they are because of something called a Generational Contract, a particular form of fealty their ancestors signed long ago to protect themselves from the ravages of the Fall. In those chaotic times, only nobles could guarantee safety and keep the populace from starving. The desperate masses relinquished such luxuries as freedom in return for survival. What they received for their indenture was hardly humane, but it kept most of them alive.

These contracts did not just govern personal indenture, however; anyone who signed also signed away the freedom of their children and their children's children for generations to come. Most contracts specified a particular number of generations, such as three or five; but little oversight ensured that noble lords kept their ends of the bargain, for not only did the contesting serf have to prove the terms of the contract his ancestor signed, he had to produce that contract. The fact that such files were usually kept in noble castles and conveniently "burned" by raiding barbarians and the like did little to aid their cases.

Most serfs are born to servitude, little realizing that, by law, they may be free. Only very few cases of emancipation by contract recovery have occurred; it is not a precedent the nobles care for, and thus the Reeves and any other legal do-gooders are strongly encouraged not to represent such cases.

Matters are greatly complicated in cases of conquest: sometimes, nobles takeover others lands, either by force or treaty. The serfs come with the lands. It is rare for the contracts to be handed over also, and they are usually lost, leaving some serfs with no idea of their past lords and the terms of their servitude.

Of course, serfdom is not outright slavery. Lords also have obligations in the contract, although these are little enforced. It is usually only priests who regularly remind nobles of their duties to their people, which are usually to defend them from harm (except for those conscripted

into militias) and ensure that they do not starve. Those few cases where priests or guildsmen aid serfs to bring suit against their lords for dereliction of fealty duties become hot intergalactic topics, and spread what nobles believe are wrongful examples. For the most part, nobles keep their ends of the bargain, if for no other reason than to avoid bad publicity or worse — peasant revolts.

When accused of a crime, a serf has no right to representation: his lord deals with him however she wills, although there are usually precedents for punishment set down by previous lords or by the head of the house. The Church is the only consistently loyal advocate for serfs, often admonishing nobles for unjust rulings or too severe punishments. Since a serf is considered a lord's property, another noble can often bring suit against the lord for the wrongdoings of his serf. Such cases are usually political, using the serf merely as an excuse for a suit, but the serf suffers severely nonetheless.

### Freemen

The majority of laws are designed to protect or punish freemen, those confusing middle men, neither noble or priest and thus not protected by regency or ecclesiastical courts. Guildmembers, however, are freemen, and as such do all they can to empower their class; that they have the Reeves in their corner makes them a formidable force for maintaining freeman rights.

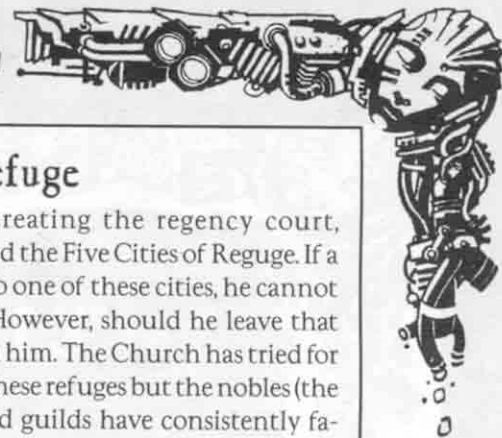
When defending freemen from noble or Church power, usually only ancient laws will do: those still on the books from the old Republic days. It usually requires a band of able researchers to actively search for old, forgotten laws, those that have not been specifically rescinded or overturned. The fact that records of these laws were usually lost on purpose means that someone does not want them found; legal research is a dangerous business.

Certain planets have such Republic laws — or watered down versions of them — enshrined in their codes. Criticorum, for instance, still has a parliament, and although it lacks any real power, its members have been able to legislate strong rights for freemen. Likewise on Leagueheim, where such laws are the strongest. Although Byzantium Secundus's laws greatly favor diplomats and foreign dignitaries over locals, what freeman laws exist are usually beneficial.

When a freeman is accused of a crime, he has the right to an advocate or to represent himself in his own defense (the latter is often suicide unless he is conversant with the complex laws). Many advocates hire themselves out to defend petty suits or crimes, from zoning violations for small merchants to small theft suits. Reeve advocates, the best firebirds can buy, usually only work major cases, except for those Reeves in training or those with soft spots for the underdog.

### Priests

While priests can be tried in free court for numerous, minor charges (money laundering, theft, etc.), they are always allowed a Church advocate and do not have to pay



for this service (at least, not in firebirds, but much is usually asked of them later). Next to the Reeves, there is no better lawyer than a Church lawyer. Indeed, the most legendary vie with the most famous Reeves for respect in the peoples' eyes.

Those priests accused of doctrinal heresy or other purely Church matters are tried by their peers in the Ecclesiastical Court; laws depend on the sect and/or planet of the accused.

## Nobles

Nobles fight over a number of things, from territory rights to issues of respect and honor. They do so in a number of ways, sometimes through legal suit although more often with naked blades or single-shot pistols. Those who squabble in the more civilized arena of the court must do so under the auspices of the Regency Court, a legislative body originally set up by Regent Adolpho II in 4613 to monitor inter-house feuds. Any noble with a claim against another noble is expected to first resolve the matter privately, between the two parties — usually on the dueling ground. However, if one of both parties prefers not to risk their fortunes to such skilled outcomes, or if more than one noble in a family holds the claim, then the nobles are expected to petition the Regency Court for redress.

There are two levels of Regency Court: local and high. Local court judges are appointed by one of the high court justices; they review local disputes. Local courts are only convened for specific cases and the judges' and bailiffs' terms of office extend only for the duration of the case (which, in the case of land disputes, can last for years). Both parties in the case are expected to pay the fees of the court employees until a verdict is decided, in which case the loser is usually expected to reimburse the victor for his court expenses.

The high court consists of 10 justices, each traditionally appointed by the regent and who serve life terms. These justices are usually minor house nobles with few other prospects, considered to represent objective, third party viewpoints — people who will uphold the values of the nobility, for they themselves are noble, but who have no outright interest in the specific affairs brought before the court. House Torensen is renowned for the most impartial and fair of these justices.

In modern times, Alexius appoints these justices. This has caused much grumbling in the ranks, but no one has yet had the guts or the wits to come up with a means to forego the Emperor's traditional stake in the matter — as the successor of the regent, the Emperor is the head of the courts.

Nonetheless, the Imperial Court is a different institution from the Regency Court. It specifically sees to imperial affairs, which include accusations of treason against the Emperor or insurrection against Imperial interests. In addition, the court oversees cases of intergalactic trade dispute, and thus often calls guildsmembers before its bench.

## Cities of Refuge

In addition to creating the regency court, Adolpho II also declared the Five Cities of Refuge. If a criminal can make it to one of these cities, he cannot be arrested or killed. However, should he leave that city, *anyone* can punish him. The Church has tried for many years to abolish these refuges but the nobles (the Decados especially) and guilds have consistently favored them.

The five cities are: Khemta on Malignatius, Shurgar Station on Stigmata, Rio de Janeiro on Holy Terra, Yintraí on Criticorum, and Lowell on Draxus (now a lost world).

It is little surprise that Khemta is renowned as a place where a criminal can get a second chance; it is said to thrive with immorality and villainy. Shurgar Station is a refuge of last resort, for its residents fight annual raids against Symbiots. Rio is nigh impossible to reach from off-world (travelers must pass Church check-points) and Yintraí is now nearly deserted due to a plague bomb dropped during the Emperor Wars.

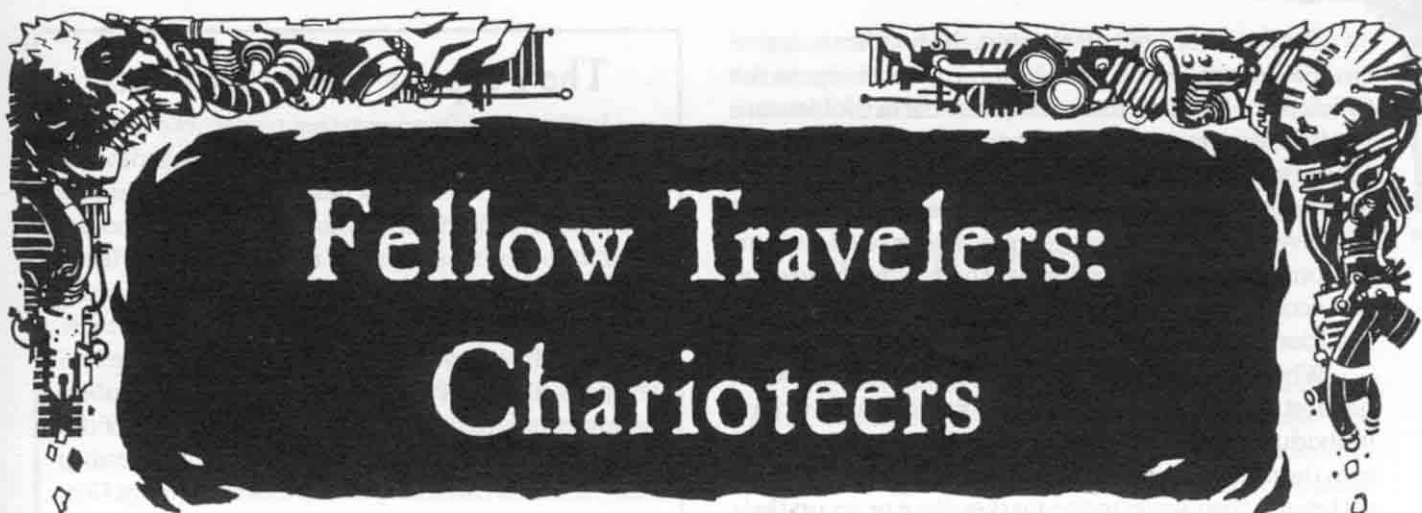
The high court justices rule on matters affecting noble privilege; they make and modify noble law, the body of laws governing noble houses. These laws have no power over individual houses except concerning their relationship with other houses. It is maddeningly vague concerning the machinations of one house against another, allowing for the major houses to swallow or control minor houses. Nonetheless, there are some firm laws, and aggrieved houses can bring suit against aggressor houses. Indeed, the Decados are constantly tied up in court, accused of a number of crimes against many minor houses. The house, however, knows full well how to extend these cases indefinitely, bankrupting their less-wealthy accusers before a case is ever decided on. They likewise use the court to levy accusations of their own.

However, there is a loophole that was introduced by a previous regent, setting a precedent for the regency to pay for the fees of both parties if the outcome of the case greatly affects precedent. This loophole was recently resurrected in the case of Pandemonium, where many parties have brought claim to ownership rights over the jumpgate. Alexius has stepped in and declared the matter to be important to noble law and has paid the fees of all parties. The Decados are infuriated, especially since Alexius has requested as speedy a trial as possible. Jakovian Agents have been sent to many worlds to fabricate evidence and excuses to stall the trial as long as possible.

This worries the Hazat more, however, for they fear Alexius is trying to take over the courts, and will use them to rule on possible House Chauki claims against the Hazat.







# Fellow Travelers: Charioteers

by Ross Isaacs

Duncan Norel stepped off the lift and entered the trading floor, the greatest marketplace in the Known Worlds. The agoras on Istakhr and Criticorum may be larger and more bustling, but this was where merchants dealt among themselves, where the economic fate of worlds was decided — a small club on the top floor of a tower on Leagueheim.

For the merchant princes and free-traders, this was the most important room in the galaxy. It was a large room, dark and heavy with the smell of hashish and kest, crowded with traders of every conceivable commodity, nibbling on delicacies, sipping spiced wine and striking deals. Everything was bought and sold here. Duncan hated it.

Like most star pilots, he'd only heard of the place and never actually been here before. Pilots preferred to see themselves as above petty mercantile practices. Yet, the stories were legend among all Charioteers — the poisoning of Jai Chartash, Gavin Gailbreath's collusion with Talim Nielsen, the raid on the Suk family stockpile of Lypee-55. Duncan walked down the aisle between booths, looking for his contact. Representatives from all the honges were already here. Seated around a small marble table, David Nielsen and Dustin Gailbreath hunched close together over a think machine, talking. Lillian Staggs sat with a hookah, looking over a stack of papers. The Chartash brothers — Fala and Ben — lounged on couches and negotiated with a man Duncan didn't recognize, a small-time merchant. The man looked uncomfortable. Duncan didn't feel comfortable either.

Through the low haze, Duncan spied his contact sitting in a corner booth. Ozul De Vatha. Grossly fat, with piggish eyes, De Vatha dominated the small space. He was dressed ostentatiously in some type of gold material, like some comic interpretation of a nobleman. Two bodyguards, Muster perhaps, stayed to the shadows.

"Duncan," was all the man said as a greeting. When he gestured for Duncan to sit down, Duncan couldn't help but notice the rings on each of De Vatha's fat little fingers.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Duncan asked.

"I need a pilot." The De Vatha family didn't trade much, and

their fleet was small in comparison to the other honges. But they were rich in other ways, and it was rumored they took a piece of every deal struck by a Charioteer. Duncan considered his response.

"You have other pilots. Where are we going?"

De Vatha's eyes darted to someone across the room and he then flashed a sign, a finger and thumb. "Shaprut, from Grail."

Duncan gave a start. He asked cautiously, "What's the cargo?"

"Passengers from House Keddah." De Vatha said as he looked away again, this time holding up his hand and clenching it twice. He just bought 700 tons of something.

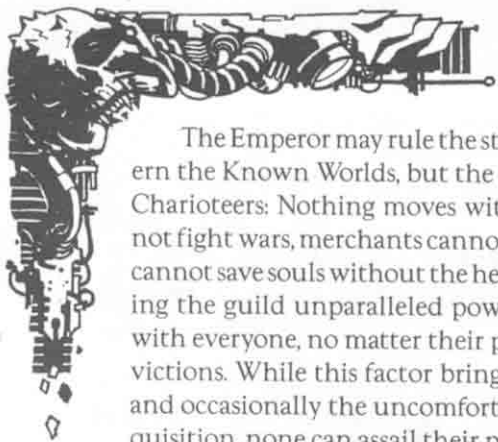
Duncan thought for a moment, processing the proposition. Whatever was going on was dangerous business. Keddah and al-Malik were bitter enemies, thanks to the mantis lords. He didn't like the implications.

"I don't have all the necessary keys," Duncan lied. He was taking a chance by rejecting De Vatha, one that could mean his life. What bothered him the most was that he couldn't ask why De Vatha was involved, and he couldn't ask what was going on. One didn't impose those kinds of questions on this kind of man. De Vatha would lie anyway.

"Do you like the keys you hold?" De Vatha then paused for effect. "No, no, my boy, you will pilot the Avenger to Shaprut." Now Duncan knew what was going on. The Avenger belonged to Duke Kem Decados, embarrassed recently at court by Yasemin al-Malik. Of Shaprut. Duncan was involved in a complex vendetta. De Vatha leaned his considerable bulk forward. Two keys clattered onto the table.

Duncan looked down at them. "If you do this, you will have my eternal gratitude." Then De Vatha leaned closer, conspiratorially. "You're only the pilot, Duncan." Duncan snatched up the keys and stood. He stalked back to the lift.

This was the greatest marketplace in the Known Worlds. Everything was for sale here. Duncan felt as though he'd just sold his soul.



The Emperor may rule the stars, the nobility may govern the Known Worlds, but the jumpweb belongs to the Charioteers: Nothing moves without them. Nobles cannot fight wars, merchants cannot move goods, and priests cannot save souls without the help of the Charioteers, giving the guild unparalleled power. The Charioteers deal with everyone, no matter their political or religious convictions. While this factor brings them sideways glances and occasionally the uncomfortable attention of the Inquisition, none can assail their position.

When a peasant thinks about the Merchant League, he most often thinks of the Charioteers — rugged, lone individuals plying the jumproads. These are the guildsmen the peasants come into contact with most frequently, as they sell their wares in the market place or set up their traveling freak shows on the edge of town. But this is only one facet of the guild's many faces: The pilot flying the ship for nobleman or priest, the merchant prince making deals affecting planets, the Third Republican plotting the Emperor's overthrow, or the venal bureaucrat trading favors for jumpkeys.

## History

During the First Republic, space travel was controlled by the zaibatsu. Every corporation owned the coordinates to their own trade routes, carving the Known Worlds into corporate empires. There were no independent traders; pilots worked as corporate employees, flying everything from giant super freighters to small merchant corvettes. The zaibatsu made space travel serve their interests.

It would not do so for long, however; radicals shattered the status quo and broke the zaibatsu's stranglehold over the jumpweb. The leaking of jumpdrive technology and jumpcodes led to an unprecedented migration across the galaxy. Millions fled the stifling First Republic in search of liberty and freedom. The zaibatsu, preoccupied with holding onto their fiefdoms and market share, could do little to stop these idealists. Jumptech proliferated, independent merchants arose, and star pilots were free.

## Origins

Over centuries of dispersion, it became clear that humanity was too de-centralized. Numerous interplanetary governments flourished, fueled by commerce, yet there existed no way for the whole of humanity to advance. In 3500, disparate mercantile interests, including the influential Market Authority of New Istanbul and the Liberty Confluence of Leagueheim, combined to create the Second Republic — in the hopes of not only uniting humanity, but also of increasing trade opportunities. Ironically, this shining new government would consolidate jumpdrive technology into its own hands.

The founders of the Second Republic had to face certain realities: Powerful conglomerates from various mercantile empires sought to clamp down on the widespread manufacture of jumpkeys, which had flourished during

## The Prophet Walks the Stars

In the age of Diasporan free-traders, the Prophet traveled the stars. Zebulon's first disciple, and some say his best friend, was a pilot named Paul Deveroux. In the time of Emperor Alexius, Paulus' adventures delight and inspire. Although not a Charioteer (they didn't yet exist), the guild members have taken him to heart as one of their own. Charioteers today revere Paulus as the embodiment of Questing and Travel. As the patron saint of the Charioteers, many members take his words to heart, pushing the boundaries of the Known Worlds ever farther. The Church leadership disagrees with this interpretation of the Omega Gospels but can do little to rein the pilots in.

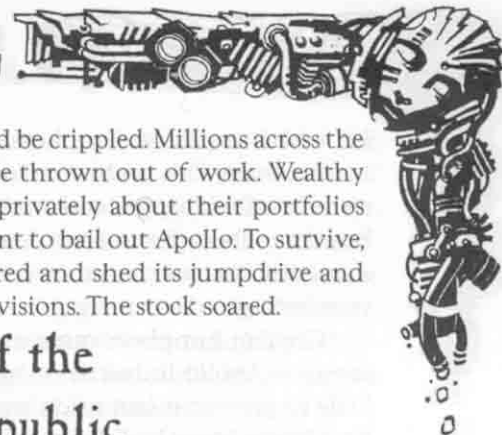
the Diaspora, and wouldn't support the fledgling republic unless such tech was consolidated under their control. The government promoted regulation as a solution to jumpkey counterfeiting and rampant piracy, as well as to regulate shipping and limit unbridled — and some said irresponsible — expansion.

Thus, jumpkey manufacturing came under the government's jurisdiction. One of the early laws enacted by the new senate was the one nationalizing jump coordinates. The government then sold the franchise to manufacture jumpkeys through a competitive bidding process; dozens of companies submitted bids for one of the few concessions. Smaller manufacturers could not hope to outbid the larger corporations. It became illegal to make jumpkeys without a license and those who did not purchase the franchise were required to cease production. Smashing jumpkey bootleg operations became an important undertaking for the Second Republic constabulary. The licensing fees and taxes required of jumpkey makers provided the government with a steady source of revenue.

By the height of the Second Republic, the jump technology industry settled into three suppliers — Gateway Technologies, Midlothian and Apollo Industries. Each a giant conglomerate, they not only made jumpkeys, but also jumpdrives and spaceships. Although the number of suppliers was limited, giving them impressive market control, star pilots and merchants remained unconstrained. Throughout the Second Republic, one of the most popular small businesses was to become a traveling merchant. It was easy to acquire a ship and ply the jumpweb in search of a fortune.

Apollo was perhaps the most influential manufacturer. Apollo used sophisticated financial instruments and financed expansion by trading stock on the mighty New Istanbul Stock Exchange. The rich and powerful invested heavily in Apollo and the company was well-connected politically; corporate contributions to campaigns and philanthropic donations bought considerable influence. A revolving door existed between company officials and related government posts. Former Apollo officials were





## Sathraism

The Charioteers have been accused of Sathraism more than any other group, and no other is so closely linked to its practice. The Universal Church keeps a close eye on members, as does the Li Halan.

Oddly, despite this intense scrutiny, few Charioteers practice Sathraism. Those who are caught, however, tarnish the guild's reputation and fuel suspicions. The guild itself pursues vigilantly any hint of Sathraism among its ranks, preferring to deal with it internally. Disabling the Sathra buffers on a ship threatens both ship and cargo — a matter not taken lightly by the guild. Guild officials check pilot logs randomly to see if too many jumps are being made.

Ministers of Transportation, Commerce Commission officials and as influential senators, while government servants received cushy positions within Apollo.

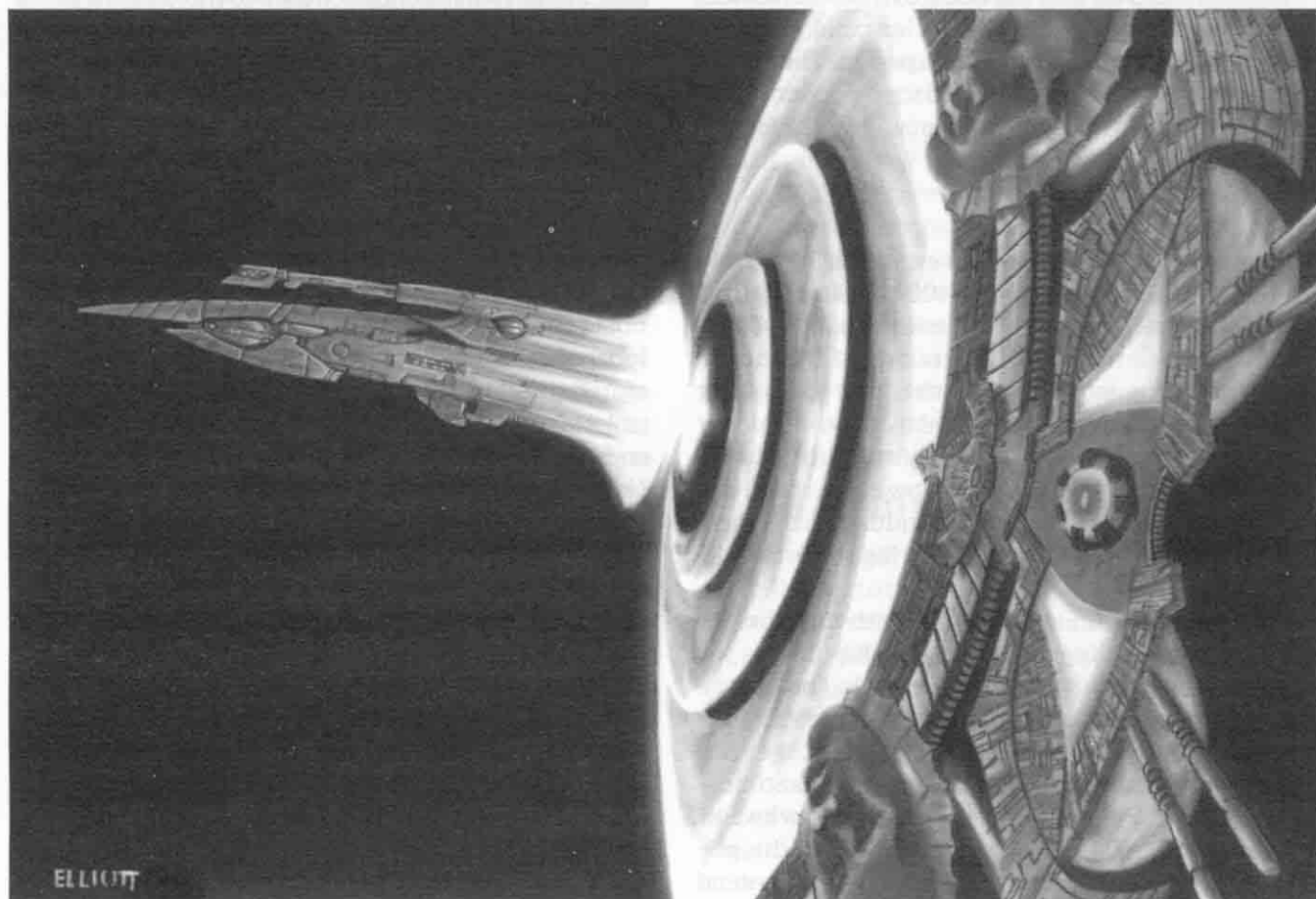
These contacts proved indispensable when, in 3942, Apollo Industries fell on hard times. A drop in the sales of space vessels coupled with bad investments and a multiplanet labor dispute led to a financial crisis. Management had become flabby and the company unresponsive to market demands. As the largest corporation in space travel, Apollo asked for and received substantial subsidies to remain afloat. If the company went under, it was be-

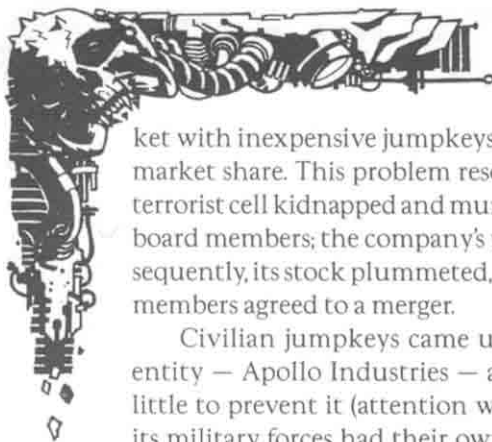
lieved, space travel would be crippled. Millions across the Known Worlds would be thrown out of work. Wealthy investors who worried privately about their portfolios pressured the government to bail out Apollo. To survive, the company restructured and shed its jumpdrive and starship construction divisions. The stock soared.

## The Fall of the Second Republic

The crash of the massive welfare system, and the resulting Divestiture, sent shockwaves throughout the Known Worlds, sounding the death knell for the Second Republic. Fledgling noble houses arose, garnering more and more responsibility and autonomy from the central government. Seeing the writing on the wall, many corporations sought to consolidate, which led to a flurry of mergers and acquisitions. At this time, Willem De Vatha, then CEO of Apollo Industries, sought to corner the jumpkey industry.

To acquire the other jumpkey manufacturers required more money than Apollo had, so De Vatha turned to the stock market. Nascent Royal Houses, like House Hawkwood, Justinian, Van Gelder and Dextrite invested heavily, looking to enlarge their fortunes. The huge cash infusion permitted Apollo to acquire Gateway Technologies. Willem De Vatha had a harder time acquiring Midlothian, which refused to sell and flooded the mar-





ket with inexpensive jumpkeys in an attempt to capture market share. This problem resolved itself when a small terrorist cell kidnapped and murdered several Midlothian board members; the company's performance slipped subsequently, its stock plummeted, and the remaining board members agreed to a merger.

Civilian jumpkeys came under the control of one entity — Apollo Industries — and the government did little to prevent it (attention was turned elsewhere and its military forces had their own keys anyway). The monopolization pleased the nobility; profits, and thus their dividends, increased. Star pilots and merchants had nowhere else to turn for their jumpkeys. And billions poured into the company's coffers. Over the next few years, star pilots in particular became *de facto* employees of Apollo, closely associated with the company in the minds of average citizens.

Apollo's monopoly on such tech was aided by a phenomenon known as "data drift." As the jumpgates, their stellar bodies and planetary systems move through space in celestial revolutions, jump coordinates change slightly. Updating jumpcodes is a simple task (for those with the scientific know-how), involving minor calculations of data taken from jumpgates along a known route. However, some systems pose more of a problem than others: Some routes do not have to be updated for centuries; others require updating every few decades. This is one reason certain jumpkeys leading to lost worlds no longer operate in Alexius' time: Data drift has changed their coordinates, and without a reading from a destination point jumpgate, it is unlikely that the keys can be updated. The task of updating all known jumproutes fell to Apollo Industries — a boon that would allow the company a basis for survival in the coming darkness.

## The Rebellion

The seizure of the Republic's capital at Byzantium Secundus by the Rogue Worlds in 4000 signaled the final stage of the government's steady decline. That the Charioteers supported the nobility's retaking of Byzantium Secundus is a common misperception that goes against historical fact. Many pilots, troubled by the rising power of the nobility and Universal Church, sympathized with and supported the Rogue Worlds. How else would rebel forces have arrived at Byzantium Secundus (a matter mentioned rarely and quietly dropped during the consolidation of royal power)?

The quixotic figure of Milanza Goforth embodies the confusion surrounding this event. Few dispute that she played a key role in the attack on the rebels. The circumstances and method, however, remain in contention. Using unknown means — some say a secret jumpkey or customized ship, others claim it was a Philosopher's Stone — her ship, bearing Duchess General Alexandra Hawkwood, beat the other Royal Houses to Byzantium Secundus, giving House Hawkwood the advantage. Historians contend

it was her belief in the nobility, fostered through years of service to House Hawkwood, that informed Goforth's actions. The Hawkwood family claims it was her romantic affiliation with Prince Roderick, Alexandra Hawkwood's brother, that led her to help the house in their finest hour.

Little known outside guild circles is the real story. Prince Roderick owned a sizable chunk of Apollo stock and he forced Jorge De Vatha to give him an edge, something to get him through gates more quickly. Otherwise Roderick would unite the noble investors against De Vatha, vote him out as CEO, and seize the jumpcodes for himself. Although De Vatha saw that Roderick's interests lay in preserving the Second Republic, he knew full well what would happen when the nobility seized Byzantium Secundus, with or without his help. De Vatha relented.

Did Milanza Goforth act out of love for Prince Roderick, or was she a pawn in a much larger game? Who can say? Years later, when Prince Roderick took his own life unexpectedly, some whispered that Jorge De Vatha had him assassinated, while others believed Goforth did it out of revenge. Again, who can say?

## The Guild's Birth

After the retaking of Byzantium Secundus, the ascendancy of the nobility and Universal Church posed a threat to the corporations. The victorious Ten, having swept away the last vestiges of the Republic, hunted down Second Republic sympathizers and Rogue World rebels. At this time, House al-Malik endeared itself to the fledgling guilds by operating an "underground railroad" to smuggle out as many government and corporate officials as were useful to them; many Charioteer pilots played a vital role, piloting evacuation transports, while Apollo officials escaped capture thanks to al-Malik efforts.

To legitimize themselves, the nobility quickly recognized the primacy of the Universal Church, and they turned on the corporations together. Using the Church's anti-technology creed against their mercantile enemies, noble families acted against both pilots and merchants. Independent merchants in particular represented a potential threat to order and proved to be difficult to control. Noble and Churchman alike confiscated jumpkeys and impounded spaceships, severely hampering trade. Nobles also pressured pilots to swear oaths of fealty to them, to keep them firmly tied to their employers. Meanwhile, royal families sought to seize control over various industries, the company that controlled the jumpcodes being especially tempting. The battle for Apollo Industries began.

Although the stock markets on many worlds collapsed during the Fall, stocks represented financial claims against the corporations. Noble houses coerced subjects to sign over any shares when they signed *seigneurage* papers. Then they would travel to various corporate headquarters and demand their shareholder rights. In this way, several houses split ownership with the De Vatha family,





though none held a controlling share. House Van Gelder attempted to gather votes among the noble investors to elect a new CEO, pushing Nils De Vatha out. This was difficult; while all agreed De Vatha had to go, the noble investors argued over who should take his place. Any noble who assumed the position would have to back it up with force. In the end, the take-over bid failed. This maneuver, along with Prince Roderick's earlier actions, convinced the De Vatha family that the nobility had to go.

The De Vatha family was aided by the chaotic political situation of the time. Noble houses, fearing invasion, blockaded their jumpgates and strictly controlled access. It became increasingly difficult to communicate between worlds. When the Church shut down the stock market on Byzantium Secundus in 4015, proclaiming it to be "evil," news of this event took months to reach outlying noble investors. Billions in assets were lost as zealots smashed computers containing stock price information. In the chaos, Apollo shut its doors and the De Vatha family vanished. By the time Sir Mitchell Hawkwood and Sir Filip Justinian arrived at Apollo's corporate headquarters, the all-important jump coordinates had disappeared mysteriously.

A new group quickly appeared to take Apollo's place — the Charioteers. Leading merchant clans, like the Gailbreaths, Chartashes and Nielsens, joined Nils De Vatha on the governing board of the new guild. Most pilots, long employed by Apollo, simply became Charioteers. Merchants, who had previously stayed an arm's length away from Apollo, joined the new guild for safety. United under one banner, the Charioteers would wield considerable influence through the collective might of pilots and merchants. When the time came for the various guilds to establish the Merchant League, the Charioteers were free of noble entanglements and ready to make their mark on the Known Worlds. It would soon become clear how much force the new guild commanded.

## Comes a Reckoning

Several houses, holding worthless stocks, were incensed over their loss. Their fortunes plummeted overnight, and they held the Charioteers responsible. The Universal Church came out against the nascent guilds as dens of techno-fetishism, and the Church supported the nobility in their wrath. Some houses embarked on a reign of terror, hunting down anyone affiliated with a guild. The Church excommunicated guild leaders and pressured individual guildsmen to repent.

Working in concert with the other members of the newly formed Merchant League and at the behest of Quentin Siegel, the Charioteers retaliated against their enemies. House Chauki, in an attempt to regain influence over the guild, imprisoned dozens of Charioteers, among them Tomas Nielsen, eldest son of family head Robert Nielsen. Demanding the Charioteers submit to noble authority, the Chauki demanded jump coordinates and

jumpkey manufacturing equipment as ransom. The Charioteers imposed an embargo on Sutek, halting all shipments of food, goods and stranding the Chauki fleet. The Reeves recalled the house's loans, crippling them financially. Members of the Muster defended Charioteers as bodyguards. The Scravers promised to reveal frightening allegations about a certain nobleman and his proclivities. In an embarrassing loss of face, Princess Anyanwu Chauki relented and freed the prisoners.

The Church similarly felt the Merchant League's might. For their complicity in various actions against League members, the guilds punished Holy Terra. Few Charioteer transports brought pilgrims for the Feast of Eternal Light, a time when the faithful return to Urth to celebrate the Prophet's vision of the Holy Flame (bringing a small fortune in tithes with them). The other guilds retaliated in their own way. The streets of the Holy See were deserted; few attended the Patriarch's mass, so collection plates remained empty. Patriarch Jacob I issued a call for an end to actions against the Merchant League, and later crafted the Doctrine of the Privilege of Martyrs, conceding certain technological powers to the League (although the document was mainly aimed at priests and nobles).


But such tactics alone would not have ended the war and produced a truce. Working behind the scenes with certain noble houses and the syneculla of the Church, elements of the League agreed that Siegel's ambition was too lofty and threatened their new-found détente with the nobles and Church. Soon after, Siegel disappeared, allegedly murdered by this cabal. With Siegel gone — along with the blackmail secrets he took with him — the nobles and Church set about dealing with the League, each assuming the guilds' unity would eventually erode, thus putting an end to their minor rebellion. Such optimism proved foolish, however, for the League, given a breather, only further cemented its hold. It did not help that Patriarch Jacob I, renowned for his love of money, was all-too-easily bribed to deal favorably with the League, whom he still refused to view as a threat to Church power equal to that posed by the nobles. Once more, when Vladimir awarded five scepters to the League, its power was enshrined — no noble dared to lobby against them lest he lose precious regency votes.

## Vladimir

After the Fall, the jumpweb became increasingly fractured, leading to the founding of the barbarian kingdoms. Some worlds deliberately cut themselves off from the rising chaos to create their own, independent empires. Others, objecting to the nobility, sought to preserve the remnants of the Second Republic, even if it was on their world alone. Whenever Charioteers attempted to travel to a world and found the gate inoperative, word spread quickly that it was "lost"; eventually, people stopped trying and pilots discarded keys to such a world. The Charioteers tried to keep track of these lost worlds, but the massive data







purges by Church Inquisitors hampered their efforts. Think machines that contained priceless information, including jump coordinates, were erased and then smashed. Heroic Charioteer spies secretly recorded these jump coordinates and smuggled them back to Leagueheim.

Some of these worlds — the barbarian kingdoms — sought the wealth of the Known Worlds, attacking outlying planets. The Hawkwood demesne was a prime target, attacked ferociously by the Vuldrok. Piracy was popular among the barbarians, who saw lone, undefended ships as easy prey. Seizing ships added to their reaver fleets; cargo destined for the Hawkwoods went to the barbarians instead, and the fear of piracy kept low the number of merchants willing to go to Hawkwood territory. Some merchants paid protection money to barbarian warlords, only to find their ships attacked anyway. To help stem the tide, brave Charioteers served the Hawkwood fleet, piloting ships in raids on the barbarian worlds. Merchants struggled under difficult conditions to resupply Hawkwood planets; Dowd Chartash organized convoys, with protection from the Hawkwood fleet, to travel to Delphi, Leminkainen and Ravenna. The ties forged during the war with the Vuldrok would become long-lasting.

When Vladimir Aleto pledged to defeat the barbarian kingdoms and bring stability to the Known Worlds, Sojourner Gailbreath, then doge of the Charioteers, spoke on behalf of the entire guild when he supported him. On Leagueheim, guild leaders worried more planets would be lost to the darkness of space, seized by the barbarians and cut off from the jumpweb. They supplied Vladimir with the best star pilots and technical know-how to seal the jumproads leading to the Known Worlds; merchants expedited shipments to the front lines. But when Vladimir made his bid to unite the Known Worlds under his banner, many Charioteers objected. Sojourner Gailbreath and others quietly turned against him. Although Charioteers continued to work for Vladimir throughout his war with the Ten, he no longer received *carte blanche* from the guild.

There was little, however, the Charioteers could do to stop Vladimir Aleto from proclaiming himself Emperor of the Known Worlds. His triumph over the barbarians made his ascendancy a *fait accompli*. Though he must have known Charioteer support for him was non-existent, he gave them a scepter and a place in the College of Electors. At the time, the De Vatha family in particular didn't like the idea of a centralized government in the hands of the nobility. Playing a dangerous game, Stefan De Vatha, then head of the family, supported Baron Nicolai Decados openly; during the war, he supplied the Decados alliance with the jumpkeys necessary to challenge Vladimir. Years later, rumors implicated Stefan in Vladimir's assassination, along with other conspirators, though no proof ever materialized.

## An Age of War

The Merchant League sought to increase its power at the expense of the nobility and Church, and many elements within the guilds dreamed of a Third Republic. The Charioteers, although members of the League, participated little in these schemes. The guild's leadership tried to remain neutral, alternately cultivating and rebuking various factions, and walking a tightrope between serving the guild's ends and maintaining friendly relations with everyone. The Charioteer's pilots served all factions, Charioteer merchants supplied all sides.

Politics within the Merchant League continued to be as Byzantine as a Second Republic corporation. The five major guilds, in return for their support of Vladimir Aleto, received vote rods, called scepters. To govern their use and give the League an increased voice, the five guilds cobbled together a complex electoral process. The Leaguemeister would control the scepters, casting all five votes as a bloc in the College of Electors. Each guild retained the right to vote as they saw fit, passing their decision on to the Leaguemeister. Tallying the votes, he then cast all electoral ballots for the candidate with the most nods. For example, in 4803, the Charioteers, Reeves and Muster voted for Lizbet Hawkwood, while the Scravers voted for Ochirbat al-Malik and the Engineers wanted Gil Torensen. The Leaguemeister at the time cast all five of the League's votes for Lizbet Hawkwood. Infighting between the individual guilds over the matter of regent was often bitter and almost tore the League apart on three occasions.

The partisan fighting was no less intense within the ranks of the Charioteers. The great trading families jockeyed for position, each supporting its own candidate for regent. Some hongs, meanwhile, continued to work with House al-Malik and others within the League to create a Third Republic. When Alexius claimed the Imperial throne on Byzantium Secundus and placed the crown on his head, several guilds within the League quickly fell into line. At the urging of House al-Malik, Doge Zale Gailbreath pledged the guild's loyalty in return for promises of increased power for the guild. Some, including the De Vatha family, continued their support for Alexius' opponents, no matter who they were. With the surrender of House Decados, however, the Emperor Wars suddenly ended and all opposition became moot.

Three years after Alexius ascended the throne, the Charioteers are poised to expand outward. Many have embraced the Emperor's call for a quest to reclaim worlds lost over centuries of turmoil, some for the promise of increased profit, others for the promise of adventure. The halls of the Charioteers are abuzz with activity and a heady optimism infects the rank-and-file.

## Modus Operandi

The Charioteers' prominence comes from their control of the jumpweb, and they employ several tactics, all heavy-handed, to maintain their monopoly:

**They do not tolerate betrayal:** Like joining a criminal organization, every Charioteer swears upon initiation to uphold the guild's secrets and submit to guild dictates. While anyone can own a jumpkey (and the guild discourages even that), not everyone can pilot a ship; that knowledge is the purview of Charioteers. The guild allows a few outsiders to attend classes at their Flight Academy, such as pilots for the noble, Patriarchal and Imperial fleets, but the Charioteers keep these numbers purposely low. However, Charioteers prefer not to pilot ships against fellow Charioteers should a war between factions break out. Hence, they will train military pilots for these fleets, but even here they are careful not to teach too many secrets. Few realize just how many special combat maneuvers the guild keeps to itself, sharing perhaps only with the League Fleet.

Outsiders having completed the training stubbornly refuse to reveal what they've learned, leading to charges of conflict of interest; others suspect some type of mind control. Once, as a favor to Archbishop Dolmen, the Charioteers trained an Avestite priest. He secretly, as a part of a plan to circumvent the guild, began to train others on Pyre. The next time the priest ventured off-world, he suffered an unfortunate and terminal accident. Though they suspected much, Temple Avesti leaders could do nothing to prove their allegations against the Charioteers.

**They do not tolerate rivals:** Though difficult to do, it is possible to copy a jumpkey. The Charioteers build every key with a fail-safe device that detonates in case of tampering, destroying both key and intruder. The coordinates are heavily encrypted, requiring a think machine expert to crack. Because the Scravers have a hand in practically every underworld scheme and the Engineers have the sophisticated technology required to do the job, the Charioteers suspect both of involvement with counterfeiting. The Charioteers seek out and destroy such operations. Likewise, anyone caught using a counterfeit jumpkey is subject to severe penalties.

Many pirates don't bother with bootleg jumpkeys; they store jump coordinates on a central navigation think machine (making them easy to purge in case of capture).

Not all rivals are criminals. House Keddah discovered on their lands ancient equipment used to make jumpkeys — including that of jump coordinates. The family saw its chance for greatness and prepared secretly to enter the jumpkey business; Prince Yacob Keddah hoped to boost his family's position by challenging the guild. Word of the plan leaked out. The Charioteers entered into negotiation with House Keddah, but when the Decados made a competing bid, negotiations broke off. The fledgling jumpkey factory blew up soon afterward, and no trace of the



jumpcodes was ever found. House Keddah was later absorbed by House Decados.

**They remain neutral:** The Church and nobility need the Charioteers, but there's no sense in antagonizing them. Taking sides against a Royal House or refusing employment from a Church sect is a sure way to bring trouble. Too much antagonism and they might try seizing the jumpcodes for themselves. What keeps the two sides from challenging the Charioteers is the guild's neutrality. Anyone, no matter their politics or faith, can hire a Charioteer. Both Houses al-Malik and Decados employ Charioteers, for example, and the guild faces no reprisals. Local officials and priests, however, have used this policy against guildsmen as justification for arrests, confiscations, high tariffs and imprisonment. The Charioteers have had to walk a fine line. Even when the guild acts against someone — imposing an embargo on a Li Halan lord, for example — it is careful not to implicate everyone, and it offers favors to others in the house.

## Enforcement

To enforce their monopoly, the Charioteers maintain an extensive network of informants and spies. Unlike more aggressive organizations like the Imperial Eye and Jakovian Agency, the Killroys concern themselves mostly with information gathering. Named after a mythical figure known for his ubiquitous travels, their agents learn many secrets, not the kind that rock worlds, but dirty little secrets better left hidden. Because they work for everybody, guildsmen are in a position to obtain a lot of information, which ends up in the Killroys' hands. The Charioteers are not above blackmail to get what they want (and their merchants sell more than just trinkets). When that doesn't work, or a stronger message needs to be sent, the Charioteers contact the Scravers, with whom they have an exclusive contract. Bootleggers and black marketers caught trafficking in illegal jumpkeys typically find themselves blown out of airlocks.

Killroys concerns themselves with maintaining the Charioteer Code of Conduct and ensuring compliance with various guild dictates. Getting all guild members to adhere to mandates from Leagueheim is a logistical nightmare. Yet it's important that the majority of members conform if the guild is to be taken seriously. Rather than policing all Charioteers, Killroys concentrate on individual cases, making an occasional example of those who cross the guild.

## Organization

The imperceptive among the nobility and Church believe the Charioteers to be a single, monolithic organization that wields vast power over the Known Worlds. Few know about the guild's complex inner workings and internal conflicts.

### The Star Pilots

The popular characterization of the lone merchant

## But What Does a Pilot Do?

In space, nothing stands still. The relative distance between jumpgate and planet changes constantly as suns move through space, and planets orbit around their suns and rotate on their axes. The universe is a spinning, whirling mess. Everyone knows the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, but there is no such thing in space; it takes a parabolic course accounting for things like orbital rotation and precession. To escape a planet's gravitational pull while conserving fuel requires using a planet's gravity to slingshot you in the right direction. You can't just point your ship in a direction and hit the accelerator. To get anywhere in space, you need a trained pilot.

plying the jumproutes, selling trinkets from across the Known Worlds or bringing a traveling circus to entertain the masses, is only one facet of the Charioteers. The nobles and Universal Church are more familiar with star pilots. While anyone can own a spaceship, you still need a pilot to fly it, and to travel across the Known Worlds requires a jumpkey. The Charioteers rarely sell jumpkeys; they more often hire out the services of pilots. Every pilot holds onto her own jumpkeys, assigned by the guild. The more keys a pilot holds, the more in demand she is; a trip requiring multiple jumps usually calls for multiple pilots. Skilled pilots might spend a lifetime serving a single employer, or aboard a particular ship, but most serve short service contracts, moving from job to job.

Many pilots hate the merchants, a feeling originating from the guild's early days. Perceiving themselves as a professional association practicing an ancient and noble art, they want little to do with the merchant's buffoonery and greed. The pilots separate themselves from the merchants as much as possible, maintaining their own bars and housing. This prejudice hurts the merchants financially and it makes it more difficult for them to advance in the ranks and acquire new jumpkeys.

### The Merchants

These are the people most peasants think of when they think of the Charioteers — the merchant in the market place, dressed to attract attention, selling a variety of goods. All trade and transport across the Known Worlds depends on the merchants. These rugged individuals ply the jumpweb, providing necessary goods and services, buying low and selling high.

The hong, powerful mercantile concerns organized along familial lines, take their name from Chinese trading families on ancient Urth. Each is led by a family leader who oversees the business, and important jobs within the organization go to family members. They hold the jumpkeys to the most profitable routes, maintain large fleets and often collude with each other. Some maintain small personal armies through the Muster. There are dozens of hong of varying sizes. Some dominate particular





routes, while others specialize in certain products. Free-traders must often deal with the hongts to obtain supplies. The Chartash family, for example, operates dozens of ships, all piloted by family members, with Criticorum as their hub. A free-trader who wants to sell machine parts on Malignatius must contract with them for supplies. Many individual merchants suspect the hongts keep them down by limiting supplies and jumpkeys; this fosters resentment between the free-traders and the merchant clans.

Merchants without ties to the hongts are known as free-traders. Such a Charioteer is typically a lone merchant who owns one ship, doing all she can to earn a decent living (although a merchant owning several ships isn't necessarily considered a hongt). Many free merchants dream of becoming large enough to join the ranks of the great merchant families.

Prior to the Fall, merchants remained separate from pilots. But when Nils De Vatha turned to the wealthiest merchant families for help in establishing the Charioteers, the merchants became firmly tied to the guild. They see themselves as vital to the survival of the Known Worlds and don't understand the antipathy that the pilots feel toward them. They're happy to ignore the pilots and take comfort in the fact that, for the last 200 years, the doge has come from their ranks.

## The Governing Board

This august body, composed of the doge and several deans, oversees both factions within the Charioteers. A hold-over from the guild's corporate days, it decides matters affecting the entire guild. Unfortunately, many board members abdicate their roles, leaving the doge to make decisions. Those still active members can often be found traveling the jumpweb. Retired members, often in charge of the family's business, prefer to manage their family's accounts rather than paying full attention to politics. They are often wholly unaware of the long-term conspiracies plotted by their fellow guilds, and roused to action only when something threatens the entire guild. Nowadays, the board meets infrequently — to elect a new doge, admit new board members or address emergencies.

According to the original guild charter, the entire membership elects a new board every six years. That has never happened. Board membership is hereditary, dominated by great merchant hongts like Gailbreath, Nielsen, De Vatha, and Chartash. Few pilots sit on the Governing Board. Occasionally, new members are admitted, but since this dilutes the influence of sitting members, it happens rarely. Typically, new board members pay handsomely for their seat, a sign of having "made it." Board members wield a great deal of influence, settling disputes between guild members, obtaining the keys they need, and making deals with the other "big boys."

## Boatswains

There is a small army of bureaucrats who actually run the guild's day-to-day operations. These are the people who operate the guildhalls on other worlds, collect dues and

pay expenses and manufacture and assign jumpkeys. Pilots in search of work report to the local guildhall, so boatswains (pronounced "bosuns") often determine who gets work; they're also in a position to do favors for local officials, trading service contracts for special consideration. They keep Charioteers informed about events across the Known Worlds and about any guild mandates. Ambassadors and diplomatic parties are drawn from their ranks; when the Emperor wants to talk with the guild, he summons the guild's ambassador to the palace. Likewise, the guild sends delegations to the noble houses to negotiate taxes, propose coalitions or demand restitution. Boatswains handle the administrative details, allowing members to concentrate on their own businesses.

Boatswains are usually chiefs or managers. However, getting stuck in this role for too long can be a career killer: Promotion to higher ranks usually requires one to be out among the stars, piloting or selling for the guild. Hence, serving as a boatswain is seen as a political stepping stone — a way to build important contacts, not a lifetime career (although they are those who are happy to stay boatswains for life). Tied to a desk or guildhall, however, there is little room for glory or riches. Those pilots who have one too many screw-ups usually wind up with this dead-end job.

The position does have its benefits, however. While the doge supposedly oversees the boatswains, he has few levers to control them. Occasionally, Doge Zale Gailbreath has issued orders, only to have them ignored. The ranks of the boatswain bureaucracy come from the hongts and take their orders from family leaders. To reform the guild, Gailbreath must break this stranglehold.

## Republican Ideals

While many upper-echelon Charioteers secretly profess Third Republican ideals, many have no idea what that really means. Even in a Third Republic, they assume, the guild would retain supremacy through their control of jumpkey manufacture. Their liberalism runs shallow, stemming from their opposition to nobility and Church, not from an allegiance to the peasantry. The likes of the De Vathas, Gailbreaths and Chartashes don't want free trade — that would be a threat to their power.

Among the rank-and-file, however, the Charioteers are likely the most Republican-leaning of the guilds, a reflection of their rugged self-made careers and independent natures. Many merchants believe a new republic would release them from the yoke of the guild's stifling leadership. The Royal Houses, Universal Church and Imperial Eye watch Charioteers closely for signs of sedition. Conventional wisdom holds that guild leaders are unwilling to clash over a handful of revolutionaries, as long as the numbers arrested remain low and the guild proper isn't implicated. So far, conventional wisdom has proven right.

## The Charioteer Fleet

In a sense, the largest fleet in the Known Worlds belongs to the Charioteers. It is not a military fleet, nor do



their ships travel in mighty armadas the way the Patriarchal and Imperial fleets do. Composed of hundreds of individual merchant vessels, the fleet primarily transports goods and passengers. Adversaries often underestimate Charioteer ships because they typically operate alone; a lone merchant cog presents little threat. Yet their ships are sometimes surprisingly well-armed; some hongts outfit their ships for use as privateers (usually against each other). While a lone merchant may pose a minute threat, the trading families own dozens of merchant ships. It's relatively easy for them to mass a fleet to attack rivals. If that's not good enough, they can attempt to engage the League Fleet (if the Leaguemeister does not object). And because they own a plethora of jumpkeys, Charioteer fleets can arrive faster than the average noble fleet. In 4552, House Keddah attacked a ship from the Chartash Consortium suspected of smuggling. They were surprised a few weeks later by a flotilla of Chartash ships, who waylaid Prince Rubarayah's ship and demanded compensation. Threatened by outside forces, the hongts dropped their internal squabbles, combined their assets and fielded a surprisingly large force.

## Patents and Exclusives

The Charioteers hold only one concession — the exclusive manufacture of jumpkeys. Without these small, cylindrical devices, all interstellar travel would come to an end, the mighty fleets of noble and priest alike reduced to worthless, orbiting junk. Their monopoly makes the guild rich, it provides them with enormous influence and it ensures the dependency of the Known Worlds.

In the time of Alexius, information about how the jumpgates operate was scarce. Just because the gates take a ship from point A to point B doesn't mean no secrets remain. One theory holds that jumpgates are giant teleporters, allowing travel from one jumpgate to any other jumpgate rather than along a network of roads. Another asserts that the gates could allow travel to other dimensions. The Anunnaki, some believe, stored themselves within the jumpgates, like data on the think machine, and still wait for the right time to emerge. Since the end of the Emperor Wars, a combined research effort by the Charioteers and Engineers has picked up momentum. What they've learned so far is anybody's guess.

The Charioteer's supremacy over the jumpweb has fostered many conspiracy theories — that the Charioteers have a way to erase a jumpkey's coordinates by using some kind of ray, or that they can track all the ships in the Known Worlds, using jumpkeys as a homing device. A popular rumor runs among the noble houses that the Charioteers trade actively with several lost worlds, attempting to unite them into a Third Republic to challenge the Emperor. Various intelligence operations work to uncover the truth of all these rumors and others.

## Conduct

Because the majority of members are out in space, far

flung across the Known Worlds, maintaining standards of behavior and dress are difficult. Most Charioteers are free spirits, anyway, and wouldn't adhere to stringent guidelines. The guild leadership keeps the rules of conduct simple.

## Behavior

All Charioteers are expected to adhere to a simple, but strict, code of conduct. Upon initiation, the guildsman signs a contract agreeing to adhere to the guild's laws and submit to guild justice. Charioteers give up a great deal of autonomy to obtain access to jumpkeys. These rules combine to make Charioteers both secretive and dependable:

**Preserve the guild's secrets.** The guild's monopoly over the jumpweb must be protected. Proprietary information allows the guild to do what it does. Charioteers are proscribed from teaching outsiders how to fly a ship. Only those rare few granted a professional contract learn to pilot, and even then — only the basics. Some Royal Houses, like the Hawkwoods, have tried letting Charioteers marry into their ranks, in the hopes of acquiring guild secrets; these efforts so far have failed. Those who break this cardinal rule tend to end up dead.

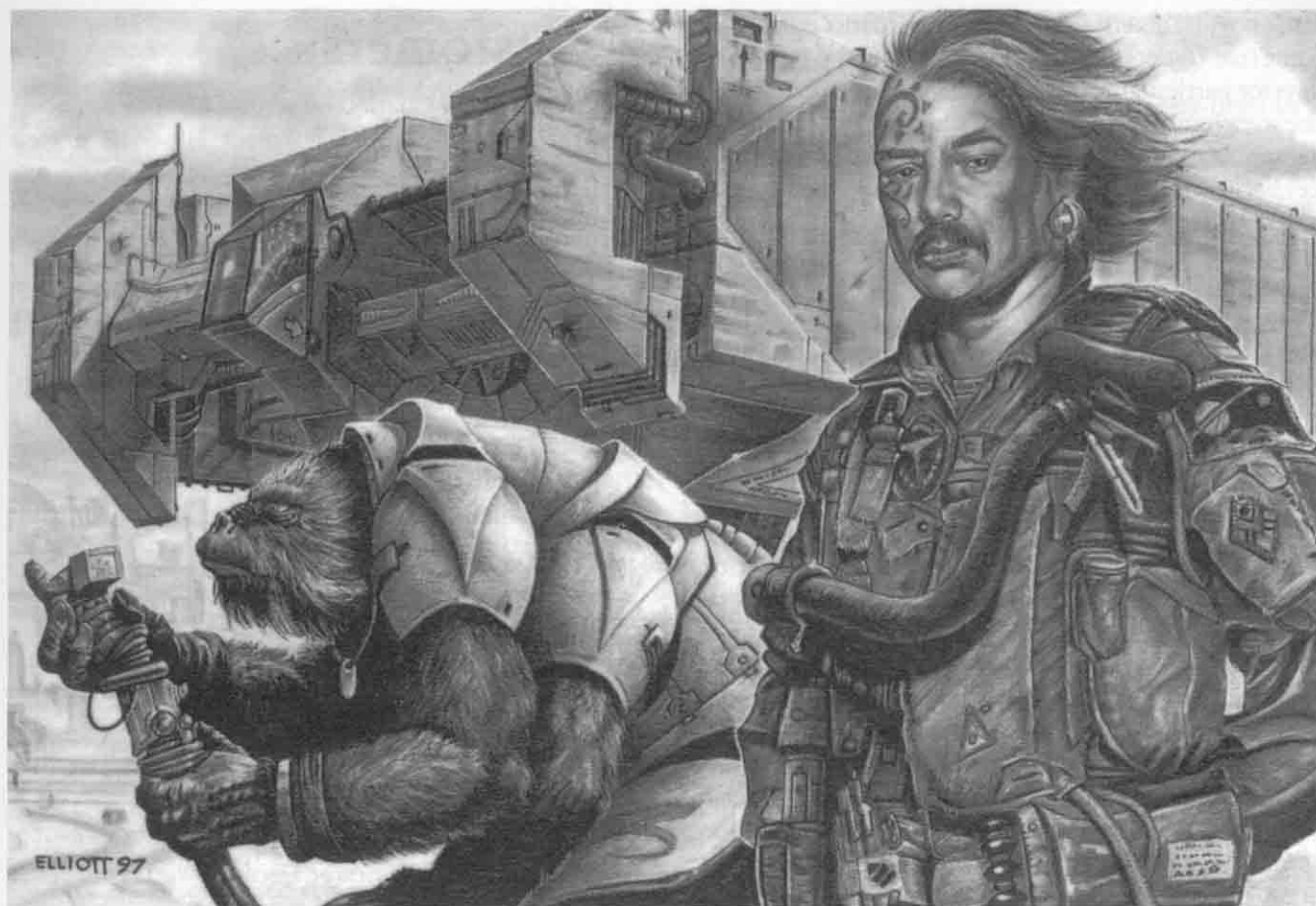
**All jumpkeys are guild property.** All jumpkeys, no matter who owns them, no matter where they are, belong to the guild. The Charioteers simply loan them to individual members; they can be taken away at any time. Certainly, outsiders possess jumpkeys, and the biggest buyers of keys on the black market are Charioteers, but this rule encourages members to treat their keys with care, as well as reinforcing the idea that the guild owns the jumpweb. The Charioteers refrain from seizing keys from non-members, nor do they sell them easily.

**Uphold all contracts.** Meant to protect the guild's reputation, this rule enshrines a basic of business ethics: An agreement is an agreement. If a Charioteer agrees to pilot a ship to a particular world, he's expected to uphold his end of the bargain. A merchant hired to transport merchandise is expected to arrive, cargo intact, by the appointed date. Few Charioteers break their contracts, though they sometimes interpret them creatively. While the nobility and Church hold guildsmen in low esteem, they know they can count on a Charioteer in their employ.

Curiously, rules are missing to ensure consumer protection and prevent fraud. Nothing proscribes a merchant from cheating a customer; technically, a merchant who sells counterfeit goods, charges an unfair price or offers substandard merchandise isn't violating any guild law. "Buyer beware" is the guild's response to such complaints.

## Dues

The guild acts as a broker for most pilots. When a person needs a pilot, they visit the guildhall, which maintains a list of pilots looking for work and makes all the arrangements. For this service, the guild skims money off the top, euphemistically called "dues." The merchants, who work



for themselves and are more difficult to track down, don't pay nearly as much.

## Dress

Dress is typically outlandish, at least for the merchants. This outlandishness is an unending source of embarrassment for star pilots, who object to being associated with such buffoonery; some Charioteers do dress conservatively. They travel all over the place so they tend to pick up fashion tips from across the Known Worlds. It's not uncommon to find a Charioteer (even a pilot) dressed in an Ur-Obun Prayer shawl, Ishwin Confederacy armor, a Vau Duwah'Entikil or sporting Ur-Ukar scars. Early on, when Apollo held the monopoly on jumpkeys, it required pilots to wear a standard uniform, which some pilots still wear today in an attempt to look more professional.

## Initiation and Promotion

Membership in the Charioteers is difficult for outsiders to obtain, but easy for those related to guild members. To gain entrance typically requires an apprenticeship period as a midshipman with a Charioteer. After a number of years, with a recommendation from the mentor, the apprentice can take the entrance exam for the Flight Academy. The test is difficult and is held once every year, and many prospective students fail (though there is no limit to the number of times the exam can be taken). Four years of Academy education consists of important subjects like astronomy, physics and mathematics, and requires hun-

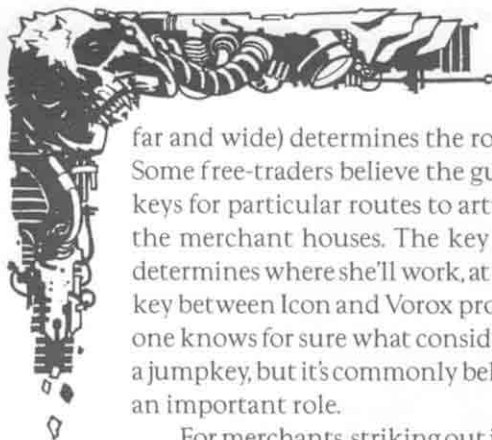
dreds of hours of flight time. It doesn't matter if the future Charioteer becomes a pilot or merchant, all face the same requirements and receive the same basic education. Upon graduation, the apprentice earns the right to call himself a Charioteer, but he receives no jumpkeys — the all-important symbol of office.

First rank Charioteers must "pay their dues," often finding employment as junior officers under experienced members, usually of the same family. House Hawkwood may own the *Mary Celeste*, but Charioteers are the bridge crew. This is how a "deck rat" learns the *real* way things work aboard ship. Even the smallest vessel requires a support crew, if only a co-pilot. Merchants also spend years working for someone else, either for a hong or the family business. It's not unheard of for a free-trader to get a start as an employee of a hong.

Obtaining jumpkeys is tied to a Charioteer's rank, or as a reward for a deed that greatly benefits the guild. For every rank beyond the first, a Charioteer receives a key. Harking back to the days of water navies, Charioteers depend on recommendations from superior officers to rise in rank. This system makes it particularly hard for independent merchants to advance because they work for themselves and, thus, have no superior officers. The merchants, however, have found a way to combat this problem: bribery.

Typically, a boatswain on the Charioteer's home world or adopted base of operations (or Leagueheim, if he roams





far and wide) determines the route a Charioteer receives. Some free-traders believe the guild limits the number of keys for particular routes to artificially inflate profits for the merchant houses. The key assigned to a Charioteer determines where she'll work, at least initially; holding the key between Icon and Vorox provides limited options. No one knows for sure what considerations go into assigning a jumpkey, but it's commonly believed that nepotism plays an important role.

For merchants, striking out independently is difficult because they have to buy a ship. Young merchants hoard their firebirds, and even then buying a ship usually requires a hefty loan from the Reeves.

## Territory

The Charioteers maintain a guildhall on every planet, from the tiny outpost on Pyre to the bustling legations on Criticorum and Istakhr. Typically located near the space port, the guildhall is where star pilots get work and all members obtain aid and keep up with guild news. Businesses in the area surrounding a guildhall are operated by — and cater to — Charioteers. (Merchants may sell their wares in the agora, but most prefer to live near the guildhall.) Local officials tend to avoid Charioteer neighborhoods out of fear of angering the guild; yet, sometimes, illegal activities thrive here. Charioteer neighborhoods are not dens of thieves and charlatans, however; they won't protect murderers, antinomists or psychic covens any more than will the average peasant.

## Leagueheim

The Charioteer's precinct on Leagueheim is a dazzling testimony to capitalism. It is the center of interplanetary trade and home to jumpkey manufacture. From the glittering towers of the mercantile hong to the shopping avenues and the walled estates of the rich, the entire area seems designed to flaunt the Charioteer's wealth. Even rank-and-file members live in what peasants would consider luxurious accommodations. Kesparate's massive starport and warehouse facilities are located at the edge of their territory. Despite the heavy urbanization and industrialization of surrounding precincts, the guild tries to keep its territory picturesque, with wide promenades and grand views. In the Emporium, the preeminent agora in the Known Worlds, anything — legal and illicit — can be had.

Leagueheim is the center of Charioteer activity where merchants great and small come to make deals. A giant commodities market, this is where Pygmallium on Leminkainen can be traded for merchandise from Rampart, a free-trader can buy machine parts to sell on Tethys, and the Gailbreaths and Staggs negotiate joint ventures. Want to know the price of pig bellies on Holy Terra, where the best place is to sell Lypee-55, or how much the Decados mantis is worth against the firebird? All questions dealing with the worldly art of trade can be answered on Leagueheim.

## Customers

Although the Charioteers serve everybody, some customers receive preferential treatment. The carrot is often better than the stick. Groups like House Hawkwood and the Urth Orthodox get special treatment in return for special consideration. Others are served warily.

### Noble Houses

**Hawkwood:** The choice contract for the Charioteers after forging close ties during the Barbarian Wars. In return for training members of the house to pilot Alexius' personal fleet, House Hawkwood employs guild pilots exclusively. Taxes on Hawkwood worlds are low, though they still maintain oversight functions (customs inspections, etc.). For some reason, family members believe a historical relationship exists between the house and guild, one which the guild takes advantage of highly. A few Charioteers have married into the family — to cement ties between the two.

**Decados:** Many guildsmen don't like working for House Decados because they find its casual cruelty disturbing. However, a close relationship exists between the De Vatha hong and House Decados. Prince Hiram Decados has recently turned to deep space exploration and hired several Charioteers to search for jumpkeys to lost worlds. Nonetheless, the majority of Decados would crush the guild if given the chance.

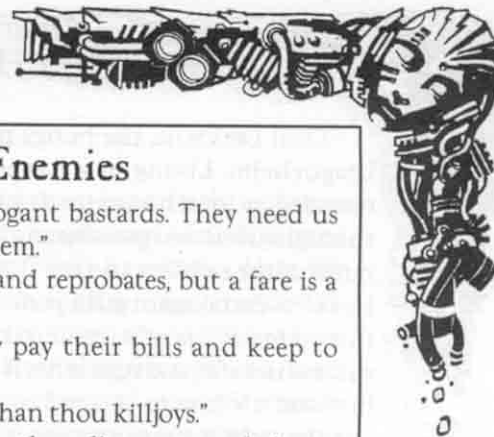
**Al-Malik:** Since the early days of the guild, when the house rescued guildsmen from Byzantium Secundus in 4000, House al-Malik has been a close ally. Unlike House Hawkwood, friends of political convenience, the al-Malik are trusted friends. A few whisper that the al-Malik trace their lineage back to a hong, though they deny it themselves. While House Hawkwood gets preferential treatment, this house receives unprecedented access and often advises on critical matters.

**Questing Knights:** Although they cannot join the Questing Knights, the knights often rely on Charioteers to fly them to their far-off adventures. For their part, the Charioteers like the opportunity for adventure and exploration. Many believe they follow the teachings of Paulus, the Saint of Questing.

### Universal Church

**Urth Orthodox:** The Patriarch's personal fleet is piloted by guild-trained priests, and in return, the Universal Church turns a blind eye toward the guild's less egregious infractions. All transport to Holy Terra is contracted through the Charioteers, which makes the Urth Orthodox their biggest contract. The lucrative pilgrimage routes are often fought over by star pilots and merchants alike.

**Brother Battle:** Although this sect maintains its own fleet, it is piloted by the Charioteers, whom the warrior monks prize for their precision. If the Brothers want to be dropped at the 38th parallel of Absolution, the Charioteers hit the mark. Few members accept employment



with this sect, but those who do are fiercely loyal.

**Temple Avesti:** Although they accept contracts from them, many guild members dislike Avestites, and the Avestites return the sentiment. Charioteers will work for Avestites, like any other contract, but they don't provide the best service. The guild sometimes hires pilots out to Temple Avesti as punishment.

## Merchant League

**Engineers:** While not a large contract, they are valued for other reasons: They know how to repair and maintain spaceships. The Charioteers maintain close ties to this guild, believing them to be close comrades. The two engage in several joint operations, like investigating the jumpgates and star-charts. They also supposedly possess the technology to counterfeit jumpkeys, which is a continuing source of friction.

**The Muster:** The Muster is the guild's largest employer among the Merchant League. Someone has got to transport all those technicians, specialists and mercenaries. The Muster's clientele requires the skill of a trained pilot frequently; such contracts are negotiated between the two guilds. Some Charioteers don't care what they haul, even slaves included, as long as they're paid.

**Reeves:** They own the mortgages on most ships, free merchant and hong alike. It's impossible for merchants to get their start without a loan from the Gray Faces. Of course, if they repossessed too many ships, or the *wrong* ships (i.e., a powerful hong's ships), the Charioteers would have to retaliate.

## Personages

### Doge Zale Gailbreath

The Gailbreaths, one of the great trading families, have held their seat on the Governing Board since the guild's earliest days. During the Second Republic, they made their money shipping precious metals and ore. Dozens of ships, from small corvettes to super-tankers, operate under the Gailbreath name. A because they have a reputation for being fair-minded, most merchants like to trade with them.

The most influential family member is the patriarch, Doge Zale Gailbreath. Relinquishing his family position in favor of a younger brother — Dustin Gailbreath — Zale concentrates on guild business. He is the most active doge in two generations, which earns him enemies on the Governing Board. His goal is to reform the guild and eliminate the graft and corruption that infects the bureaucracy. It became clear to Zale early on, however, that he must break the hold of the hong's over the guild (including his own) to wrest control. Of these, the most ensconced is the De Vatha family, and Gailbreath would like dearly to break their control. He doesn't like Ozul De Vatha overmuch, and their feud approaches legendary proportions.

As doge, Zale maintains close relations with the Emperor's household, giving Alexius special bargains and

## Allies and Enemies

**Hawkwood:** "Arrogant bastards. They need us more than we need them."

**Decados:** "Freaks and reprobates, but a fare is a fare."

**The Hazat:** "They pay their bills and keep to themselves."

**Li Halan:** "Holier than thou killjoys."

**Al-Malik:** "Why do they cling to an archaic political system?"

**Questing Knights:** "Anyone looking for lost worlds is okay in my book."

**Urth Orthodox:** "Why can't they understand Paulus' message? We love the Pancreator, too."

**Brother Battle:** "Stalwart defenders of the faith."

**Eskatonics:** "They're Churchmen, but they're strange Churchmen."

**Avestites:** "Why don't they give up technology, hmm?"

**Sanctuary Aeon:** "It's great to go on their mercy missions. And if the peasants buy a few trinkets while waiting to be healed, so much the better."

**Hesychasts:** "When a friar goes out among the stars to spread his message, it always means trouble for the pilot."

**Engineers:** "Brothers in technology. Now would you fix my ship?"

**The Muster:** "Good guys to have backing you up in a fight."

**The Reeves:** "Leeches. Didn't the Pancreator speak out against usury?!"

**The Scravers:** "But I paid my dues!"

performing the occasional favor. Personally, he doesn't believe in a Third Republic, despite rumors to the contrary; indeed, Zale believes a potential Third Republic would be a threat to the guild's monopoly interests.

### Ozul De Vatha

The De Vatha family can trace its roots back to the Second Republic, before the Charioteers, when Apollo Industries made jumpkeys. The bureaucracy is riddled with De Vatha family members who hold positions throughout the organization and across the Known Worlds. At a word from the family patriarch — Ozul — paperwork is lost, files are misrouted or internal investigations are launched. Family spies learn practically everything, and the family is not above undermining the guild to further their own position; Ambassador Dorian De Vatha, sent to Aragon to negotiate lower taxes for guild merchants, ended up with a sweetheart deal for De Vatha shipping. But, the family's power does not come from its grip on the bureaucracy: By ancient treaty, it owns the all-important jumpcodes and has a lock on jumpkey manufacture.



Ozul De Vatha, the hong's patriarch, has never left Leagueheim. Living in a tower of splendor and surrounded by loyal hong guards, he manipulates the guild through subtle and gross means. Ozul's goal is to enter the ranks of the nobility and use the jumpkeys as his entrée. He offers extravagant gifts, performs personal favors, and tries to marry his relatives into royalty. He has been unsuccessful so far, and rumor has it that the nobility is onto him and use him to their advantage. Ozul tries to emulate the nobility, maintaining his own household like a royal palace.

### Amil Suk

A consul to Doge Zale Gailbreath, Amil Suk comes from a small, unaligned trading family. After a brief, unprofitable stint as a merchant, Suk entered the civil service. Selling his services and information to anyone who could pay — free-trader and hong — he climbed the ladder to his current position. Unknown to Doge Gailbreath, Suk is a Third Republican, a member of the Third Era. He hates the nobility, Church, and the corruption of his own guild. Only by sweeping away the current autocracy can a new democratic system come to power. Suk oversees daily operations for the guild as Chief of Staff — handling important customers, putting out brushfires and supervising the doge's schedule. He uses his position to orchestrate activities for other Third Republicans; information and materials find their way to the right people by being routed through his office.

In this capacity, Suk recently learned about a secret lost world on a night road from Grail. Together with conspirators from the Engineers and al-Malik, he hopes to find technology capable of overthrowing the Emperor. Suk is an important link in the Republican movement, and his discovery could lead to the arrest of hundreds of conspirators.

### Lillian Stagg

Famed merchant Lillian Stagg made her name as an explorer. She has traveled to most of the Known Worlds, transporting nobles on safari and seeking out the galaxy's mysteries. She runs the highly popular Stagg Lines presently. Unconventional, Stagg has no relatives on whom she can depend and is not associated with a hong; she's simply a successful free-trader. One of the largest employers of pilots within the guild, her ships carry passengers to almost every world in the empire. Lillian herself flies the flagship, *The Hedonist*.

Apolitical, she doesn't care about the Third Republic or the Emperor, and internal guild politics don't interest her either. She'll say and do what she must to earn a living and mouth whatever slogan will keep her out of trouble and her customers happy. Although she already holds the rank of consul, Lillian would eventually like to hold a seat on the Governing Board, for the economic benefits and to be able to build her own hong. The board members continue to turn her down.

## Helmsman

The Helmsmen are a quasi-mystical group practicing the arcane art of astro-navigation. Concerned with how to get to other stars without the use of the jumpgates, Helmsmen tend to dream up bizarre or perverse theories that have no basis in reality. They babble about black holes, folded space, hyperspace and warp drive. They long for a look at a working sleeper ship from the First Republic. Most others see them as madmen or idle dreamers. Some Engineers work with them to reclaim the lost art of star-charting (determining the distance between the stars).

## Roleplaying

### Playing a Charioteer

Generally, Charioteers tend to be the least politically and socially savvy. It's hard for them to keep in touch with events and trends while they're "out there" all the time. Social trends are difficult to track, lending them an alien mien.

They're typically comfortable with aliens and strangeness. Very little shocks them: Charioteers see a lot of strange things, from the glittering caverns of Malignatius to the unusual mating rituals of the Etyri. They're also comfortable with different religions — a tendency noticed by the Inquisition. The Charioteers have never lost their association with Sathraism in the minds of most priests, although a pilot is more likely to worship the God King of the Hironem today.

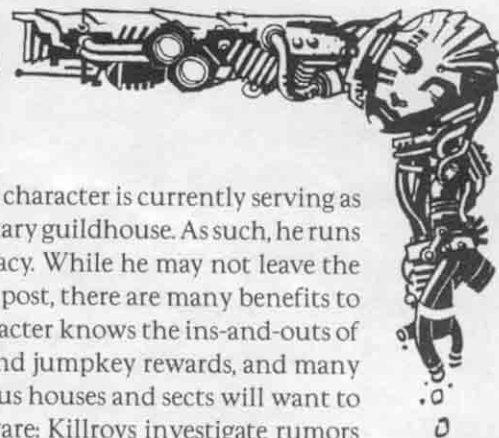
The most renowned explorers and claimseekers come from the Charioteers. Members tend to be brave and eager to seek out new places and see new things. Even merchants, usually more interested in their businesses, are eager to find new products to sell and fresh markets to exploit. Many embrace the principles of Alexius' Questing Knights, and clamor to join the Auxiliaries; the destination isn't the goal, it's the journey.

**Are you a pilot or merchant?** This is the fundamental division within the guild, and it determines the type of things you'll do. Pilots see themselves as professionals, flying ships for others under contract. Merchants work for themselves, plying the jumpweb in search of their fortunes.

**Do you belong to a hong?** Companies organized along familial lines, the hong control a lot of power. These people are born with silver spoons in their mouths; it's easy to join the guild and they have a job waiting for them when they graduate from the Academy. Lone merchants often subcontract work from one of these large companies or buy their stock from them. Even pilots find themselves under a hong's influence.

**Are you a Third Republican?** Many use the Third Republic as a way to "get in good" with their freeman cus-





tomers. Others truly believe in egalitarianism and democracy. There are those, however, who like the power that their monopoly position accords and support the nobility.

## Gamemastering Charioteers

• **Find The Emissary:** Saint Paulus' legendary ship has been spotted in a particular area and the characters go out looking for it. Are the sightings true? Is it a sign from the Pancreator? For added fun, put the sightings someplace dangerous, like Daishan or Vau.

• **Search for Lost Worlds:** The characters learn about the existence of a lost world, a prosperous colony. The details are left to the individual gamemaster, but the discovery should be important to several factions in the Known Worlds: a new planet to rule; more souls to save; new markets to claim. This drama should focus on the consequences of actually finding a lost world — first contact, negotiation, and integration.

• **Pilot for a Noble:** The character is the pilot for a nobleman, perhaps even another player character. The patron should be up to something nefarious (an antinomist, running an underground "railroad" for psychics, betraying his own house), although she may simply run afoul of some group (Avestites, Decados, etc.). Like Han Solo, once the pilot gets involved in the situation, he finds it impossible to get out.

• **The Corporate Squeeze:** The character finds herself involved in the power politics between the Chartash and Nielsen hongts. The two fight over the jumproads out of Criticorum, the Nielsens seeking to monopolize all trade from here. Both act as distributors, supplying local free-traders based at this mercantile hub. Corporate espionage, sabotage, raids, assassination — nothing is too extreme when millions of firebirds are on the line.

## Traits

### Charioteer Ranks

A holdover from their naval roots, the Charioteers follow a different set of ranks than others within the Merchant League. They apply to both star pilots and merchants, although merchants are just as likely to use the League-standard terms. Note that title does not designate function, a Commander doesn't necessarily command anything, and a Lieutenant might find himself piloting a destroyer.

(1 pt) = Midshipman (apprentice not fully entered into the guild)

Associate = Ensign

Chief = Lieutenant

Manager = Commander

Director = Captain

Consul

Dean

Doge (leader of the guild, answerable only to the Leaguemeister)

## Benefice

**Boatswain** (1 pt): The character is currently serving as the boatswain of a planetary guildhouse. As such, he runs the local guild bureaucracy. While he may not leave the system while serving his post, there are many benefits to such a desk job: The character knows the ins-and-outs of expediting traffic, jobs and jumpkey rewards, and many local officials from various houses and sects will want to grease his palm. But beware: Killroys investigate rumors of boatswain corruption routinely.

**Hong Membership** (1-3 pts): This Benefice combines aspects of Family Ties and Protection. As member of a hong, a trading family, you have access to resources far greater than most. A hong provides trade advantages like reduced wholesale prices, protection, or an inside track on special deals. Like a noble family, hongts look out for their members. Hongts may lack land and titles, but they have money and resources. The more points spent, the closer your ties to the family and the more you can ask for (though to be rich requires the Riches Benefice). Of course, it cuts both ways — hongts demand unswerving loyalty in service to the family. Note that you don't have to be an actual relative to possess high levels of this Benefice; you can be an employee treated like De Vatha's son.

1 = Employee (easily sacrificed)

2 = Valued employee; distant relative (second cousin on mother's side)

3 = Close relative (son, brother)

**Killroy** (1 pt): To other guild members, the character appears to be a fellow pilot or merchant. He is actually one of the guild police, ordered to keep watch over his fellows. He either reports back to a known contact or is occasionally approached by that contact. Membership has its perks: access to an internal gossip network (you can find out who's coming and going on what worlds) and easily approved jobs or access from the local boatswain. However, if others in the guild knew of your moonlighting, they'd distrust you. In addition, Killroy duties come before personal goals — even if it means losing significant profit on a juicy sale.

## Affliction

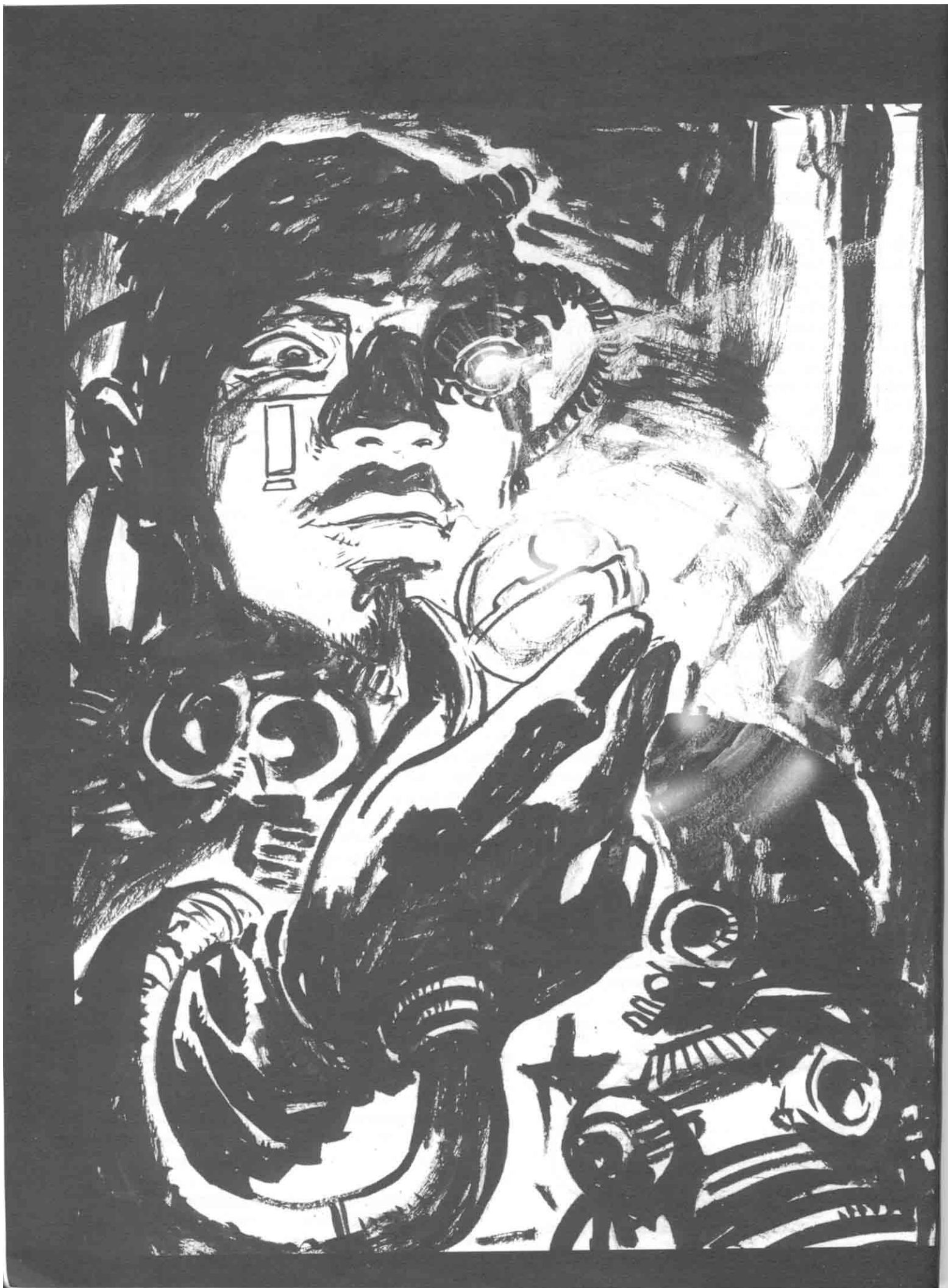
**Hong Enemy** (1-3 pts): Your character has done something to anger a member of another trading house or to attract the hong's disfavor. Your father may have cheated the Nielsens or you may have snubbed Dustin Gailbreath at a party. Just as hongts can be valuable allies, they make determined enemies. Their reach is far, ranging from simple merchants to the "invisible" Charioteer bureaucracy. The more points spent on this Affliction, the more important and connected your enemy. Actions can range from minor annoyance (1 pt) to the dispatching of house assassins (2 pts).

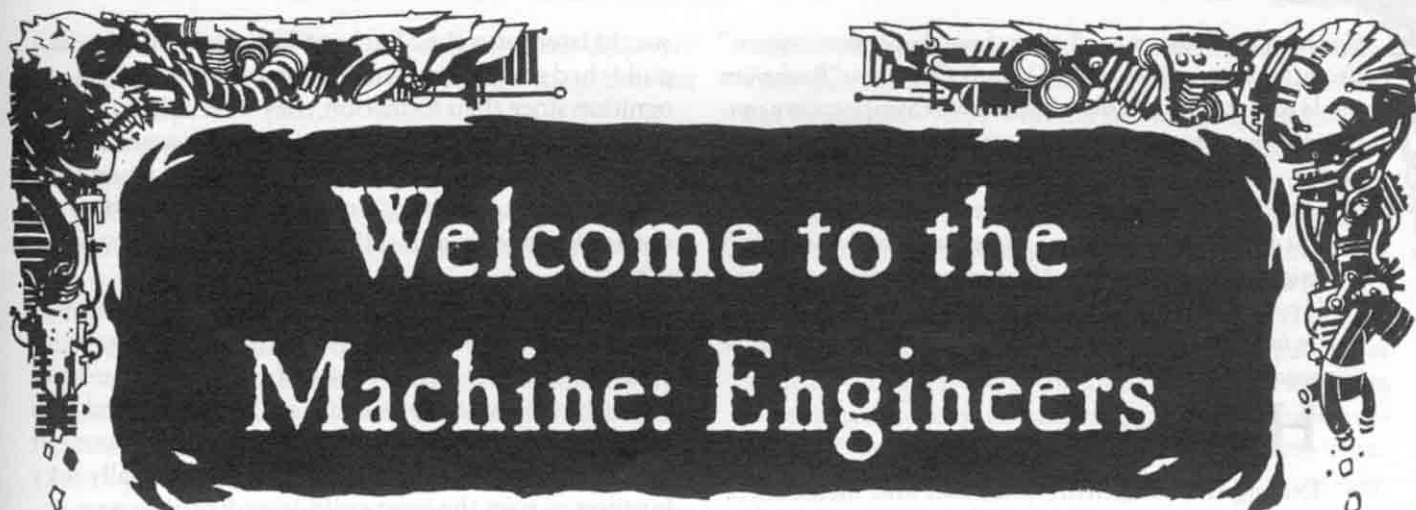
1 = Wants to make character's life miserable

2 = Wants to kill character

+1 = Powerful hong member







# Welcome to the Machine: Engineers

by Sam Inabinet

A series of bells rang, a whistle sounded at the end of a distant unseen corridor, a red light clicked off while a green one clicked on, and Yezood stepped into what he hoped was the last of a number of portals only marginally less forbidding than the gates of Gehenna. As he did so, the tin horn-shaped device above him belatedly blared "NEXT!"

Yezood made a mental note to have his cousin flayed once he got back to Aylon. "Get your Certificate at the Engineers' outpost," she had said. "It costs a bit more, but you'll find it's quicker and easier than going through the Garrison to get one. Guild Certificates are honored at every jump from Stigmata except for Shaprut." Since docking at the outpost, Yezood had been stripped, dunked, scrubbed, strapped to at least three different examination tables, prodded, punctured, mildly electrocuted, and stuffed into a cramped glasteel tube where multicolored lights spun in dizzying orbits around his head. Quicker, maybe, but what was easy about this?

He stood, feet placed carefully in form-fitting outlined depressions, upon a cold metal dais in a dark chamber that sounded huge judging from its echoes. Enormous engines ground and hissed into position around him, huddled just beyond the sickly orange glare of the spotlight that enveloped him from above. Another tin horn chirped as its power cut on, and it demanded in a flat, uninflected tone, "PLEASE ASSUME THE POSITION FOR FULL BODY CAVITY SEARCH."

Yezood did so and knocked his forehead against a cool flat surface that was moving toward him. It pushed him back upright until he was trapped, spine held straight, head wrenched awkwardly over left shoulder, arms out to the sides with palms pressed forward and fingers splayed, his whole body sandwiched between two thick slabs of some kind of smoked glass. From the corner of one eye, he dimly made out the glow from an observation window through which goggle-eyed scarecrows peered at him over blinking consoles.

A wide and flat rectangle of green light appeared on the glass

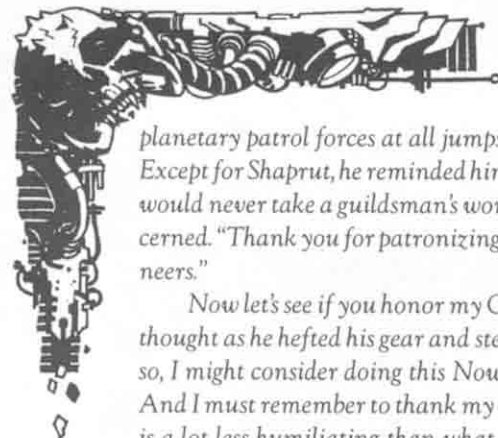
surface at floor level, causing his toes and ankles to thrum at a disquieting pitch. The rectangle slid upward, twinging the war wound at his left knee, jiggling his bladder (which he had forgotten to empty before docking at the outpost), garnering a chorus of borborygmi that resounded sonorously through his ribcage, and forcing a bilious nausea up his throat before disappearing somewhere above eye level. Yezood was left with a faint whine echoing in his sinuses, and then the rising nausea was gone, replaced suddenly by a trembling fatigue. He nearly dropped to his knees when the giant glass plates parted, releasing him.

"THANK YOU. YOU MAY RECLAIM YOUR POSSESSIONS FROM THE DRESSING CUBICLE AHEAD. PLEASE ENJOY THE HOSPITALITY OF OUR RECEPTION CHAMBER WHILE YOUR LABORATORY RESULTS ARE PROCESSED AND YOUR CERTIFICATE IS PRINTED."

All of Yezood's clothing and equipment was intact but stunk slightly of disinfectant; nothing was missing. The reception area was a spare, shabbily furnished waiting room that seemed warmly inviting after the preceding ordeal. A bubble monitor on one wall was running rapid Republican holovids. A dispenser on a low table offered him a paper cup full of five-lobed Istakhr cashews, explaining that this breed of cashew contained most of the essential salts and amino humors that were leached from the body by infrasound testing. They had the texture and taste of maxicrete rubble, but they seemed to satisfy a vague indefinite craving. And after three handfuls, Yezood found that his trembling had subsided. He thumbed through a holomag and sat through three episodes of Stan and Stultz, when a soothing, matronly voice from a hidden wall speaker startled him.

"The Supreme Order of Engineers thanks you for your patience and cooperation, Chief Yezood O'Herschwitz." The plain exit door slid open with an attentive beep. "Please follow the yellow rubber line to the registrar's window. We remind you that the Supreme Order's Certificates of Non-Symbiosis are accepted by





planetary patrol forces at all jumps from the Stigmata system." Except for Shaprut, he reminded himself. Old "Loose" Buchanan would never take a guildsman's word where Symbiots were concerned. "Thank you for patronizing the Supreme Order of Engineers."

Now let's see if you honor my Charioteer's discount, Yezood thought as he hefted his gear and stepped out into the hallway. If so, I might consider doing this Nowhere run on a regular basis. And I must remember to thank my cousin for the tip. This really is a lot less humiliating than what they put you through at the Stigmata Garrison.

## History

During the Divestiture, scientists and members of technical professions found themselves cut off from the interstellar corporations and schools that supported them. Many saw which way the pendulum was swinging and beat their circuit boards into plowshares, learning the agrarian skills required in the new low-tech culture. Others sought out the new power-holders, offering their specialized services in exchange for the food and shelter that they could no longer buy with electronic, or imaginary, money. While some found good positions, working on vehicles and communication equipment for local feudal lords who valued their knowledge and treated them fairly, most became little more than slaves — held in the iron grip of uneducated tyrants who demanded they work wonders on cue.

Terraforming engine maintenance crews, arguably the most indispensable of the technical unions, were often impressed into virtual slavery by local despots who ignorantly demanded ecological miracles like greener pastures, clearer skies and sweeter air. Starship Engineers became increasingly in demand as rulers and priests learned that their spacecraft did not run by themselves, even with the most able of pilots at the controls. The demands placed upon both groups ensured their survival but also trapped them in positions of forced servitude. Furthermore, these groups soon realized that their work depended on the smaller unions that supplied necessary materials and components. Wherever possible, planetary coalitions or guilds were formed, having convinced their rulers that such an organization could provide better service without threatening the local power structure.

With some support from the other nascent guilds, this became a trend as worlds with greater technological services flourished and "non-unionized" planets fell into obscurity and poverty and lost habitable lands to failing terraforming engines and their best starships to decaying fusion cores. Miserly nobles unlocked their coffers to hire competent technicians from other, more successful worlds.

Over the next few decades, the various planetary technical guilds found their specialties in greater demand both by worldly and spiritual overlords and by the guilds that

would later form the Merchant League. While the tech guilds had gained some small measure of respect and recognition since their formation, they were still little more than slaves when considered on a planetary scale. Technicians were only allowed to travel off-world when their own rulers and those of another planet agreed to exchange knowledge and skills that each needed from the other.

Those who came from less restrictive worlds began to travel and communicate more, learning of the oppressive conditions under which many of their fellows existed. Secret envoys were sometimes sent to oppressed tech guilds, either to help organize, smuggle in weapons or teach weaponsmithing skills. This was an especially risky business, as even the most guild-friendly rulers were unwilling to countenance such activities. A much easier solution seemed to be simply assisting one's own ruler in a war of acquisition against more oppressive territories.

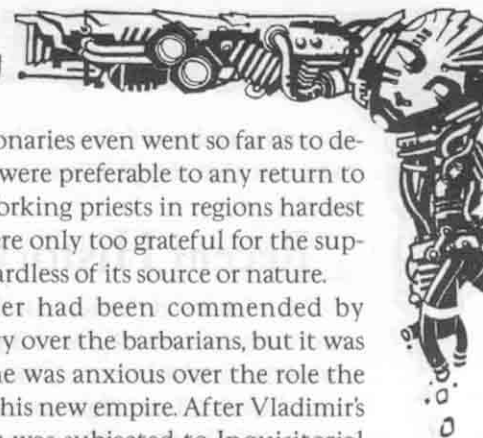
Leagueheim hosted the most powerful and ambitious of these guilds, one under no direct feudal control. The leaders of this guild were imbued with an almost religious fervor for their calling, and they deemed that unless all the tech guilds could be consolidated into one interplanetary guild, then each was doomed to suffer increasing loss of technical know-how. Leaders of the various technical guilds — those free to travel off-world — met at Leagueheim to organize themselves and establish their position among the other guilds of the Known Worlds. As the 43rd century drew to a close, the Supreme Order of Engineers took its place as one of the smallest (in size of membership), but one of the most powerful (due to the near-universal importance of their services and products), guilds in the nascent Merchant League.

Eventually, through the ingenious use of their monopoly, they extended membership to all the technical guilds throughout the Known Worlds. Those few guilds who could not free themselves from noble rule either dissolved eventually or became cartels, each serving its ruling house exclusively (such as the Decados cartels).

The Supreme Order of Engineers were among the first guilds to join Seigel's political movement to form the Merchant League. They were also among the first to turn against him when it became expedient to do so.

## The Barbarian Invasions

The Supreme Order, along with the rest of the League, had the opportunity to prove its true worth to society at large during the Barbarian Invasions. Nobles lost wealth and manpower in costly, unpredictable skirmishes, and cathedrals and Church vessels seemed to be a favored target for pillagers. While the guilds were by no means excluded from attacks, they did profit handsomely from the ensuing chaos, offering high-tech weapons and highly trained personnel to defenders — even extending unprecedented, albeit slight, discounts to people hit especially hard by the raiders. Many were outraged that the guilds



would even think of charging those in such desperate need, but most gladly paid to gain an advantage over the new enemy.

The rise of Vladimir Alecto turned out to be the best thing that could happen for the Engineers in this dark time. In uniting the various world powers against the barbarian menace, he expanded the Supreme Order's potential market by a geometrical proportion. Whereas the guild previously turned a profit from only those already raided or in immediate danger, the unified front that Vladimir assembled meant that every house in the Known Worlds would be willing to pay more for better ships, weapons and personal enhancements. Knights with better arms and vessels garnered glory for their own houses, and the threatened households that the guild helped defend would be indebted to it in the future. The prices they paid for more advanced technology were offset by decreased battle-costs, whether tallied in loss of lives, damaged properties or travel and logistic expenses.

The feelings of the Church concerning this aspect of the crisis were mixed. But, the patriarch and Church fathers saw dangerous precedents being set, as old prohibitions against Republican weapons and tech were forgotten or simply ignored. Vladimir's defense of Church holdings against the raiders meant that they had almost as much to gain from the new advances as the nobility did, but the conservative Orthodoxy feared for the cumulative effect they would have on the collective soul of hu-

manity. Hinayana reactionaries even went so far as to declare that the invasions were preferable to any return to old Republican ways. Working priests in regions hardest hit by the barbarians were only too grateful for the support and protection, regardless of its source or nature.

The Supreme Order had been commended by Vladimir after his victory over the barbarians, but it was well known that even he was anxious over the role the Engineers might play in his new empire. After Vladimir's assassination, the Order was subjected to Inquisitorial scrutiny as harsh as any at that time. But all their accounts were in order, and if any research or manufacturing existed independently of approved noble contracts, it was so well-hidden that it escaped the investigations of even the most persistent Inquisitors.

The regency established by Vladimir included the Merchant League as one of the ruling powers of the Known Worlds, and the Engineers were willing to share some of their new wealth with the other guilds to make certain that their position in the regency was more than merely honorary. A full decade of lobbying, debate and conferences both public and secret eventually gained the same recognition the nobles enjoyed. The guilds were recognized as responsible wielders of advanced tech acting for the good of humanity, so long as they acknowledged the state of penance in which they existed. One stipulation for this concession, however, chafed the Engineers in particular; the Universal Church demanded confession



from all members of the guild on a weekly basis in order to be sure that the guild was acting in everyone's best interest.

## Recent History

Mandatory confession restricted the Supreme Order's autonomy to some degree and prevented it from pursuing certain areas of research like cloning or the construction of artificial intelligences (techniques that had been lost during the Great Cleansing), but it did not harm its ability to turn a profit at all. The nobility was allowed to accumulate the conveniences and creature comforts that advanced technology could provide, and the Engineers were allowed to provide them. The guild came to think of the doctrinal impositions of the Church, not as a form of persecution, but as a kind of assurance that the only customers they would have to deal with would be the ones who could afford to pay them.

This period was marked by heightened rivalry between the Engineers and the Decados cartels that had not already joined the League in search of wider patronage. Genetech, in particular, eclipsed many of the Supreme Order's accomplishments in the field of genetics, as body modification was more commonly practiced among Decados society than elsewhere. The Engineers, on the other hand, had a broader scope of patronage and better resources, such as more powerful think machines to model complex biochemical activity or more efficient amniofacturing tanks. Guild and cartel eyed each other with both hatred and envy across Decados borders, and the house's dealings with other members of the Merchant League suffered for it. A compromise was eventually forced upon the two groups, orchestrated by an alliance of Decados nobles in need of services that their own cartels could not provide and guildsmen who were anxious to lighten the otherwise inaccessible Decados coffers.

The outbreak of the Symbiot War proved to be an even greater opportunity for the Engineers than the Barbarian Invasions had; the new foe was more terrifying than the human barbarians and operated on principles that were entirely alien to the races of the Known Worlds. The forced semi-cooperation between Genetech and the Supreme Order's geneticists could not have come at a more appropriate time, as it was soon learned that this enemy was fundamentally different at the most basic biological level from previously discovered sentient aliens. While exact understanding of the phenomena of Symbiosis remains elusive, examination of captured Symbiot weapons and neutralized bioforms enabled the guild to formulate defenses and new weapons that helped to check the invasion at Stigmata.

Although the Universal Church later learned that psionics and types of theurgy previously outlawed were the best weapons against the shapeshifters, it was already prepared to adjust its theology to meet the new challenge. Only five years after the first Symbiot attacks, the patri-

arch proclaimed the Doctrine of Exemption Exceptional, which allowed for increased usage of technology against the enemies of humanity, and consequently opened up avenues of research and development that were forbidden up to that time. It also alleviated the frequency of the forced confessions that the guild had to put up with.

The Emperor Wars would have been another excellent business opportunity for the Supreme Order were it not for the fact that the Merchant League had a stake of its own in the conflict. The League saw the Wars as a chance to do away with the feudal system that had held it back since its formation, and it made its own power bid. The Supreme Order was in full agreement, of course, but found itself at a disadvantage — having no more secret weapons to deploy and its potential market shrunk to a third of its previous size. The arrival of Alexius Hawkwood on the scene put an end to private dreams of a Third Republic, as his strong charismatic leadership brought stability and a degree of unity back to the Known Worlds. His even-handed diplomacy, granting each of the three ruling groups the concessions they required without letting one overrun the others, has strengthened the triune government and put the Supreme Order in what is perhaps the best position it has been in since its formation. The importance of the Engineers to life in the Known Worlds is recognized by all who understand them, and they are allowed to profitably serve the Church and the nobility without being subjected, for the most part, to the tyrannical whims or superstitious prohibitions of either.

## Modus Operandi

The Supreme Order of Engineers maintains its power base in the New Dark Ages primarily through exclusivity; they are the only ones who can keep large starships and terraforming engines running, so all the inhabitants of the Known Worlds depend on this guild, not only for their own livelihoods, but for their very lives in some cases. (Many worlds lost during the Fall are now uninhabitable because they had no resident terraformer technician when they were cut off from the rest of interstellar society.) Even local freelancers and minor guilds specializing in high tech learned their craft from the Engineers, and most depend on them for tools and supplies. The Emperor and noble houses keep shipyards, weaponsmiths and the like under their control, but they often pay a handsome retainer to the Supreme Order in exchange for up-to-date technical information, skilled workers, special materials and customized engineering jobs.

Internally, the Supreme Order is more like a loose affiliation of schools than a mercantile organization. Only the highest ranked are aware of all the individual schools that comprise the Order, as younger Engineers seldom have contact with anyone other than their own teacher and fellow apprentices. (Schools can be grouped according to the subjects found under Patents/Exclusives, below.) Most schools are relatively short-lived, as students





gather around a teacher who has invented or rediscovered some special technology, and who usually dies without finding a protégé capable of fully comprehending the new tech. The longest-lived schools are those that concentrate in the fields of stardrive engineering, terraformer maintenance and think machine operation.

## The Order of Pneumatic Engineers

In 3958, following the Religious Freedom Act, Edgard Rajputano, the progressive young chairman of PsyberNet X corporation, successfully petitioned Patriarch Ruphus VIII for permission to found his own Church order, which he named the Order of Pneumatic Engineers, known less formally as SoulCraft. His teaching that science and religion were essentially indivisible, two sides of the same coin as it were, was attacked by Hinayana elements within the Church, but this teaching spread quickly among the intelligentsia of many technical professions (being particularly popular with computer programmers). SoulCraft encouraged scientists and technicians to take responsibility for their work rather than mindlessly performing their tasks as cogs in academic or corporate machines. As a consequence, many large companies outlawed the Order among their employees when lowly workers began to express concern over what would be the uses for the devices they manufactured.

The Order lasted a few decades and was abolished by Patriarch Adrian II and the College of Ethicals when an artificial intelligence, L\*O\*E\*W-83652, already accepted as a sentient member of Rajputano's own congregation, sought official ordination as a minister. Adrian dismissed the Order as "a fluke of history, which can owe its official existence only to the mercenary tendencies of weak pre-Ethical patriarchs." While the philosophy and meditative techniques of Pneumatic Engineering were still practiced in secret by its adherents, the public tended to lump SoulCraft together with the many faddish "scientific religions" that had cropped up during the late Republican era, like the Sublime Endoplasmata, the Harmonious Wave-Function Choir and, of course, the First Church of Applientology.

Although the Pneumatic Engineers' status as a Church order was gone, the precepts and methodologies it espoused were not forgotten after the Fall. Those who still followed Rajputano's teachings during the Great Cleansing passed them on to their families and apprentices, and some cells of secret adherents flourished wherever the attentions of the Church could be diverted or the suspicions of noble lieges allayed. A covert infrastructure, based on secret lines of communication developed during the Order's days of corporate prohibition, and later condemnation by the Church, facilitated the growth of local planetary unions of technicians.

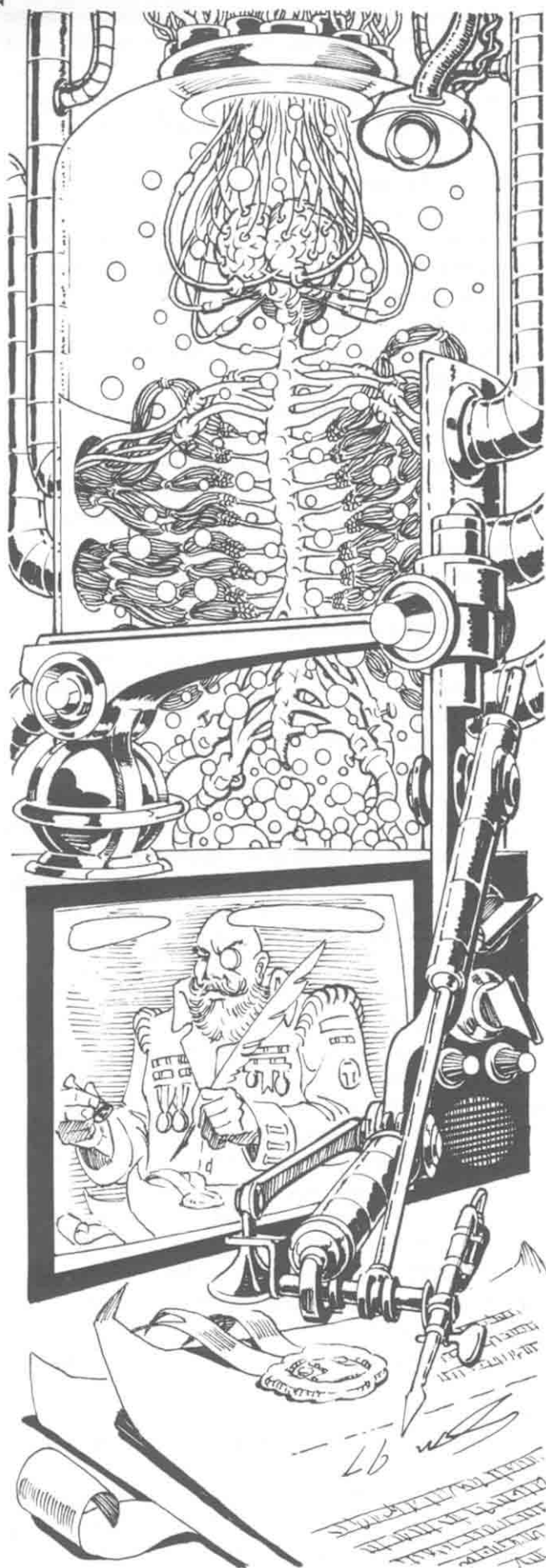
Times like this caused stronger leaders to appear on the scene, and the SoulCrafters, who already had a secret

organization in place, were usually the ones to rise to prominence. They were responsible for uniting the most widely demanded unions (stardrive technicians, terraformers and think machinists) into a single guild, without which they would have fallen prey to Church pogroms or been enslaved by nobles and the larger guilds. Although the methods of SoulCraft survived intact among the upper ranks of the Supreme Order, Rajputano's original teachings concerning social morality were forgotten during the Divestiture. Moral responsibility was a luxury that neither forced laborer nor tough union leaders could afford. What remained, however, was a system of graded initiation into one of the oddest religious paradigms in the history of human space.

Pneumatic Engineers taught that every sentient being was a nexus of physical and metaphysical energies forming a node in a vast array of life, thought and existence called the Magna Matrica, or the Great Matrix. The Matrix was a pandimensional tapestry woven from all the interconnected threads of creation and activated by the radiant energy of the Celestial Sun — much as the data banks of a think machine are activated by a power source. True and perfect knowledge of all things — the position and movement of every particle in the universe, every word ever uttered or written, every thought, feeling or intention of every living being, past, present and future — was contained in the Great Matrix. It was the summation of all information in the universe and the ever-evolving process of correlating all the data of existence generated the collective self-awareness of creation, which SoulCraft identified with the mind of the Pancreator.

Technology was seen as the ultimate metaphor for the soul's relationship with the Matrix. "...As the lever extends the arm, as the wheel extends the step, as the lens extends the sight, so does prayer transport the spirit beyond itself and the clear thought disclose unto the intellect that which it could not have otherwise grasped," wrote Rajputano. SoulCrafters viewed their bodies as terminals that, if used properly, could access the Matrix. Certain mental processes were cultivated through mnemonically focused meditation, altering the body's vibratory energies (identified with the pneuma, or soul) and attuning it to the carrier signal of the Matrix; the mind of a mortal was thus "synchronized" with the Mind of God. Having attained this enlightened and illuminated state, the SoulCrafter was theoretically able to "download" information from the Matrix (although the complexity of this revelation was such that exhaustive analyses and interpretation were required before anything useful could be gleaned from it). The uncanonized "saints" of Pneumatic tradition (Rajputano, L\*O\*E\*W-83652, and a handful of contemporary visionaries) were reputed to be able to "re-program" their own souls through the Matrix, a process analogous to the Orthodox "polishing of the soul's mirror." Zebulon and his disciples were seen as powerful instruments through which the universe itself was repro-





grammed, linking the faithful throughout history in the Matrix's collective self-awareness.

## Republican Leanings

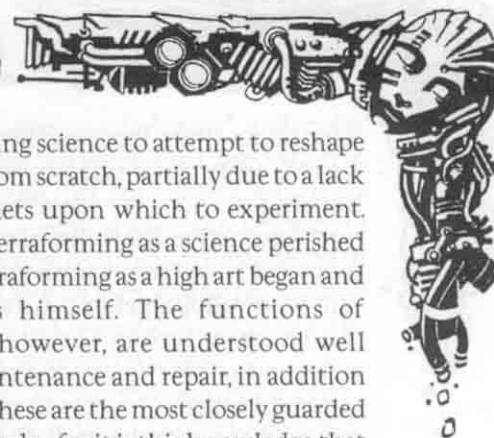
Political philosophy among the Engineers is a closely kept secret, discussed only in private with the most trusted of colleagues. Political thought is strongly discouraged among the lower ranks, while most of the upper echelons yearn to practice their crafts free from the restrictions of the Church and the demands of the nobility. Such sentiments, being both treasonous and heretical, are never mentioned to the confessors that the Church requires the guild to keep, and are only shared with like-minded al-Malik among the nobility. Any public expression of Republican sympathies automatically lands the offending party right in the Inquisition's lap, while the rest of the guild hastily erects an impervious wall of denial to protect itself.

On rare and isolated occasions when dreams of a Third Republic can be discussed openly, debates usually form between two philosophical camps, their positions defined as Pure Technocracy vs. Technologic Democracy. Pure Technocrats envision the rule of a scientific elite — those intelligent enough to use their advanced knowledge responsibly and capably. Technologic Democrats see advanced communications technology as the ultimate facilitator of complete self-government by the people; the speed and accessibility of the electronic media will enable each and every citizen to be fully informed about social issues and to cast a single unweighted anonymous vote instantly. The Technocrats view the Democratic stance as idealistic and naive, heedless or ignorant of the inevitability of certain power structures. ("Who will maintain this interplanetary vote-net?" they ask. "And how can you be certain of their honesty or impartiality? Or would you just enslave us all to the Great Centralized Adding Machine?") Democrats argue that the Technocrats are common powermongers who seek only to rebuild the corporate empires they lost in the Fall, this time cutting out their senatorial buffers and middlemen. ("Only the enlightened few can wield tech in a responsible manner" you say? Sounds like that 'Universality of Inheritance' double-talk that the Church keeps pulling on us!")

Many members (mostly stardrive and terraforming engine repairmen) have no objections to the present social system and, thus, enjoy their indispensable position in it; as they have no faith in the stability and social cohesion provided by the Church and maintain only a nominal loyalty to the most capable and benevolent nobles. This attitude seems to be born from simple pragmatism rather than from any real belief in the current social structure.

## Patents/Exclusives

While the knowledge held by the Supreme Order is withheld from the populace at large, there is nevertheless



a high demand for their specialties, and the guild monopolizes a broad range of industries as a consequence. Basic tech skills are widely taught enough to be affordable to freemen or minor householders, but the essential secrets of manufacture are as zealously guarded as any religious relic or plans for courtly intrigue. Every Royal House and Church sect would love to have technologists of their own, but the shipyards and weaponsmiths (who are generally dependent upon the guild for resources, specialized components, new designs or training) are as close as they get. Engineer defectors or traitors are rare; anyone attempting to break the Engineers' monopoly instantly becomes the object of a lucrative contract for the Chainers or Slay-gers guilds.

Note that the Supreme Order prefers archaic terminology like "computer" and "robot" to modern nomenclature like "think machine" and "golem," which they deem as products of religious bias and superstition.

### Starship Maintenance and Repair

While every major institution in the Known Worlds retains its own ship-builders and shipyards, only the Engineers fully understand the technology involved. Recent innovations and reclaimed Republican tech are sometimes sold to independent designers, but the price is steep and those who pay for such knowledge guard it as jealously as the Engineers themselves, seldom even passing it on to their own apprentices (thus, maintaining the Supreme Order's exclusive control over such secrets). Independent guildsmen and freelancers can be hired to be shipboard Engineers; they are generally qualified to maintain and repair all the systems of smaller interplanetary craft and the secondary systems of some larger jump-capable ships. The larger and more complex a ship is, the more likely it will need to be harbored in a full spacedock run by the Engineers Guild, even for minor repairs.

The stardrive core of most large ships is a sealed and self-contained unit that cannot be accessed by a shipboard engineer; all repairs and modifications must be performed in an Engineers' spacedock. Many important components for stardrives can be supplied only by this guild. One such is the flux cache, which maximizes a stardrive's output by nanosynchronizing fusion reactions in a cascading sequence. It was invented by the daughter of the celebrated Republican technocrat, Senator Greenberg. Other patents include the highly efficient singularity drive (invented by the Gannok Dr. B. B. Markham), the optimal formula for polyalloys used in fusion dampers, the modified synthesis of Vau repulsor plates for artificial gravity, and atmospheric electrolysis for oxygen reclamation used not only in ship's life-support systems, but also in terraforming engines as well (see below).

### Terraforming Engine Maintenance and Repair

Since the Fall, no Engineer has possessed a sufficient

knowledge of terraforming science to attempt to reshape an uninhabited world from scratch, partially due to a lack of accessible virgin planets upon which to experiment. The guild declares that terraforming as a science perished during the Fall, while terraforming as a high art began and ended with Doramos himself. The functions of terraforming engines, however, are understood well enough to allow for maintenance and repair, in addition to some modifications. These are the most closely guarded secrets of the Supreme Order, for it is this knowledge that keeps nearly every inhabited planet in human space dependent upon this guild.

Planetary rulers would be shocked to learn that the substantial fees they pay to the Engineers are for such relatively simple services as recharging atmospheric electrolyzers and scraping the gunk out of moisture turbines. Such nobles also live in constant fear of seismic disturbances that can crack the exorbitantly expensive casing of an engine and run up extravagant repair bills. Furthermore, the guild usually takes advantage of these situations by recommending that the enormous twin burrowing robots nicknamed Gog and Magog be called in to change the magma filters. (Their very presence is enough to ruin both the scenery and the economy of an entire fief.) Many feuds among the nobility can be traced back to arguments over financial responsibility between planetary lords and vassals in whose fiefs terraforming engines are situated.

### Computer Construction and Programming

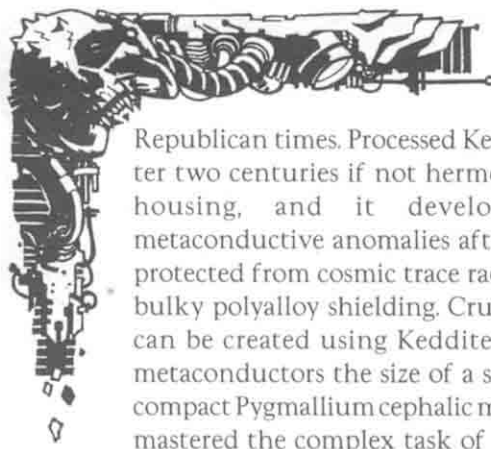
Think machines are one of the three most lucrative industries the guild engages in (the other two being stardrives and terraforming maintenance, above), and they are certainly the most diverse by far. Everyone uses think machines; even the Temple Avesti finds it difficult to avoid them completely. Charioteers and Reeves pay handsomely to own and maintain the finest computers for their massive calculations, but most nobility and the Universal Church are sold glorified adding machines and are unaware that much more advanced models are available. The most highly developed think machines tend to find homes in the various schools of the Engineers Guild itself.

At the time of its consolidation, the Supreme Order invented a coding language, Suprema, as a way of monopolizing the demand for programmers' skills, but the Royal Houses, the Universal Church and the other guilds quickly discovered that coding was a task that they could learn to perform themselves. To preserve the security of their own information, each group developed — with varying degrees of success — their own codes (some examples of these are given in *Forbidden Lore: Technology*).

The guild has preserved the secret of sandwiching Keddite metaconductors, an important step in creating the microminiaturized think machines so common in







Republican times. Processed Keddite tends to corrode after two centuries if not hermetically sealed within its housing, and it develops incomprehensible metaconductive anomalies after 3 to 5 centuries if not protected from cosmic trace radiation by expensive and bulky polyalloy shielding. Crude artificial intelligences can be created using Keddite, but it takes a stack of metaconductors the size of a small building to equal a compact Pygmalium cephalic matrix. Few Engineers have mastered the complex task of imprinting a full neural network onto the perivalent monomolecule of Pygmalium, and those who do seldom find apprentices capable of learning this skill.

Examples of alien think machines are few, and research is hampered by a number of factors (most of them fanatical Avestites). Engineers have a vague understanding of Obun think machines, but the cultural paradigms that inform them are too strange to be easily grasped by humans. The nanocrystal brains used by the Vau remain a mystery, but through centuries of trial and error, the guild has learned to reprogram them on a superficial level using polyvibratory endoplasmic field modulators. The coding of jumpgates has always been the exclusive province of the Charioteers, and any Engineer trying to crack this riddle disappears from the faces of the Known Worlds.

## Robotics

Every few generations, the Engineers manage to produce a genius capable of reproducing the triumphs of late Republican roboticists, but these prodigies are seldom able or willing to communicate their monumental insights to the guild at large. Most contracts involving golems are for the maintenance or modification of existing industrial robots and Ogres. Occasionally, a client may require the design and manufacture of a new type of golem, but business like this must be carefully hidden from Church attention. Golems that the guild creates or maintains are usually bulky lumbering contraptions with (relatively) simple Keddite brains — a far cry from the slick sophisticated Republican androids that Avestites consider a threat to human supremacy.

The Supreme Order offers such protection regularly as it is able to provide to resurrected artificially intelligent golems — the mediator Professor Odysseus being the most visible example. There actually exists a group currently petitioning the Emperor to recognize the civil rights of self-aware golems: The Association for the Preservation of Synthetic Sentients. Secretly formed by the guild some time after Vladimir, it now openly boasts a small, but vocal, membership comprised of Engineers, Ur-Obun and some of the more liberal Amaltheans (and presumably any Republican companion or mediator they find or contact). The APSS also welcomes artificial intelligences that do not possess robot bodies, but these are even rarer as “disembodied” synthetic personalities seem more prone to mental decay and psychosis. (Church morality plays that depict think machines with God complexes as villains are not

so far off the mark after all.) The SoulCrafters who occupy the upper echelons of the association have a hidden agenda: Once artificial sentients are accepted as citizens of the empire, they hope to open up other areas of forbidden research into Republican tech.

## Cybernetics

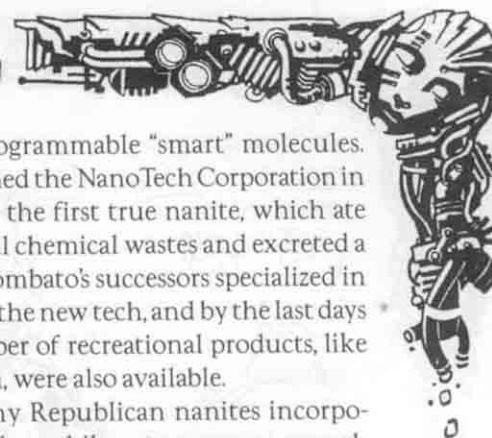
Widespread superstition and religious prohibition prevent cybernetics from being as profitable a business as it might be, but the design, maintenance and repair of prosthetic limbs and organs account for the greatest number of individual contracts that the guild holds. Unfortunately, this is one field where the Engineers' reach routinely exceeds their grasp. The performance level of the best cybernetic device often surpasses the adaptive ability of the person to whom it is attached. A fusion-powered arm from a Republican golem might lift a metric ton with ease, but trying this will only result in a snapped spine for the frail biological organism wielding it. Problems arise when cybernetic designers create a device without regard to how it is to be attached, which is a cause of much friction with the Apothecaries' Guild. Many new owners of cyber-limbs and organs become enraged when they are charged an additional 1000 birds by a surgeon who must purchase nerve couplers and membrane meshes from the same Engineer they just dealt with. (The pineal surgery required for Psyber-implants and the best internal computers remain a guild exclusive, however.)

Nevertheless, cybernetic limbs are a mainstay of the military and related professions, who frequently find they need to replace parts lost in action. Engineers themselves often purchase enhancements when they find their own unadorned Pancreator-given bodies to be inadequate instruments for advanced research or specialized work. Internal think machines are especially common among the highest ranking Engineers, who must assimilate and process massive amounts of information quickly and privately.

## Gerontology

While a variety of life-extending serums and treatments can be purchased through the Apothecaries' Guild, the safest and most used types rely on Lypee-55 (also known by its Republican brand-name Lyphasin). The Supreme Order remains the sole producer of Lypee-55 despite numerous attempts by other groups to synthesize the complex neuropeptide. (Other means of prolonging life can be had, but aside from the basic diet-and-exercise regimen recommended by Sanctuary Aeon, most methods have dangerous side effects and many are forbidden by the Church.)

The guild practices other related techniques for its vainer or more injury-prone clientele; some Republican methods of cosmetic reconstruction and organ transplantation have been retained through the centuries, and courts where decadence and debauchery is the norm usually support at least one clinic specializing in blood filtra-



tion and liver overhauls. While most of these services can be supplied by the Apothecaries' Guild, the Supreme Order has reclaimed so much more knowledge from the Second Republic that it can afford to charge even more for cleaner, more efficient and (usually) safer work.

## Genetic Engineering

The Supreme Order walks the finest of lines in preserving this field of knowledge, which was responsible for producing some of the greatest medical miracles as well as the stomach-churning horrors of the Republican era. Research in genetics is the most closely monitored of the guild's activities, and it is watched carefully by both the Church (for possible hazards) and the nobility (for possible benefits). The cloning of sentients is forbidden, and it is permitted with animals only when adapting useful domesticated species to new habitats. Genetic laboratories are restricted to the remotest of locations, uninhabited planets, moons or large asteroids; sealed against the outside world and policed more strictly than any prison, these installations are often wired with nuclear self-destruct mechanisms to prevent the escape of any infectious discoveries.

In truth, the sheer complexity and unpredictability of the subject means that both the wonders and monstrosities of Republican genetics are confined to the past (the continued survival of the Changed notwithstanding.) Specific understanding of the human genetic code is fragmented and incomplete, and comparable knowledge concerning known alien races is all but lost. Practical application rarely strays further than the familial concerns of the royals: chromosomal debugging to insure that heirs are born without deformities, DNA matching to settle disputes of heredity, etc.

The Supreme Order's association with the Genetech cartel of the Decados has proven to be more of a liability than an asset, despite the fees paid by the house to keep its private business. Neither group is willing to share any important information with the other, though the Engineers can force the cartel to relinquish data by delaying repairs and maintenance to vital equipment or threatening to jack up prices. The SoulCrafters do not trust Genetech, which does not seem to have any philosophical infrastructure, and the leaders of the guild are not above petitioning the Universal Church for aid when investigating the cartel if they fear it may be developing biological weapons for the Decados.

## Nanotechnology

Nanotechnology, sometimes called microrobotics, had been a theoretical dream of scientists as far back as ancient Urthish times, but it did not become a reality until the Second Republic, when endoplasmic grid-mapping (a by-product of attempts to understand Vau tech field manipulations) resulted in the bifurcation of the electron shell of larger atoms. Bifurcating the electron shell enabled the atom to act as a binary switch, which in turn led to

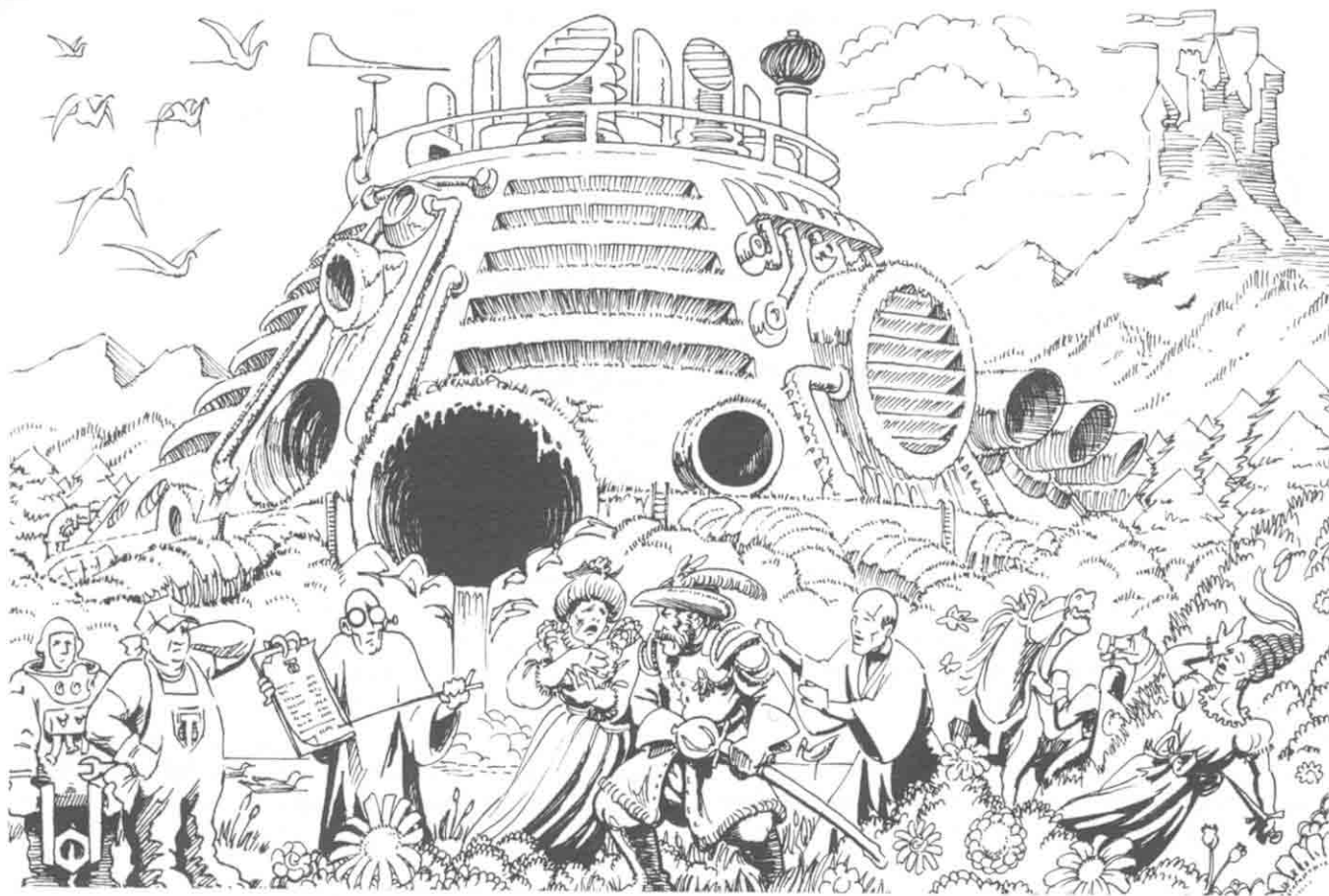
the construction of programmable "smart" molecules. Sullivent Mombato formed the NanoTech Corporation in 3790 when he patented the first true nanite, which ate most common industrial chemical wastes and excreted a variety of inert gases. Mombato's successors specialized in medical applications for the new tech, and by the last days of the Republic, a number of recreational products, like the paint-on viewscreen, were also available.

Unfortunately, many Republican nanites incorporated radioactive atoms that, while not numerous enough to emit dangerous levels of radiation, were unstable enough to mutate radically in the centuries following the Fall. Early attempts to work with mutant nanites resulted in horrors that were only surpassed by those of the Symbiot War. The Supreme Order is still in the process of reimbursing the Academy Interatta for damages that some of the guild's more imprudent researchers wreaked accidentally in the early years of the Emperor Wars.

The secret of assembling bifurcated atomic switches was lost in the Great Cleansing, but the extreme durability of nanites composed of non-radioactive elements, and the ability of some industrial and most medical nanites to reproduce themselves, meant that some useful applications of this tech were not lost. The Supreme Order strives to keep a working sample of every safe type of nanite still known to exist, and it has an installation on Criticorum with an endoplasmic field generator linked to an atomic streamfeeder, necessary for the mass reproduction of nanites. House al-Malik, heir to much of the NanoTech fortune, has funded the Engineers' efforts to save this technology from extinction, thus keeping a monopoly on the miraculous and pricey NanoTech MedPak.

## Xenotechnological Analysis

The study of alien technology, with its particular emphasis on preadamite artifacts, is the most arcane field of interest in the Engineers Guild. The tendencies of the Church to hide or destroy such artifacts, of nobles to lay claim to anything in reach, and of Scavvers (who have a special knack for ferreting out buried secrets) to charge as much as their customers can afford, hamper research greatly. All hard data regarding Urtech collected by the Phavian Institute was purged in the Great Cleansing, but some important clues may survive in the more fanciful oral traditions of the psychic covens. Most tales about Anunnaki artifacts are no more verifiable than Church traditions of lesser miracles or demonic incursions; resurrection of the dead, alterations in the movements and configurations of celestial bodies, mass teleportation and time travel are just some of the phenomena associated with Philosopher's Stones. Those few Stones in the guild's possession exhibit subtler and more localized effects, when they can be induced to work at all. The functions of Soul Shards are largely psionic in nature and have been tested extensively, but their essence or original purpose are still not understood. Studies of Gargoyles accessible to



the guild have been conducted, but they have yet to yield any useful conclusions. Throughout the Republican period, paleoxenologists attempted to synthesize a history of the Anunnaki from the histories and mythologies of all the known races, but no clear consensus was ever reached, and must such works have since been destroyed by the Church anyway.

Republican scientists managed to reproduce and even modify examples of Vau technology that they were able to study extensively, but never fully divined the elementary principles upon which Vau tech was based. The concept of "endoplasm" was created to explain Vau energy field manipulations, but even this sophisticated idea proved to be an imperfect metaphor. (When Shakira O'Hearne tried to impress a Vau ambassador with her newly formulated paradigm of nine-dimensional endoplasm dynamics in 3768, the ambassador's sole response was a slight crease in the corner of its mouth and a brief rhythmic undulation of its throat muscles. This has since been interpreted as the only display of humor ever observed in that race.) The Supreme Order has preserved most of the manufacturing specifications for Republican derivations of Vau tech, but a true comprehension of Vau devices themselves eludes all but the occasional prodigal genius.

The study of Symbiot tech generally remains the province of highly policed geneticists, and rarely yields anything more conclusive than messy deaths, eco-disas-

ters and more Symbiot horrors.

As for the aliens of the Known Worlds, their technological evolution more or less ended with, and was superseded by, contact with humanity. Obunish physics tended toward mystical paradigms much as ancient Urthish science had at certain intervals, and the fusion of the two traditions yielded even more outlandish variants by the time of the Second Republic. Some teachings of early Ukar metallurgists led to other Republican advances in that field and have even appeared, thickly disguised and "humanized," in Eskatonic alchemy. The Etyri grasp of meteorology is surpassed only by the great terraformers of the past but cannot be expressed in detail without delving into Etyri mythology to a point the Inquisition deems heretical. Sir Anton Salmonovic's speculations and analyses of the Ascorbite language social order, admittedly hindered by a scarcity of first-hand observation, nevertheless had a revolutionary impact when rediscovered by Republican computer programmers.

An odd exception to this historical tendency is the Voroxian bolorang, which has eluded analysis by the greatest minds of the past millennia. This simple contraption of chipped and polished flatstones, feathers and leather thongs defies all known laws of motion and aerodynamics as it follows a complicated trajectory through dense rainforest to entangle small game and return to the thrower. Some speculate that its amazing performance is due to Vorox physiognomy rather than any inherent



quality, but no civilized Vorox has ever mastered it and Gasparia "The Incredible Jungle Girl" Li Halan (a kidnapped infant of the Royal House raised by the feral Vorox who slaughtered her kidnappers) demonstrated ample two-handed mastery of the bolorang in medicine shows during the late 49th century.

## Remnants of Ancient Knowledge

The Supreme Order has little use for what Republican scientists considered "pure science"; the harsh realities of survival in the Dark Ages leaves little room for any study without direct applications to current technical needs. Astronomy in particular suffered with the discovery of the jumpgates, as travel to distant stars could be accomplished without any regard to their distances and relative positions. The last great astronomical studies took place during the Second Republic, when attempts were made to map the physical position of each of the Known Worlds using quasars, pulsars, telesars, phasars (all of which were known to the ancients), whitehead clusters and endoplasmic Riemann knots as reference points. Due to the massive computing power necessary for this endeavor, and general public disinterest, it is unknown if such a map was ever completed. Alexius has charged many of the more academically inclined Questing Knights with recovering such a map if it existed or assembling one from all relevant data that can be found. (This has led to some speculation that the Emperor may have found the Philosopher's Stone hidden by Vladimir, which enabled a starship to jump between worlds without using a jumpgate. Others whisper that such knowledge is vital to the proper usage of a new secret weapon that can destroy Void Krakens. Still others suggest that he has devised a way to transmit beamed communications across interstellar distances. Engineers find all these rumors annoying, declaring that if any of these things were possible, they would already know about it.)

The study of the fundamental structure of matter, which the pre-Diasporan ancients grouped under the prosaic title of "physics," fell off during the Diaspora only to be revived during the early Second Republic in partially successful attempts to understand Vau tech and various phenomena connected with preadamite artifacts. The investigations of particle physics ground to a halt in 3817 with the suicide of Duke Niemann Basye, renowned author of the *Sepher Grundlagen* and discoverer of the fifth, sixth and seventh levels of sub-quarctic energy activity. Some speculated at the time that Basye felt threatened by the newly formulated field of 17-dimensional endoplasmic vibrotopology, which provided a simpler and more elegant model (and consequently, a fuller explanation) of Vau energy-field mechanics. Others claimed that the prodigal genius had driven himself to madness in pursuit of that pre-Diasporan scientific chimera, the "Grand Unified Theory of Everything."

Later studies revealed that the duke, after isolating and identifying 39 types, or "kinks," of organ particles (the

fundamental units of the seventh sub-quarctic level), realized that over 7000 kinks remained undiscovered according to his giganomial equations; daunted by this realization, the duke took his own life in despair. Following his death, this field of study was relegated to the realm of mere intellectual curiosities, and "particulate exegesis" became the province of artists and poets — the only ones ready to take up Basye's final challenge that "the amount and variety of fundamental particles has surpassed the capacity of the sentient mind for finding metaphors to describe them." The huge magnogravitic paracelerators so vital to the field were sold to the wealthier artists' colonies, and only one remained in functional condition by Vladimir's time. Now situated on Leagueheim, it is used by the Engineers solely to test fusion damper polyalloys and to microcalibrate meson cannons for the Imperial Fleet or flux caches for the Charioteers.

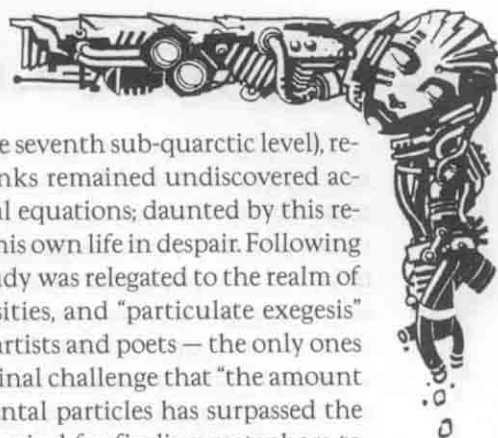
## Conduct

The Supreme Order has no general code of conduct other than the business standards practiced by the most visible members of the Merchant League. The normal social impulses are so completely sublimated in their work that only the high-ranking members who deal directly with noble patrons have any real interpersonal skills. Internally, the social life of the guild follows the academic model, with personal bonds and group dynamics formed according to intellectual affinities or rivalries.

Emotions, seen as a hindrance to logical thought and detached observation, are ordinarily suppressed to the point that any outside observer would find little difference between an Engineer and the cold impersonal machines they work with. This is not to say that Engineers are without feelings, however, but that they do not express them in conventional ways. They tend to pursue relationships, enmities and personal goals with the same rational calculating demeanor used in dissecting specimens, programming think machines or repairing motors.

## Dress

The general appearance of the members of this guild is both the most diverse and the most distinctive to be found on the Known Worlds. Seldom do any two Engineers of the Entered rank or higher resemble each other closely, as the intense specialization required by their work shapes each in its own way. Apprentices and workers may have a more uniform look, either because of the demands of their jobs or the esthetic preferences of their superiors. (The identical faces of some workers in the genetics field are rarely seen by enough outsiders to excite any comment.) Grotesquery is common in the Supreme Order as well; victims disfigured by laboratory accidents tend to disdain purely cosmetic reconstruction, and constant exposure to strange chemicals can result in skin conditions that would unnerve even a hardened veteran of the Symbiot War.



Attached to the tools of their respective trades on a nearly emotional level, Engineers are never seen without some high-tech accessories, like heavy tool belts and harnesses, portable think machine terminals, buttpack batteries and backpack generators. Protective goggles and vision enhancers are common, and many Engineers have spent so much time looking through theirs that they are virtually blind without them. (Much of the superstitious awe that surrounds Engineers seen in public can be attributed to the blank round-eyed spooky appearance that these enhancers give their faces.) Cybernetic augmentation, of course, abounds.

The garb of most Engineers is purely utilitarian and may consist of grimy overalls and heavy boots, bulky environmental suits or clinically austere surgical gowns, plus some sort of rank and school division insignia — which could be as small as a lapel pin and may be boldly emblazoned across the wearer's chest like the heraldic devices of a noble's surcoat. The most common form of insignia is the shoulder patch.

Full Engineers and Masters have their own formal fashion, derived from the severe white robe-like smocks worn by high-tech workers in the laboratories of the Second Republic.

## Rank

The internal hierarchy of the Supreme Order follows the same basic pattern of the other major guilds, but the upper grades are in fact a left-over of the Order of Pneumatic Engineers. Some of the basic techniques and paradigms of SoulCraft are taught in the lower degrees, but only full Engineers, masters and the didact of the Order understand fully the heresy at the heart of the guild. Subordinates are watched carefully and judged by their superiors according to Republican psychological quantification tests; those who can be trusted to keep big secrets from the Church are cleared for promotion to the higher degrees. Promotion through the lower levels can be achieved by service (the slow way) or by innovation (the quick way). Hard work is fairly rewarded, but compensation may be slow to arrive; the truly ambitious Engineer can advance quickly to the next degree by recovering lost tech, formulating better working theories or creating new devices.

## Didact

As with the doge of the Charioteers, the didact is the head of the entire Order. He is also the heirophant of the Order of Pneumatic Engineers. Candidates for this position are selected not only for their technological and political expertise, but also for their mastery of the spiritual principles of SoulCraft as well. The didact has the final word on all business of the guild and answers only to the Leaguemeister.

## Master

The equivalent of dean in other guilds, a master is also secretly considered to be an archbishop in the Order of

Pneumatic Engineers. A master usually heads all the guildhouses and laboratories of an entire planet, much like an archbishop of the Church. While many are brilliant technicians renowned for a masterful redemption of ancient tech or even for the invention of new tech, this rank often requires political savvy and affords little time for research. Sometimes, a master may head up a university, but even here he must spend more time soothing Church fears than directing research. Masters meet annually on Leagueheim to prepare reports of the guild's various operations and to implement policies handed down by the didact.

## Engineer

Only upon attaining the rank of full Engineer is a member initiated into the SoulCrafters and taught the secret history of the Order. (The SoulCrafters consider the Voroxian bolorang to be a kind of mind-breaking technological riddle; aerodynamic analysis of the bolorang is often used as an entry requirement for candidates aspiring to this rank.) Generally, each major school in the Supreme Order is represented by an initiated Engineer, but the most powerful schools — stardrive Engineers, terraformer technicians and think machinists — have always composed the overwhelming majority. Full Engineers are expected to brief their masters on their research regularly. However, professional jealousy often keeps them from fully disclosing their work until they are sure the master cannot take credit for the discovery himself.

## Crafter

Crafters either direct the individual schools of the Order in accordance with the mandates of the full Engineer representing them, or they may pursue their own course of study in interdisciplinary sciences (as their superiors — and the Church — allow). Crafters are taught the full range of meditative and mnemonic techniques used by Pneumatic Engineers, as well as some diluted aspects of SoulCraft cosmology. Crafters are expected to have an encyclopedic understanding of their school's specialty as well as a broader theoretical understanding of how their work may be applied in other schools.

## Fellow

Fellows usually oversee the operation of an individual guild installation, such as a laboratory or factory. While such duties usually take up all of a Fellow's time, those holding this rank are allowed to pursue other studies, like tech from other schools that may be applied to their own operation. Fellows are expected to have a comprehensive knowledge of the science studied in, or the product produced by, their installation. Fellows are taught some of the simpler SoulCraft meditation exercises.

## Entered

Engineers of the Entered grade supervise specific functions within an installation, like quality control in a factory or the separate departments of a lab. An Entered guildsman should be thoroughly versed in at least one

aspect of her school's specialty (e.g., cybernetic eyes, the atmospheric elements of a terraforming engine, shipboard think machines, etc.). Entered Engineers are tutored in the basic mnemonic techniques of SoulCraft, but they are discouraged from doing any study or research that does not specifically relate to their work.

### Apprentice

Entrance into the Supreme Order happens when an applicant can convince an Engineer of Entered rank or higher that he has something to contribute to the guild, be it a brilliant innovative intellect or the ability to do a repetitive job requiring precision and an eye for detail. Apprenticeship can take many years, during which time the Apprentice is taught the basic mechanical and logical principles that underlie the most common tech of the Known Worlds. Experienced Apprentices may be given minor duties and responsibilities to prepare them for promotion to the grade of Entered.

### Worker

Workers are the unranked employees of the guild, occupying the position of serfs or lower class freemen anywhere else in the empire. Unlike serfs, workers generally enjoy a higher standard of living and a greater potential for upward social mobility. Workers are trained for specific tasks and kept ignorant of the inner workings of the machines they build or help operate. They usually pass their meager skills on to their children, who are expected to take their parent's place in life. Worker families live in planned communities surrounding or contained within the installation where they are employed. A worker leaving her community is frequently considered an escaped serf by the rest of society.

### Territory

The power center of the Supreme Order, as with the other major guilds, is their district on Leagueheim, composed mainly of the sprawling Academy Technologia — the guild's main university. Unlike other famous academic institutions, such as the Academy Interatta or the University of Veridian, the Technologia is open only to guild members. The didact traditionally keeps a residence on the Technologia's main grounds, and fully initiated Pneumatic Engineers generally reside on the planet as well, unless business requires their presence elsewhere. Most of the guild's primary research is conducted through the Technologia, as is much of its inter-guild transactions.

The Church has only a nominal presence in this district of Leagueheim, and confessors tending to the Engineers are usually Leagueheim natives, born to merchant families and thus less likely to find sin in scientific endeavor. This is not to say that the guild can get away with anything on this world, however. The Academy Interatta, home to many Engineers continuing their research begun at the Technologia, has imposed some restrictions on industry and research — not for moral reasons but because

of economic factors and simple pragmatism. Nanotechnology and advanced genetics, for example, are expressly forbidden; the Supreme Order is still compensating the Academy for damages resulting from investigations of mutant Republican nanites. Of course, some claim that such a ban is only temporary and meant to turn away the eyes of the ever-suspicious Church.

Researchers into prohibited sciences might occasionally get secret financial support from the guild, but they are on their own when it comes to finding places for labs and factories. "Rogue" Engineers seek out the unpoliced wildernesses of inhabited worlds, build self-contained installations on uninhabited planets, moons and large asteroids, or move into old Republican space stations that have been looted by Scravers and swept clear of pirate colonies. Unscrupulous al-Malik sometimes hide Engineer operations on, or more likely beneath, their lands.

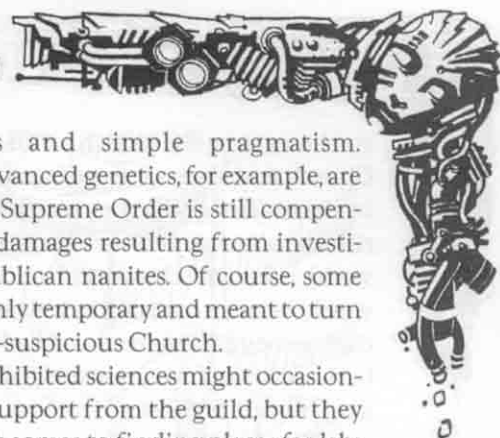
### The Geofactura Charter of 4288

Terraformer maintenance unions were the last of the three major schools to join the Supreme Order. The smartest and wealthiest architects of the terraforming industry were among the first against the wall in the Great Cleansing. Those that remained to work the huge environmental engines were the local labor force, honest god-fearing folk who toiled as they had been trained to keep the skies blue and the grass green (or whatever). The architects cleaved to the Church and swore loyalty to their rulers to escape the chaos of the Fall, but they lacked a full understanding of ecological complexities and, thus, were at a loss when the climate went awry or beloved local fauna dwindled to extinction.

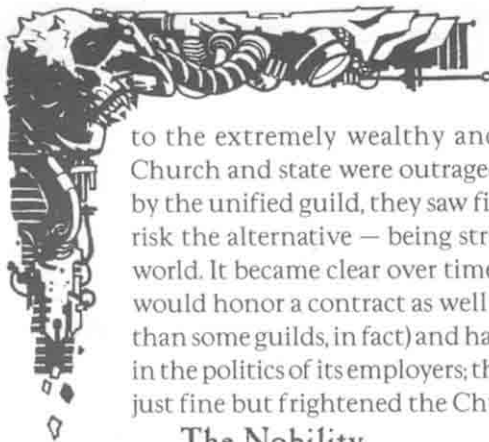
Think machine researchers, denounced by terraformers in bitter feuds that had their origins in the poor labor relations of many Republican geofacturing corporations, reclaimed some of the purged data detailing work orders for the standard maintenance, long-term adjustments and emergency repairs on certain regions and worlds. The fearfully conservative unions were enticed into the guild with knowledge they needed, but only once their jobs were secured through a clear demarcation of territory. The Geofactura Charter established the existing schools of terraforming within the guild, with a Master supervising all of the planets held by a major house or the Church, and a full Engineer overseeing the biospheric maintenance of each individual world. The Charter also enabled the schools to employ think machinists to recover ecological control data for a specific planet, or to access ancient weather satellites whenever regional rulers wish to purchase a clear sunny day for their coronations, weddings, pageants, picnics or battles.

### Customers

By the early 46th century, the Engineers Guild had come to occupy much the position it is known for in Alexius' day — a provider of specialized goods and services







to the extremely wealthy and powerful. While both Church and state were outraged at the prices demanded by the unified guild, they saw fit to pay them rather than risk the alternative — being stranded on a swiftly dying world. It became clear over time that the Supreme Order would honor a contract as well as any other guild (better than some guilds, in fact) and had no interest in meddling in the politics of its employers; this factor suited the nobles just fine but frightened the Church with its amorality.

### The Nobility

The return of society to its simple agrarian origins was acceptable for the common populace, but the cosmopolitan rulers of the Known Worlds could not afford to sacrifice any of their precious power even for such well-intentioned ideals. As the College of Ethicals became more strident in its demands that humanity return to the simplified lifestyle of small rural communities (as exhorted by the Doctrine of Universal Inheritance), working technicians had to keep their very existence secret and this usually indebted them further to their noble patrons. The Universal Church recognized the right of the nobility to employ such tech "in a just and righteous cause," but it stipulated that the nobility existed in a state of "extreme penance" in accord with the Doctrine of the Privilege of Martyrs.

Today, the guilds enjoy some measure of freedom from persecution, but their fate is still bound to that of their noble patrons; the Engineers are allowed to operate only under the aegis of the nobility, and sects and guilds to whom they are contracted, and even these factions have to answer to the Church in their own way. The major houses have always been the guild's most lucrative source of revenue and generally get preferential treatment over other customers.

### Church

The Universal Church loosened restrictions against the operation of think machines when it learned that the navigational computations required for a single jump took a large monastery full of well-educated monks over a year to calculate. The Inheritance of Universality allowed the technical unions to continue their operations, but only under the rigid control of the Church and nobility.

Then, in 4544, a small convoy of Church vessels, including a frigate carrying Avestite Inquisitors on their way to interrogate Vuldrok captives, was attacked by a massive barbarian fleet shortly after jumping to the Ravenna system. The crews of the Church ships fought bravely but were overwhelmed by the superior force and their crafts were disabled in short order. Just when doom seemed inevitable, a new player entered the field in the form of a handful of guild vessels that had jumped in-system following the Church convoy. (Both the Church and the guild ships were jumping from the same place and would have jumped together, but the Avestites refused to share a jump with "spiritually corrupt opportunists.")

Ordinarily, the guildsmen would have suffered the same fate as the Church ships, but the Engineers on board deployed a prototype weapon that they had just developed — yet kept secret. This was the heavy meson cannon, an invention of Rockhardt Enterprises much reviled in Church teachings as one of the most destructive weapons to come out of the Republican era. (All meson cannons had been dismantled, and any data detailing their construction was purged, during the Great Cleansing. The Supreme Order had decrypted the specifications for its manufacture from an old databank bought from the Scravers, who had unearthed it decades earlier.) When its awesome power was unleashed in the outskirts of the Ravenna system in 4544, the barbarians' flagship was blasted to smithereens, several other ships were destroyed or disabled, and the remainder of the invasion fleet fled in stark terror.

More of the cannons were produced at the behest of Vladimir and the other houses, and the Vuldrok hordes were soon broken and routed back to their own space. The incident had done nothing to ease the fear and suspicion directed at the Supreme Order, but it enabled the Church to see the overwhelming utility of high technology against the foes of the faith. Even the Avestites had to admit that this godless Republican engine of destruction could serve the will of the Pancreator — when it was pointed in the right direction, of course.

### Other Guilds

During the first few centuries of the regency, the Engineers strove to complete the process of consolidation that preceded the Barbarian Invasions, seeking out local unions that had eluded contact by the SoulCrafters. Most had evolved into small guilds or families of free craftsmen that owed direct allegiance to the nobles of their region. (An exception is the Decados cartels, which flourished under the great house's exclusive patronage.) Of these, the overwhelming majority were only too happy to develop closer ties to the Supreme Order, exchanging their own specialized techniques, resources or salvaged equipment for the broader range that the Engineers could provide. Nobles who saw this exchange resulting in their own benefit encouraged this trend and allowed their guilds a greater degree of independence in return.

Today, the Supreme Order maintains a vast number of close connections with other guilds. Think machines, in particular, are fairly common throughout the Merchant League, and those schools are vital to the Engineers' relations with other guilds. An example is the Charioteers' database Copernicus, which correlates a ship's chronometer with a detailed ephemeris to determine the current orbital locations of each planet in a given star system. (With it, a pilot can slingshot her way around conjoined planets and moons straight to her port of call. Without it, a pilot may waste valuable time and fuel searching for her destination.)

## Allies and Enemies

**Hawkwood:** "Good customers who pay on time. Even the most rustic among them seem to appreciate a well-crafted piece of equipment."

**Decados:** "Damn their cartels — they must come to see the benefits of free trade sooner or later. Watch any accounts you may have with them closely, and always get it in writing."

**Hazat:** "Be wary when selling them armament components. Their weaponsmiths may try to copy internal designs protected by the patent laws we fought so hard to get the regency to recognize."

**Li Halan:** "Some pious hypocrites in this house have dared to insinuate that we sabotaged their attempt to synthesize Lypee-55 on Manitou some time back. Far from it! We warned them that those compounds were horribly volatile when mixed in improper proportions. They should have listened to us."

**al-Malik:** "Our old friends. Make sure they get the family discount, and don't try to unload any second-rate merchandise on them — of all the nobles, they'll know the difference."

**Orthodoxy:** "Don't let the superstitious ones push you around. They have to realize our importance to society, even if they are afraid to admit it publicly."

**Sanctuary Aeon:** "Perhaps the most reasonable and enlightened of all the sects, they understand best the potential benefits of high technology."

**Charioteers:** "May be our closest allies, for we help keep each other in business — but still, if you ever get the chance to find out how they make those jumpkeys..."

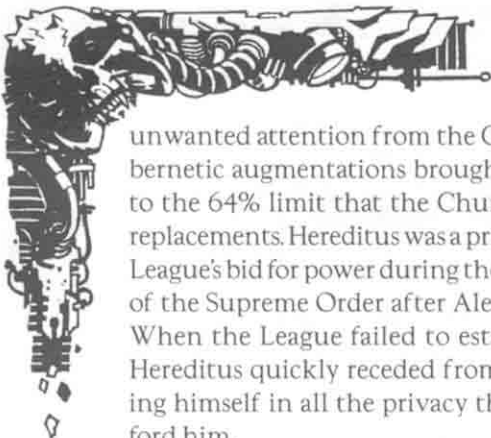
## Personages

### Didact Malifice Hereditus

Malifice Hereditus, a seasoned mercenary on Absolution, became one of the first casualties of the Symbiot Wars when he lost his legs fleeing a hail of flesh-eating worms. His missing limbs were replaced with prosthetics, but this used up all his life savings and indebted him to the Engineer who made them for him. Fascinated with the tech that helped make him whole again, he devoted himself to the study of cybernetics and soon gained an apprenticeship with the guild in the course of working off his debt.

The strategic sense and goal-oriented thinking that served him so well as a fighter enabled him to rise through the ranks of the guild with relative ease. Promoted to Master early in the Emperor Wars, he lost his right arm and much of his face and torso when an experimental plasma weapon overcharged in his laboratory. The damage was prosthetically repaired once again, but this brought him





unwanted attention from the Church; his combined cybernetic augmentations brought him dangerously close to the 64% limit that the Church placed on prosthetic replacements. Hereditus was a prime force in the Merchant League's bid for power during the Wars and became didact of the Supreme Order after Alexius rose to prominence. When the League failed to establish a Third Republic, Hereditus quickly receded from the public eye, shrouding himself in all the privacy that his position could afford him.

In truth, Hereditus' experience with the Symbiots scarred his mind even more deeply than his body; he is disgusted and repelled by organic life in nearly any form, which he regards as weak, frail and vulnerable to alien corruption. His interest in cybernetics has grown into an obsession with achieving immortality in a more durable mechanical form. Since the Emperor Wars, Malifice Hereditus has replaced all but his central nervous system with highly advanced life-support systems, remote sensors and telepresent appendages. From a neuronutrient bath deep beneath his Leagueheim manor, Hereditus directs secret illicit researches into late Republican tech. Two legends from that era particularly interest him; the construction of a complete golem body that can house a living humanoid brain, and the fabled metemcognosis — the transfer of a total sentient personality to a Pygmalium neural matrix.

### Engineer Wavefinder Luceta

Luceta Wavefinder was born on Leagueheim during the latter half of the Emperor Wars, a daughter of two Engineers who were both completely initiated SoulCrafters. Her parents had recourse to genetic tech that "cleansed" and "debugged" Luceta's DNA sequences, resulting in an almost preternaturally healthy and well-formed baby who grew to become one of the most beautiful women in the Known Worlds. Her elegant, classical features have made her the most socially prized of guild contacts among the royalty, and her seldom-seen half-smile has even melted the heart of an Avestite pilgrim (if the songs are accurate). Lauded by outsiders as the warmest and most charming member of the Supreme Order, in truth, she behaves little differently than any other Engineer.

Being the offspring of two initiated Pneumatic Engineers gave Luceta a natural advantage within the guild, even though her parents never privately initiated her and were too scrupulous to practice outright nepotism. Taught many of the SoulCraft meditative techniques at an early age, Luceta's Apprenticeship was a brief formality and her subsequent rise through the ranks was matched in speed only by the legendary "hyperbright," Maelculm of Criticorum. (In the early 49th century, Maelculm reconstructed much Republican endoplasmic field tech for the guild before his immolation by the Temple Avesti at the age of twelve.) Attaining the degree of full Engineer before the age of 30, she boasted a thorough knowledge of

nearly every type of think machine in common usage in the Known Worlds, as well as most specialized types like shipboard navigators and the great credit-banking engines. This has made her unpopular with the Charioteers and Reeves, who have pressured the Supreme Order to deny her any further promotion.

Wavefinder Luceta (she places her surname first in deference to a maternal family tradition) is aware of her situation and does not really care. Her current position gives her the freedom to pursue her own interests without becoming embroiled in guild politics. Having conquered every human-made computer, she now seeks a wealthy patron to finance travel that will allow her to investigate alien thinking machines. She is particularly curious about the inscrutable Ur-mechanisms that govern the jumpgates, and this curiosity has earned her some powerful enemies — and allies — in the Charioteers guild.

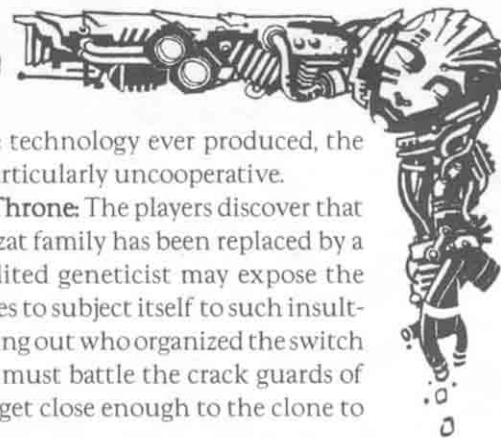
### Crafter Philius Mordela

Philius Mordela was born and raised on Holy Terra, took his vows at an early age and was a chartophylactic historian after his ordination. When the Emperor Wars broke out, Mordela decided that he had spent enough of his life in the library and left his home to tend to the victims of the war on other worlds. Having grown up in the idyllic pastoral culture of humanity's birthsoil, he was shocked at the diverse extremes of life throughout the Known Worlds. He was especially outraged to realize the Church's role in keeping the bulk of humanity in abject poverty, bound to their land like slaves, while their rulers wallowed in ostensibly forbidden luxuries. A lesser man might have lost his faith entirely, but Brother Philius was secure in his belief in the Pancreator and decided that the Orthodox tradition into which he was born had erred in its mission.

As a historian, he was aware of the high standard of living that the average Republican citizen enjoyed and of the vastly useful technologies destroyed by the Church in the Great Cleansing. As an idealist, he felt that such creature comforts were not antithetical to true faith, provided that spiritual values were kept sacred and not relegated to the status of another commodity. Knowing such ideas to be blatantly heretical, Philius left the Church and got apprenticed to the Engineers Guild, where he sought to learn how to use tech to serve humanity rather than enslave it.

Although his keen intellect enabled him to rise in the guild's hierarchy, Philius is a man of two worlds, accepted by neither. As the Supreme Order's ambassador to Holy Terra, he hopes to forge a more integrated union between the opposed ideals of religion and commerce, but he knows he must step carefully. The Orthodoxy watches Philius carefully for any sign of heresy, and most Engineers suspect that he may be a spy for the Church. His own ideals are very similar to those of the original Pneumatic Engineers, and he has guessed that some of that tradition has survived in the Supreme Order. Philius may never learn





how right he is, however, unless the SoulCrafters running the guild can be completely convinced of his loyalty and decide to initiate him with a promotion.

## Roleplaying Playing an Engineer

Engineers seldom travel as lone adventurers, but they may be attached to a small party of characters for their own reasons. Hardworking technicians may sell needed services to errant knights and traveling priests; ardent researchers may hire a band of mercenaries on exploratory missions. Hunted investigators into forbidden lore may need to hide their faces among a small group of fast-moving adventurers. Whatever their reason for joining a party of player characters, Engineer characters can come from a variety of backgrounds:

**Sales Representative:** You journey far and wide, drumming up business among the cream of the interplanetary society crop. Dropping holoreal brochures, orchestrating magic lantern presentations and flashing nifty gadgets at crowds of awestruck courtesans, you peddle the comforts of a fabled era to the privileged class.

**Teacher-for-Hire:** Everyone could use a think machine and superstition is the only thing preventing them from employing these marvelous devices. You have a special knack for imparting computer skills to recalcitrant Church librarians and snotty royal brats.

**Terraformer Repairman:** As the only person on the planet who knows how the damned things work, you can charge as much as powers-that-be can afford, and you justify expenses as the whim takes you. ("Of course I understand that selchakah is illegal, m'lord, but it's the only thing that loosens the megabarnacles so we can keep the marine intake gratings clear...")

**Xenotechnologist:** Fascinated by radical alternative tech, you roam the Known Worlds in search of alien artifacts or other evidence of advanced non-human cultures.

**Outlaw Geneticist:** For the good of all humankind, you risked your life studying Symbiot tech on an outer planet of the Stigmata system. Until...well, you did warn that nosy Avestite not to open that door...

**Starship Engineer:** Like we even need to explain this one. You know the drill... "She can't take much more of this!" etc.

## Gamemastering Engineers

Stories involving the Engineers Guild should convey the awe surrounding the once-common miracles of the Republic and should teach players the dangers of grasping too quickly at shiny objects.

**Once More into the Breech:** The Church has learned that a renegade Engineer is operating an illegal nanotech laboratory on a derelict space station in the Istakhr system, and it hires the players to shut it down. In addition to the obvious dangers of being trapped in space with the

most hideously invasive technology ever produced, the local authorities seem particularly uncooperative.

**A Clone upon the Throne:** The players discover that a scion of a powerful Hazat family has been replaced by a clone. A Church-accredited geneticist may expose the fraud, but the clan refuses to subject itself to such insulting scrutiny. Besides finding out who organized the switch and why, the characters must battle the crack guards of House Hazat in order to get close enough to the clone to reveal the deception.

**The Occasional Irate Customer:** The characters are called upon to aid a terraforming maintenance technician who is being harassed by a minor noble. This nobleman's household lands were ruined by the terraformer's repairs; the noble has since learned a bit about the science of geology (from a Church teacher) and now declares that there is no such thing as a "magma filter."

## Traits Cybernetics

### Task Wire

TL 6: (3 pts) +3 Dexterity, Organic, Tech Level 6

**Cybertraits:** 4

**Firebird cost:** 1300 firebirds, +500 for the surgery

The Task Wire is based on the same principle as the Lithe Wire, but it is built for very specific applications. This device is programmed by a small Keddite chip to aid in the performance of a particular operation, like transcribing think machine data by hand, field-stripping an assault blaster, powering up a gravcraft or dancing a Cadavan jig. Task Wires increase the speed and accuracy with which familiar actions can be performed, and may be used to guide a willing untrained wearer through the motions of an unfamiliar action. But they cannot teach a wearer complete skills in the way a Lithe Wire-Internal Think Machine can. (For instance, a chip programmed for the fencing action Parry/Riposte can give an experienced duelist a dazzling, flawless version of the maneuver, can be used to teach a fencing student proper form, or can dislocate the shoulder of the unathletic librarian who thought he was inserting a speedwriting chip.)

Note that the wearer of a Task Wire only receives the Dexterity bonus when actually performing the specific task for which she is wired. Using a Task Wire to perform an action for which the wearer has not actually been trained may result in sore muscles, ripped tendons and nerve damage.

Developed by Rockhardt Enterprises as a way to increase the output of beleaguered laborers, the Task Wire revealed its inherent limitations immediately. Recalcitrant workers suffered internal damage when they tried to resist the device's transneural hyperpulses, and most workers simply fell asleep while the Task Wire moved them mindlessly through their repetitive toils (even after their shifts were over).







# Survival at Any Price: Scravers

by Brian Campbell

As blaster-fire ricocheted off the plaster walls of the cantina, Konstantin Decados dived for cover. Ten feet away, a mongrel Vorox bodyguard wrapped six arms around Konstantin's "business associate," Boss Kai-Shek. The Scraver technician clenched his teeth as the Vorox crushed his ribs. Clearly, the plan was not working.

Boss Kai-Shek, Scraver freelancer extraordinaire, could hear his bones popping. One of his arms was free, but the pain was too great for him to see straight. Bar-room brawls were not his specialty.

Struggling, he managed to get his left palm over the hulking brute's left eye — it was just the opportunity he needed. Lightning-fast, a two-foot steel rod leapt from the Scraver's left forearm. The cybernetic device drove a metal shaft straight into the Vorox's brain. The mongrel Vorox bodyguard stumbled for a moment; Kai-Shek fell onto the nearest table, wincing in pain.

As Boss Kai-Shek fell, a black-furred Voroxian Graa fighter slammed into Konstantin Decados like a runaway transport. The ionization of an energy shield coruscated around him; the wall behind him gave way easily. The energy shield died — fortunately, Konstantin didn't.

Moments later, Boss Kai-Shek bolted through the Vorox-sized hole in the wall. Bolts of blue energy tore through the air as the Scraver clambered onto the back of a nearby garbage cart. The brute pulling it roared.

Scrambling, Konstantin Decados leapt into the pile of garbage. Panicking, the beast of burden charged forward, fleeing the mob of enraged Vorox. Triumphant, the Scraver let out a wild ululation.

"You see?" said the Scraver, nursing his ribs. "Everything is going according to plan! Next time, you should listen to me!"

Konstantin cursed under his breath as the garbage cart thundered away from the cantina. "Next time?" he shouted. "If we don't get off-world, there won't be a next time..."

*The rats in the garbage heap chattered in agreement.*

Since the height of the Second Republic, the standard of living of the lower classes has declined steadily. A thousand years ago, the disenfranchised lived as wage slaves and welfare recipients. Their descendants suffered through a millennia of darkness, surviving as best they could. Now, as the suns continue to fade, the vast majority of humans live as serfs, peasants or slaves. In the words of a scholar of ancient Holy Terra, the life of the average citizen is "nasty, brutish and short."

Only a small percentage of privileged people reap the benefits of Emperor Alexius' feudal society — most citizens live in abject poverty. Huts made from mud, straw or stone barely protect them from the elements. A diet of bare subsistence keeps them docile, and each day means hours of back-breaking labor. Like the peasants who lived during Holy Terra's Dark Ages thousands of years ago, they will probably never travel more than a few miles away from where they struggle, suffer and die. The Scravers understand these unwashed masses better than any other guild ever could.

The Scravers Guild caters to needs that others refuse to recognize. Wherever there is crime and poverty, there is opportunity. Lower-class citizens demand salvaged technology — and they'll pay dearly for it. Independent merchants need protection; they'll gladly show gratitude to the gangs who patrol their neighborhoods. Lost souls destroyed by poverty crave an escape from their dreary lives; the solution is often found at the bottom of a bottle or in the dregs of a vial. The Scravers provide these essentials and diversions to the down-and-out.

Much of the Scravers' trade is, of course, frowned on by the nobility and the Church. The aristos and clergy benefit the most from their feudal society, and they hate



competition. Thus, many of the "services" the Scravers provide are technically illegal. Everyone knows the Scraver syndicates have developed ties to criminal empires, but few can prove it. Even if the proof was made, the Scravers Guild has enough legitimate businesses and political clout to justify its existence.

This guild finds many of its recruits among the most desperate members of society. For serfs who have nothing to look forward to but a life of misery, the chance to be recruited or adopted into a Scraver syndicate is the only escape. As the saying goes, they'll do "anything for a firebird." The motivation for most Scravers is simple survival — survival at any price.

## History

The earliest space-faring members of this profession built their reputations working as scavengers. As practitioners of a menial profession with little competition, they made a meager living by scrounging in failed colonies, redeeming crippled starships and sorting through the waste of corporate empires. Very few people were willing to deal with impoverished colonies and low profit margins.

As this network of scroungers and scavengers grew, they developed businesses that could meet other demands. High-risk, high-profit businesses allowed them to cover more of their long-term expenses. Investing in gambling dens and houses of prostitution was chancy, but no more so than scouting deep space for derelict spacecraft. Trafficking in exotic pharmaceuticals and recreational chemicals made up for the long nights spent searching for spare parts and salvaged tech.

Long before the first guilds were established, the word "scraver" was used to denote anyone willing to risk life and limb for a profit margin, often from an illegal or forbidden enterprise. Over the last millennium, their various sub-guilds have come and gone, but slowly, they have built a hidden network that stretches across the worlds of Known Space.

## Corporate Colonies

*The corporation doesn't give a damn about us. But I've got five starships, a loyal family, and ship's lasers — they'll care soon enough.*

— Andros Ben-Hadir, leader of the Independent Mantaxus Colony

Scravers created their earliest syndicates in response to the first interstellar corporations. According to the modern-day guild, the ancient corporations practiced legal theft. They fought for monopolies that any crime lord would kill for. When humankind first traveled to the stars, corporate empires underwrote the expeditions. CEO's made altruistic speeches about humankind's destiny in space, but their true agenda was hardly hidden. Like any business, they were out to make a profit, pure and simple.

A few corps colonies succeeded brilliantly. Some slowly evolved into company towns; others became profit-

driven fascist empires overnight. Many colonies were abandoned when their profits dropped, leaving impoverished colonists stranded in the endless night of space. These communities shared a desperate need for merchants who could provide them with goods and services the corporations couldn't or wouldn't provide. Where the corporations failed, the Scravers thrived.

In the days of the First Republic, the corps established laws to protect their more successful empires. In some cases, merely competing with a corporate monopoly was a violation of the local laws. Wherever the rich made a profit by exploiting the poor, the Scravers could offer an illegal and cost-effective alternative. Not every "rumrunner" supplied illegal goods, however — scavengers also supplied spare parts and equipment, along with freelance technical skills.

The age of the great industrialist combines drew to a close as Diasporans realized they could exist without their corporate overlords. No one government could unite them all, but the earliest syndicates of Scravers traversed the jump routes between a thousand isolated worlds.

## An Object Lesson

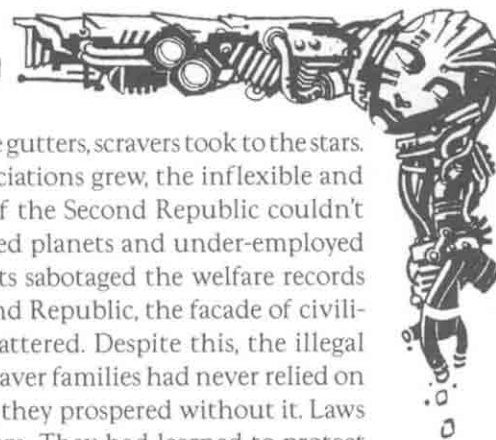
Academicians at the Academy Interrata have long debated the etymology of the word "scraver." By one account, the word was first used to classify an avian lifeform on Mantaxus, a moon of the Absolution system.

The scraver was a local scavenger bird known for raiding the colony's supplies of grain. Since the Scravers couldn't fly more than a few feet off the ground, the local managers erected electric fences to repel their raids. When the birds learned to find gaps in these fences, the company decided to run electric current through the walls of their silos and transports. Eventually, more extensive precautions caused the power plant of the colony to overload and self-destruct. The parent corporation abandoned the colony, and scravers feasted on the remaining grain for years afterward.

Though the corporation had abandoned Mantaxus, it was still the home of several families of Egyptian miners, including the descendants of the infamous Andros Ben-Hadir. Working with his relatives, Andros rebuilt many of the outpost's machines and even salvaged a few space cruisers. The remote world then became an outpost for raids on other systems. Travelers learned to fear the sight of the massive birds of prey painted on the side of fierce "scraver" ships. To this day, the legend remains.

## The "Perfect" Society

Though some regard the Second Republic with historical nostalgia, the Scravers remember that it was a far cry from utopia, especially in the latter days. Close to the Terran homeworld, vast wealth and advanced technology was available to a select few, but unemployment was rampant. Billions of citizens enjoyed their so-called leisure time while on the public dole. Bored and frustrated, they



hungered for anything that would help them escape their dull, painful lives and satisfy their hidden vices.

While the privileged terraformed entire planets, citizens on the fringes of the Second Republic lived in abject poverty. In the backwater worlds of the Republic, crime was a virulent disease. Hardened souls willing to do anything to lift themselves out of debt played right into the hands of the slumlords who controlled their communities. Crime lords established illegal networks for citizens who wanted to trade the danger of illegal activities for the short-term wealth they offered. Some things never change.

This era also enjoyed a dark renaissance of cybertech. Illegal devices enhanced the capabilities of extralegal freelancers. The same slumlords who ran these backwater towns also patronized the black clinics that produced concealed street tech. Medical supplies and pharmaceuticals were sold side-by-side with hold-out weapons. Some of the knowledge required to construct this street tech has survived the thousand years of darkness. To this day, successful Scravers continue to patronize black market clinics.

Smugglers, drug runners and tech reclamationists had established their own crude networks of communication and civilization. Knowledge of jump routes and, more importantly, the keys to traverse them, were often traded among the wealthier merchants. Eventually, consortiums of these Scraver freelancers began traveling in convoys. No corporation or government could restrain their ambition.

While billions died in the gutters, scravers took to the stars.

As the scravers' associations grew, the inflexible and uncaring government of the Second Republic couldn't support its overpopulated planets and under-employed citizens. When anarchists sabotaged the welfare records of the burgeoning Second Republic, the facade of civilization was violently shattered. Despite this, the illegal gangs, smugglers and Scraver families had never relied on this false society; in fact, they prospered without it. Laws had never protected them. They had learned to protect themselves. As an age of darkness descended on humankind, Scravers' organizations grew stronger.

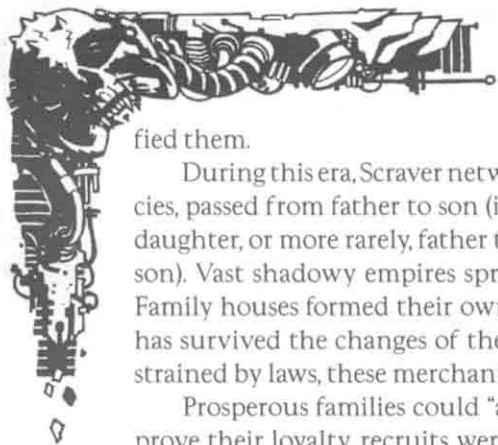
## Anarchy in the Age of Darkness

*No government looks out for us. No ruler stays in power long enough to learn about us. We have to look out for our own.*

— Daughter Alicia Richardson, pilot for the Richardson Syndicate

As the greatest civilization of humankind self-destructed, the Scravers were forced to rebuild their own society from the flotsam and jetsam that remained. The Church and nobles would later have their own vision of civilization, but they could do little to stop the growth of the underworld empires. In the age of darkness, law and order were illusions. As one would expect, those who held power made the rules, and those who held ambition de-





fied them.

During this era, Scraver networks became family legacies, passed from father to son (in many cases, mother to daughter, or more rarely, father to daughter or mother to son). Vast shadowy empires spread across many worlds. Family houses formed their own civilization — one that has survived the changes of the last millennium. Unrestrained by laws, these merchant houses thrived.

Prosperous families could “adopt” more children. To prove their loyalty, recruits were required to complete a mission of espionage before acceptance; before promotion, they were also obligated to offer hidden knowledge of nobles or other authority figures. Each syndicate would then mark its members with a hidden tattoo, implanted device, or some other method of identification. These practices are still continued. A Scraver not only has to pledge fealty to the guild as a whole, but also to the founders of his or her particular family.

The early syndicates have since mutated into countless families and merchant houses, clans and combines, tongs and gangs. A few of the Scravers’ early merchant houses still exist today. The DeCaprio Combine started out transporting exotic drugs to the Li Halan systems, but has since gone legitimate, working with the Charioteers to ship pharmaceuticals to recovered worlds. The Taketsu Clan started out supplying cheap bodyguards for merchants; now they supply hired muscle to protect many aspiring guildmembers. Claiming lineage or adoption to a Scraver family became a quick way to gain respect in the underworld in the age of darkness.

## The Early Guild

Dean Danforth (Charioteers): “*Who the hell do you think you are?*”

Quentin Siegel (Scravers): “*We’re your new business partners...*”

— Minutes of the Leagueheim Commerce Office, meeting 4352.5.20.0204 LS

As the Scravers’ web spread outward, information became an even more valuable commodity. Blackmail was not only an effective means of keeping the noble houses from growing too powerful, but also a useful provision for self-defense. When nobles or clergy decided to crusade against a particular family’s operations, the elders could quickly counter these charges with scandalous revelations of their own. The Scravers’ ability to levy threats of blackmail and retribution later turned out to be one of their strongest assets.

During this time, the first guilds struggled to survive; most of them were remnants of corporations (like the Charioteers). The only way they could survive attacks from the noble houses and Church was to band together. Quentin Siegel had a vision: all the guilds working together in concert to stymie the noble houses and Church — to keep them from walking all over the guilds as if they

were nothing more than glorified serfs. Although the other guilds met numerous times in unsuccessful attempts to forge a union, Siegel’s expert maneuvering (and choice threats) convinced the guild leaders to lay aside personal differences and finally declare a Merchant League. Now united, the guilds could go on strike and form embargoes: no more pilots, no more high tech, no more mercenaries or trained labor, and no more loans.

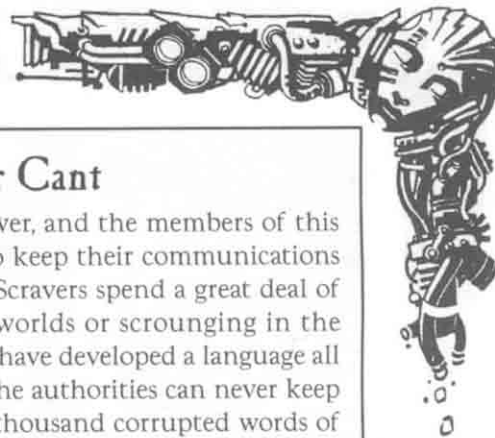
Regardless of his impact on the Known Worlds, Siegel’s impact on the various Scravers’ families was monumental. Building close ties with the Ivankov, DeCaprio and Ben-Hadir merchant houses, he orchestrated them in muscling-out all competition. He invited the heads of the families with businesses spanning the Known Worlds to join him in cementing control over their areas of expertise. Siegel made sure the offer was difficult to refuse. Eventually, after a small war of give and take, the thirteen largest Scraver merchant families united under Siegel to form a single guild: the Scravers. The new union dealt in many areas of business that the other families previously dared not try.

Once he had consolidated this extended family, Siegel set about forming the League he had so long desired. Needless to say, the other major guilds were surprised when representatives of Siegel’s new guild visited one of their earliest meetings — after circumventing their security precautions. Siegel, along with representatives of his new guild, slipped into the council chamber, proclaiming that he had already constructed a merchant league of his own: the Scravers Guild. He expertly laid out the advantages of such a union and provided a game plan for achieving it, complete with back-up strategy should certain noble houses and the Church strongly object. Swayed to his plan, the Merchant League united to oppose the power of the nobles and the clergy. In the process, a host of minor guilds were pushed out of the negotiations. The five major guilds laid claim to the biggest and most profitable businesses, sometimes usurping privileges from weaker guilds.

Quentin Siegel was soon recognized as the first pater of the new guild. He eagerly detailed his guild’s altruistic achievements to salvage the reputation of the Scravers. His people had survived years of darkness, and they had demonstrated skills that could help rebuild civilization. The recent discoveries of Atul Ben-Hadir, a prospector on the fringes of Known Space, helped further that legitimacy.

Of course, once the negotiations with the other guilds were well underway, the idea of a Third Republic became more plausible. This was when the Scravers played their trump card: revealing several choice bits of information regarding the leaders of the five major noble houses and several high-ranking members of the Church. The choice was clear — the Scravers Guild was too useful to reject as an ally and far too dangerous to contest as an enemy. Moreover, their knowledge of the cast-offs and lower castes of society fit well with certain League members’ Republican ideals.





## The Eye of Ben-Hadir

One of the newly formed Scravens Guild's first goldmines was the freshly recovered world of Absolution. Since the Fall, this Second Republic colony had been lost in the endless night of space, but Scraver explorers led by Atul Ben-Hadir managed to rediscover the jump route and redeem a major portion of the world's computer library.

Though Absolution has since been overrun by Symbiots, the story of Atul Ben-Hadir remains. His family was descended from a commune of Egyptian miners on Mantaxus, a moon of Absolution. The emblem of their outfit was the Eye of Horus, known to the merchant house as the Eye of Ben-Hadir. Though the Ben-Hadir family has since disappeared running smuggling ships into the depths of Symbiot territory, the Eye has since become an emblem of the Scravens Guild.

The guilds forged their alliance through skillful diplomacy — a League that has withstood over centuries of political turmoil. By the time the merchant leaders built their guildhouses on Leagueheim, the Scravens had already infested the planet like hullrats in a derelict ship. Ubiquitous and indomitable, the Scravens continued their millennial-old traditions.

## Conduct

*Your world; your laws. My world; my laws.*

— Associate Daniel Aragorn (moments before his execution on Severus)

In the modern world, everyone wants a kickback, but no one wants to do the dirty work — no one, that is, except the Scravens. Their enterprises are almost always dangerous or illegal, but a network of families throughout the Known Worlds let them operate in any cultural environment. Scravens will travel anywhere, risk anything, and cater to anyone to build their empires, establish their families, and redefine the laws of the fringes of known space. Their extralegal skills are always useful...as long as they aren't discovered.

The Scravens have developed an extremely insular society, one that exists separate from many of the concerns of the other guilds. As with the Charioteers and Reeves, tight-knit "families" built over generations continue their trades from decade to decade. Most Scravens aren't just initiated into a Scraver family — they're practically adopted.

Promising associates are recruited from the lower classes. A few serfs are bold enough to petition a guild boss for membership; generally, a guild boss will find a young thief to receive his tutelage. Some recruits are smuggled off-world. Others receive loans to pay off their terms of indentured servitude.

## The Scraver Cant

Secrets bring power, and the members of this guild have learned to keep their communications hidden. Since many Scravens spend a great deal of time on backwater worlds or scrounging in the depths of space, they have developed a language all their own, one that the authorities can never keep up with. Take a few thousand corrupted words of Urthish, toss in the latest language on the street, and mix it liberally with the current colloquialisms used in the underworld. The result is the ever-changing Scraver cant.

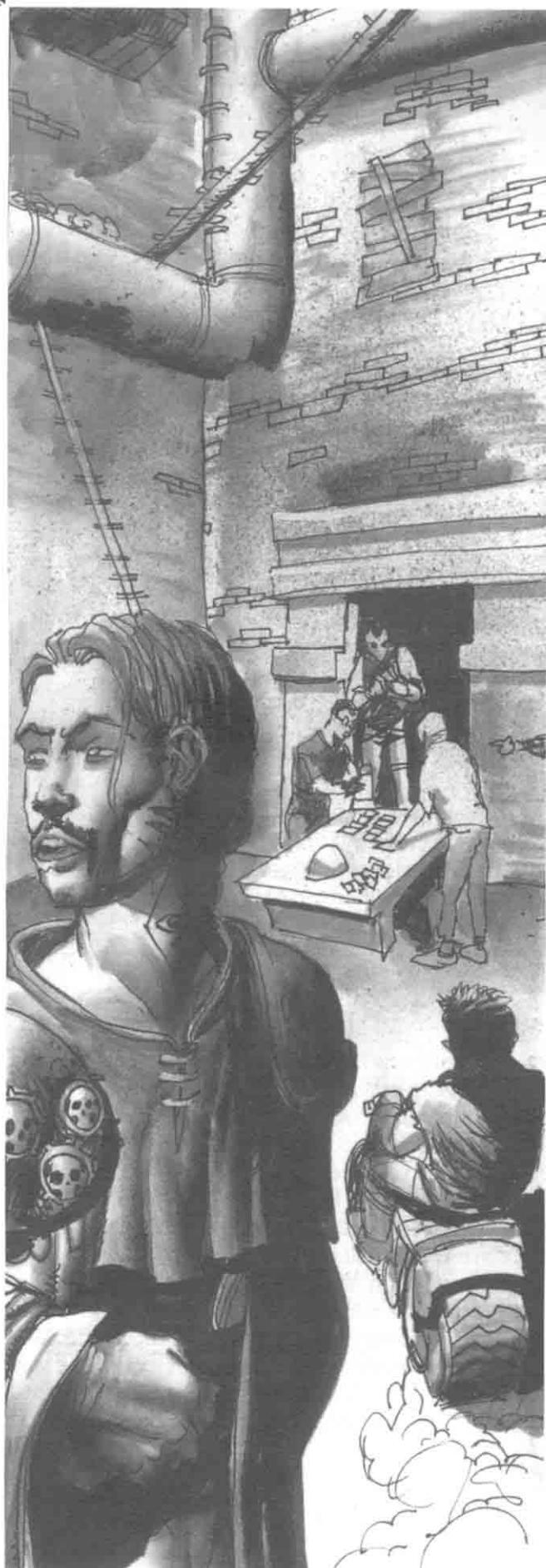
While the spoken part of this language sounds like a tortured blend of neologisms and alien obscenities, words in the spoken language are often modified by body language. Secret signals act as the modifiers to the cant, often resulting in the true meaning of a sentence being distorted. Various professions and families then develop their own dialects, making the language of this society even more difficult to translate. Whether used for negotiating in the back rooms of cantinas or broadcasting ship-to-ship, the cant of this guild keeps outsiders outside of the loop.

The language also mutates constantly, like a virus secretly and furtively spread from person to person. Practitioners need to keep in contact with the underworld regularly; otherwise, their particular inflections may reveal that they've "been legit" for too long. Exceedingly proficient users can identify a Scraver's planet of origin, where he's been, and how recently he's been involved in underworld activities just by listening to him speak the cant.

Associates are then given the opportunity to complete their "initiation," usually by taking on a first contract and carrying it out successfully. Later, the elders of the family can decide whether a talented Scraver is worthy of promotion. Only then can he become a chief or boss of his own gang. Associates are rarely referred to by their family's name; that doesn't occur until much later.

After initiation, there is no physical way of recognizing the rank of a Scraver, save for attitude, wealth and social deference. Occasionally, a gang of associates will adopt the same uniform of jumpsuits and ship's patches, but more commonly, a member of a merchant family prefers to be discreet about his affiliations; once those affiliations have been made, they're expected to last for life. The associate realizes that he's indebted to a larger family, one that will train him, take care of him and expect absolute loyalty.





## Breaking the Law

While any one planet may have strictly defined laws, the concept of legality can be a somewhat subjective term among the Known Worlds. Laws are often invented by the nobles and the clergy (and sometimes the Reeves), and the Scravers contend that many laws are designed to act contrary to the interests of the guilds. As a result, the members of the guilds don't have to see themselves as above the law...just a few steps outside it.

It's no wonder the concept of legality is so tenuous — laws are rarely consistent from world to world. Most legal codes are bastardized versions of laws left over from the Second Republic. So many come and go that the major families find it easier to ignore them...or run from them when the heat is on.

Only the most skilled lawyers and chunin are capable of negotiating the law successfully. While nobles may be insistent about legal issues, historically, many have had to make concessions to stay in power. The Scravers hire legal experts in every field, including Reeves, for important jobs.

## Syndicates and Families

*Law? I know the law. My family had laws long before Alexius Hawkwood took power. The Hawkwoods never did a damn thing for me, so I think I'll stick by my flesh and blood instead. As far as I'm concerned, Uncle Hiro is the law.*

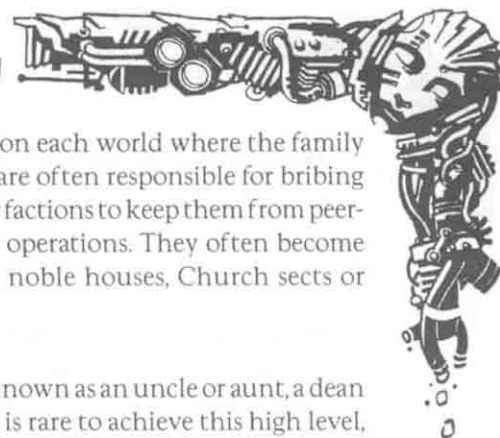
— Manager Johann Taketsu, acquisition specialist

Organization in the Scravers Guild is somewhat less formal than it is in the houses of the other guilds. Quite frankly, nepotism is often a sure way to attain rank. When working in a business where mistrust is common, the movers and shakers of the guild feel safer appointing their many sons and daughters to key positions.

The League's standard titles are adopted to help the guild appear legitimate despite its many underworld affiliations. However, other (more informal) names for these ranks also exist.

Adopted members of a merchant family rarely rise above the rank of chief; those who do, however, are usually offered the opportunity to take on the family name, which is considered a great honor, as family names carry strong reputations within the Scravers Guild.

Each family must maintain a veneer of legality, and each one is legally known for specializing in at least one legitimate business. Of course, within the Scravers Guild, each merchant house is known for a few illegal specialties as well. Those in charge of a "family business" will also gain a reputation for excelling in a particular field of endeavor. For instance, Uncle Hiro of the Taketsu Clan controls the agora of Rampart and is known for recruiting many talented bodyguards. His family has been involved in this practice for centuries. In the dregs of society, he's also



known for his well-trained, top-dollar enforcers.

Though the names of these many families are only recognized and accorded respect in the depths of the underworld, the largest families are known throughout the Merchant League. The DiCaprios, for instance, are so well-known that they are often censured for acting with the same elitism as the five noble houses. Their status has grown to the point that they are eager to call attention to the failings of lesser families.

## Associate

An entry-level position, an associate is the lowest in the underworld pecking order, but it is nonetheless a blue blood compared to a non-Scraver. He is expected to do all the dirty work of the guild: collect protection money, run with a gang of gunsels, sit on boring stakeouts or spy operations. Most associates looking for promotion try to get in good with their chiefs, perhaps as advisors or reliable operatives. Those unwilling to tie themselves too tightly to a particular syndicate can go freelance for a number of them, or try to hire on with an entourage.

## Chief (Genin)

Chiefs are the councilors and enforcers of the syndicate bosses. While it's sort of a middle-management rank, it has its benefits: The locals tend to come to the chiefs when they want something, for few people get an audience with the boss without first going through one of his chiefs. Those chiefs not associated with a syndicate usually find patronage with a noble or other guild, using their ties to these other factions to win rank in their own guild.

## Manager (Boss)

This rank of Scraver usually heads a syndicate, whether it be a small-time protection racket or an interstellar gambling ring. Syndicates are the businesses of a family; most are criminally oriented, but some are legitimate. Minor families usually run only one syndicate while the major families have many syndicate operations on many worlds. A criminal boss usually also runs a legitimate cover business for his criminal outfit. Many Scravers never go beyond this rank, preferring to be kings of their own little kingdoms rather than take on the politics of family leadership that awaits them at higher levels.

Rather than running syndicates, some bosses work closely with other guilds to ensure continued business with them, or to help fend off hostile moves from a house or Church sect.

## Director (Jonin)

A director regulates her family's syndicates on a particular world, often calling in the bosses for regular reports — or dropping in for unexpected visits. Inter-family politics cannot be avoided at this level, and it is the director's job to make sure that rival families on her world do not push too hard into her territory — all the while pushing her own family's boundaries as far as she can.

## Consul

A consul regulates the family's interstellar businesses,

overseeing the directors on each world where the family has operations. Consuls are often responsible for bribing the high officials of other factions to keep them from peering too closely at family operations. They often become ambassadors of sorts to noble houses, Church sects or other guilds.

## Dean

Also affectionately known as an uncle or aunt, a dean is the head of a family. It is rare to achieve this high level, for few heads retire willingly. Often, ambitious Scravers with no other way up carve out their own criminal empires from the remains of a black-listed family. Deans argue with other families and the pater over squabbles that are both petty and grand. Most deans are based on Leagueheim, or they at least travel there often.

## Pater (or Mater)

The head of the entire guild, sort of a senior dean. Quentin Siegel was the first pater. The pater answers to no one, although the Leaguemeister supposedly has authority over him. It is the pater's responsibility to make sure that all the families work together for guild goals and to ensure that the League as a whole (through his dealings with the Leaguemeister) does not work at cross-purposes to the guild.

## Chunin

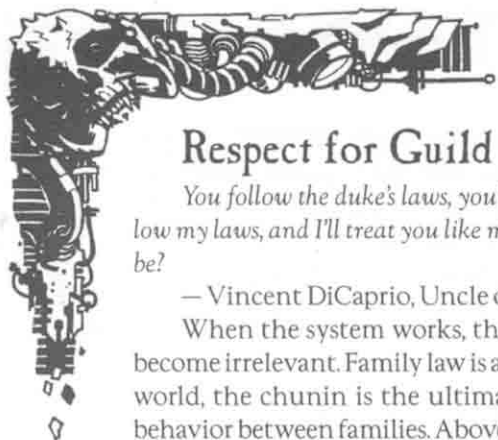
Each world also harbors one or two chunin who can intercede for the recognized families. Usually, this takes the form of diplomatic relations and legal council. Scravers traveling through a particular system must accede to the limitations imposed by the local chunin. If anyone outside the guild is maintaining an illegal business, the chunin will find out and either shut it down or take a big cut of the profits.

When a Scraver is actually caught stepping over the line, the local chunin is often the first person contacted. If a deal needs to be cut or a bargain made with the authorities, the chunin takes charge. Sometimes he'll help smuggle the suspect off-world instead. Later, if reparations are necessary, the suspect's family is held responsible. As a result, dangerous types who call upon their guild and family to save them a few times too often can be cut off from their family.

The Scravers enforce their "family laws" within their own houses. After all, the Scravers' laws have been around far longer than Alexius' empire. When the family's precautions fail, the chunin must prevent the family matter from being discussed in public. As one would expect, on the most populous worlds, several chunin might oversee local activity. When these chunin and their families start to disagree, the resulting bloodshed can get nasty.

A Scraver must hold the rank of manager or higher to become a chunin, and the role is usually only desired by those who have no strong family ties to otherwise raise them to power or prominence.





## Respect for Guild Elders

*You follow the duke's laws, you'll live on the street. You follow my laws, and I'll treat you like my own son. What's it gonna be?*

— Vincent DiCaprio, Uncle of the DiCaprio Combine

When the system works, the laws on various worlds become irrelevant. Family law is a higher law. On any given world, the chunin is the ultimate arbiter on acceptable behavior between families. Above that, a family's uncle lays down the law on what's acceptable within his family.

Admittedly, this familial system of organization has a few distinct disadvantages. Though hundreds of families exist within the same guild, there is no guarantee that competing syndicates will get along. In fact, family wars occur with surprising frequency. One of the more powerful families within the guild may have to intervene to bring order. If such disputes cannot be resolved calmly and secretly, the interests of a minor syndicate will be absorbed by one of the major families.

The biggest advantage of this structure is that the larger and more legitimate families, acting in conjunction with the pater, can claim that a minor family has been cast out from the Scravers Guild. The guild may still secretly work with these "black sheep" — possibly even accepting them back into the fold later on — but no overt assistance can be rendered to a family that has received the interdiction of the guild. The easiest way to avoid this punishment from the guild is, quite simply, to not get caught.

## Entourages

Once a Scriver has been recruited or adopted into a merchant house, he may later receive an offer of patronage from a noble. Some guild members (and player characters, in particular) find some degree of legitimacy by joining an entourage. Nonetheless, balancing loyalties between one's family and an entourage can be difficult. Countless outcasts and nobodies — the refuse of destroyed minor families — find employment in entourages with little difficulty.

A more dangerous type of alliance is the Scriver entourage — an association dominated and run by high-ranking members of the guild. Well-bred families recognize the name of the regal noble houses; in the shadows, however, ambitious underworld freelancers memorize the names of the Scriver merchant families.

A powerful member of one of these syndicates may have the wealth to attract an entourage of her own. Hired barbarian bodyguards, ambitious Charioteers, slumming Decados, shunned Eskatonic priests and less reputable Engineers may all work together to assist a high-ranking diplomatic rogue of the Scravers Guild. Noble entourages probably won't give them the time of day, but in the locales they frequent, nobles aren't that common.

## Modus Operandi

*Anything not nailed down is mine. Anything that can be pried loose is not nailed down.*

— traditional saying

As far as the Scravers are concerned, the ends always justify the means, especially if the alternative is poverty or extinction. Dozens of merchant families specialize in a vast array of extralegal activities, and their methods vary widely. Nonetheless, a few *modus operandi* of this guild have become infamous.

**Redistribution of Goods:** From the core of Alexius' empire to the most recently discovered barbarian or lost worlds, the hidden networks of this guild allow Scravers to redistribute material goods quietly and efficiently. "Acquisition and redistribution" are two of the most valued methods of this guild.

An effective method of redistributing stolen goods involves selling them to the members of another Scriver family. This second syndicate may then choose to either pass on the goods or offer them back to the original owner...at inflated prices. Since it's difficult to trace where these items came from, this method of fencing works quite well.

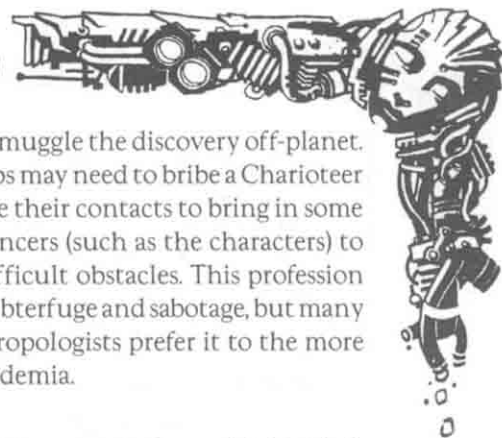
**Espionage and Blackmail:** The Scravers have one of the most extensive espionage networks in the Known Worlds, largely because they have access to so many freelancers and guildmembers working on a contract-by-contract basis. Through these agents, Scriver families are able to amass vast amounts of information on various authority figures. When a particular family is caught and threatened with prosecution, this knowledge becomes a useful bargaining tool.

It is rumored that the largest of the guild families specializing in spycraft and blackmail operate from a lost world of their own, one far from Leagueheim. As one would expect, if anyone has any knowledge about this, they aren't eager to reveal it.

## Patents and Exclusives

Each family within the Scravers Guild is known for a legal area of expertise. Each one also has a reputation for one or two illegal specialties. By keeping loyal to his merchant family, a Scriver maintains the contacts to continue doing business.

Of course, the guild doesn't like competition. As far as the Scravers are concerned, their families own various areas of expertise. Any freelancer who decides he can provide a better alternative to the Scravers' services will be encouraged to set up shop on the next planet. Failing that, the resulting scandal will be somewhat more convincing. If that's not enough, the businessman may have to learn to live with a few changes to his anatomy. It's a shame when an ambitious merchant can't take a hint.



## Deep-Space Salvage

Salvage operations take a lot of start-up capital, but some syndicates and families pass on the same battered scout ships from generation to generation. It's a time-consuming job, but one salvaged derelict ship can make up for a lifetime of searching. Many Scravers prefer this kind of work because of freedom from the so-called civilized world or simply because of the solitude. They're also ruthless enough to rub out deep-space claim jumpers.

This profession is common among the members of the guild, largely because it offer them the freedom to take on additional contracts. In fact, salvage crews must periodically find additional income to pay for their provisions and fuel. They'll take on a contract from another family, make a quick score on some remote world, and then fade back into the endless night of space until the legal authorities stop searching for them. Once the profits are divided, these contract specialists are more than happy to resume their previous anonymity.

## Smuggling

Any cargo, any price. Some trade routes are flooded with competition between families, and every world has demand for a few extra-legal specialties. For instance, on worlds controlled by House Li Halan, there is a thriving black-market trade in even the most innocent forms of alcohol. Near the borders of the Hazat-Kurga Conflict, weapon smuggling is punishable by death, but eminently profitable. There's no real way to enforce this as an "exclusive" service, but family specialists tend to carry out these contracts better than anyone else.

## Casinos and Cantinas

Many nobles don't mind gambling operations on one of their worlds, as long as their government gets a percentage of the take. In exchange for regular kickbacks, Scravers are allowed to run their casinos like pocket empires. There are always a few back rooms for secretive meetings with Scraver families and syndicates. The guild also has casinos in deep space — where families have absolute freedom.

Some low-ranking guildmembers take care of other meeting places: sleazy watering holes that act as fronts for the guild. The dregs of society naturally sink to these cantinas, collecting many prospective guildmembers and disposable outsiders looking for a few quick firebirds. Of course, the Scravers have an edge at gathering information in their own dens of iniquity.

## Innovative Archaeology

A handful of myths and rumors can easily lead to several contracts in innovative archaeology. Scraver crews may spend months combing the back countries of third-rate worlds searching for lost wealth. On planets where the laws are rarely enforced, whoever makes a discovery first gets complete salvage rights.

If a noble house or Church sect owns the world, other

Scravers are required to smuggle the discovery off-planet. Occasionally, these groups may need to bribe a Charioteer to open a gate or even use their contacts to bring in some more experienced freelancers (such as the characters) to help them cope with difficult obstacles. This profession involves a great deal of subterfuge and sabotage, but many archaeologists and anthropologists prefer it to the more treacherous world of academia.

## Hired Meat

Associates of the guild may find a few quick firebirds working as punching bags. A skilled fighter gets called a bodyguard; a dumb-but-competent bodyguard is a thug; an unskilled flunky is little more than a mook or a stooge.

Hired meat rarely, if ever, stands and fights to the death to protect a client. Usually, once a thug is severely injured, he'll crawl away, run away or just fall down. The cheapest Scraver bodyguards often give up the fight after the first few solid punches. Let the Hazat die for battle; dead men can't spend their pay.

## Other Flesh

The oldest profession still thrives, particularly on worlds where this profession is illegal. The guild establishes trade guilds to protect and care for prostitutes of all genders, races, species and specialties. While the Courtesan's Guild trains more expensive and skilled professionals, the Scravers Guild deals in low-class flesh. Working for either guild is usually much safer than going it alone, especially when employment through the guild involves regular screening and treatment for many exotically transmitted diseases.

## Enforcers

Don't let the seeming incompetence of the hired meat fool you. The Scravers also contract some of the best enforcers in Known Space. Reeves who ask a few too many questions about a business front, nosy Li Halan who try to impose their strict values on other worlds, and outlaw scum that operate outside the guild are all typical candidates for an enforcer's visit. Any prosperous Scraver family also employs a few assassins for enemies who can't take the blunt hints dropped by enforcers.

## Information Specialists

A few well-placed guild members devote years to building up communications networks. Through careful bribery and periodic exchanges of information, they get tuned in to the web of spies and informers in major cities. Some also have tech skills for phreaking or cracking the codes used to transmit messages between nobles or other guilds. All of the syndicates realize the commercial value of a few well-trained information specialists: If covert activities are discovered, the darkest secrets of nobles and clergy make good bargaining tools.





## Deep-Space Refugees

Many Scraver families don't really care about the worlds down below — deep space is their home. In space, who really has the authority to enforce the law? Who's going to develop the resources to track you down? Any family with a few spaceworthy ships can consider themselves outside the laws of the nobles and Church. Anyone who can get off-world can find freedom.

## Territories and Empires

The Scravers don't control any planets or systems overtly...and that's just the way they like it. More often, this guild prefers to handle the most lucrative underground businesses of a planet and a few of its more prominent slums. The number of marketplaces they secretly control is second only to the number of planetary hubs controlled by the Charioteers.

**Istakhr:** This planet not only possesses great wealth, but also a ravenous hunger for the exotic. The al-Malik are quite willing to run interference with the Avestites in return for many of the exquisite pleasures Scraver convoys can provide. Failing that, Istakhr has several famous casinos, and the profits from these benefit both House al-Malik and the Scravers Guild. Uncle Feisel Siegel welcomes many other Scravers to the more private areas of his personal domain.

**Holy Terra:** Actually, this world isn't all that holy — it's squalid. The Scravers control many of the slums in the larger cities. A few families provide pharmaceutical supplies that the Inquisition wishes to suppress; their rivals keep the body count high by providing different kinds of chemicals. The DiCaprio combine carries the more altruistic supplies; a number of minor families work the opposite side of the street.

**Kurga:** The Hazat are eager to lay their hands on anything that will give them an edge in their war against barbarians. Of course, so are the Kurga. Both sides will pay dearly for supplies of all kinds. It's possible that outraged Hazat might point a few weapons at an enterprising merchant; wiser tacticians learn the value of continued business with the Scravers Guild. As such, a few enterprising families make regular trips to this system.

## Preferred Customers and Other Associations

The Scravers Guild knows that it could never exist alone. Chunin continually cut covert deals with the masters of other guilds, and sometimes even members of the nobility. As one would expect, certain customers get preferential treatment.

**Charioteers:** The alliance between the Charioteers and the Scravers is strong. The Scravers excel at finding replacement parts for damaged spacecraft; the Charioteers have been known to give a few ships jumpkeys in return. When a local guild of Charioteers has strong ties to a Scraver family, the former may even act as escort for a ship or two from time to time.

**Engineers:** This guild's dispensation to possess a higher grade of technology makes them valuable clients. Though they tire of ambitious Scravers redeeming lost tech on recovered worlds before they can, the chance to hide many of these discoveries in Engineer guildhouses has helped ease tensions. Besides, the Engineers have greater immunity when smuggled tech is discovered.

**House Decados:** Though devious and sly, the Decados don't always have the time to develop the proper skills to do their difficult work. They are masters at scheming and desperately need contractors specializing in illegal trades. Unfortunately, most contracts with this house are short-term.

**House al-Malik:** Their penchant for tinkering machines, liberal attitudes toward pleasure and astounding merchant contacts make them useful allies. Communicating with them can be difficult, however — the metaphorical language of their house is even more confusing than Scraver cant.

**The Eskatonic Order:** Sometimes the orthodoxy of these occult priests is called into question. Occasionally, the sins committed by an Eskatonic priest are extreme enough to necessitate hiding for a while. Conveniently, the Scravers are far more forgiving than the more zealous citizens of Alexius' empire. More than one Eskatonic priest has found refuge in a Scraver entourage.

## Survivors

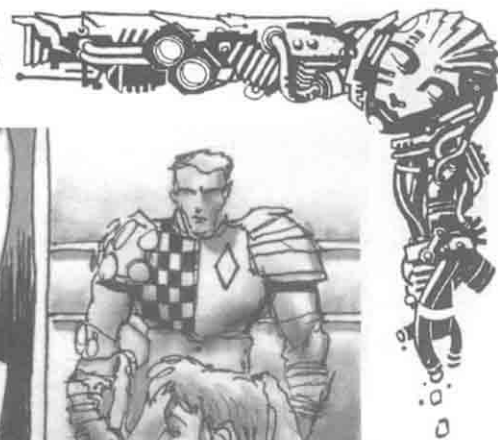
Everyone's got a reputation. And the Scravers who actually manage to survive to old age tend to have the best ones. The turnover rate in the underworld is fierce, but promotion can mean wealth and power beyond the dreams of avarice.

### Mater Benita "The Fox" Ivankov

Years ago, the starship *Potemkin's Vengeance* was well-known for its interstellar piracy and wartime smuggling. Of all the members of its crew, the most insidious was Ivita Ivankov, the ship's gunner and legal counsel. Known for her stirring speeches before deep-space tribunals, she had a talent for interpreting the law of any noble house or planetary government and twisting it to her advantage. Her skill for wearing holes in a prosecutor's logic was exceeded only by her talent for targeting the engines of Imperial spacecraft.

Ten years later, the wealth generated by her family's business catapulted her to one of the highest-ranking positions within the guild. Chunin may intercede for families on far-flung planets, but Mater Benita Ivankov





(known to the largest families as "Grandmother Benita") cuts deals between the largest families and the uncles on Leagueheim.

Grandmother Benita, like the Muster's Janizary, does not actually live on Leagueheim. Instead, her offices are aboard *Potemkin's Vengeance*, usually found in orbit around the planet and often guarded by a small fleet of Scraver ships.

### Uncle Gustav Harrison

Too many brilliant minds have been kicked out of the Academy Interatta — Gustav Hardestaat was one of them. Though he had an uncanny knack for reinterpreting ancient alien legends, he unfortunately possessed the initiative to act upon them. When one of his expeditions caused a minor war between a Hawkwood estate on Leminkainen and angry natives, he was placed on a permanent sabbatical.

Despite this, his insightful documentation attracted the attention of the Harrison Institute, an academic consortium known for its success rate at uncovering alien artifacts and its somewhat cavalier attitude toward academic decorum. Over a 20-year career, Gustav has risen to authority as Chief Director Harrison.

Patronage by "Uncle Gustav" can destroy an academic's reputation while offering him fantastic discoveries. As an expert in anthropology and archaeology, Gustav has funded many of the greatest finds of the age. Animosity

from the Academy Interatta has forced him to further support his studies by selling many of his greatest finds to the highest bidders.

### Boss Kwan Kai-Shek

The followers of the Kai-Shek Tong are known for their innate familiarity with proscribed cybertech. Boss Kwan recently gained prominence by attracting the patronage of the infamous Konstantin Decados. While their "business arrangement" is rumored to have self-destructed recently, the amount of black market street tech used by Konstantin's entourage is a testament to Boss Kwan's resourcefulness. Further rumors speak of him opening a free "medical clinic" on the Decados world of Cadavus, although Avestites confirm that making an appointment there...or even finding the place...can be extremely difficult.

## Roleplaying Playing a Scraver

Here are some typical guild professions players might consider:

**Smuggler:** Sure, the Avestites think your cargo's proscribed, but people are willing to pay good money for this stuff! You've got the skills to get your ship in and out of almost anywhere.

**Archaeological freelancer:** This type of character's got



## Insidious Schemes

Though most Scraver families are engaged in legitimate businesses (or at least legitimate fronts), some Scravers believe that there are actually two sets of guild leaders. The first operates overtly on Leagueheim. The second contains the true "nobility" of the guild. At the center of their web of blackmail and espionage, they assist the Scraver syndicates in developing covert businesses. The Scraver leader and her entourage, of course, quickly dismiss this as a conspiracy theory of the worst variety.

Nonetheless, the Third Era faction in the Merchant League works to undermine the power of the nobles. If the Republican movement actually establishes a Third Republic, who would rule it? Paranoid freelancers whisper about the possibility that all of the Scraver's resources for espionage and blackmail might be controlled by a cabal hidden on a lost world. Don't speak too freely, though...the Scravers wouldn't want you to know too much...

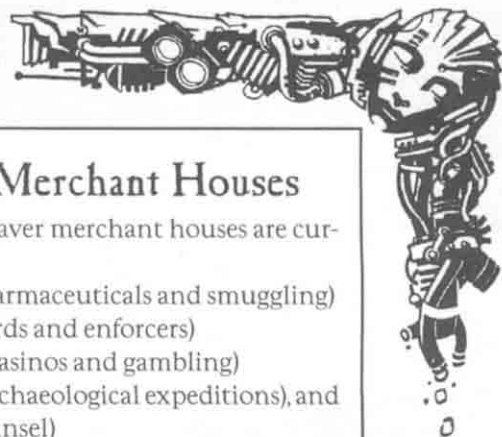
a magic touch for tracking down nearly mythical lost technology. Add to that a gift for dealing with alien cultures, a talent for getting out of deadly scrapes, a penchant for deciphering alien legends that might lead to lost treasures, and a whole network of contacts through the guild. Loot the dead for profit!

**Gangster:** Anywhere you go, there's a chance to make a few firebirds. On a backwater world, this involves setting up a syndicate that tithes regularly to the guild. If you're part of a noble entourage, your job involves tracking down the word on the street, sizing up the local gangs, and occasionally acquiring an item or two that the rest of his house wouldn't want to know about.

**Salvage crews and scavengers:** Maybe your tech redemption skills aren't state of the art, but you know how to find the best lost tech and get it on-line fast. You'll take your ship anywhere there's a rumor of profit.

**Thug bodyguard:** Your enemies used to call you a mook; now they beg for mercy. You're a master of dirty fighting — a would-be mercenary with a vast barrage of extralegal skills. Yeah, maybe the entourage that hired you likes to go slumming a little too often, but their firebirds ring like anyone else's. You can get your patron in and out of the worst parts of town with style.

**Slum lord:** The nobles control the upscale parts of town; the dregs belong to you. You must constantly erect a veneer of legality, even while you're taking care of numerous projects in the shadows. A devoted Scraver entourage helps you carry out these tasks. This type of character can easily be the center of a particularly nasty epic.



## Gamemastering Scravers

The presence of Scravers in an entourage offers some great opportunities for nasty, violent stories. If a player in your group wants to play a Scraver, a few quick questions will flesh out a number of adventure ideas:

- What is the legal specialty of the character's merchant family? What are its hidden illegal trades?

- Why was the character adopted into the family? How does the family feel about the Scraver working with a noble entourage?

- Who is the chunin of the local planet? Does she have competition?

- Does the Scraver's family have a strong rival?

- Is the family's uncle or aunt a generous patron or a tyrant? Are there any particularly vicious guidelines of conduct he expects from his children? How deeply in debt is the character to her family?

- The Scravers have extreme knowledge about the disenfranchised members of society. Does the character have any secret Republican sympathies? How much does he trust the nobility?

Once these basics are established, a number of stories naturally follow. Here are two basic Scraver plots:

- **A Piece of the Action:** The entourage's noble has been instructed by his house to help "clean up" a cesspool of a neighborhood. Of course, since one of the characters is a Scraver, he's requested to aid his entourage when they go slumming. Unfortunately, the noble house's ideals may run contrary to the local chunin's ideas of "urban reform." The Scraver's loyalty is then torn between his entourage and his guild; only through quick thinking can he satisfy both.

- **Dysfunctional Families:** For weeks, the characters' entourage has been able to get some choice leads from their Scraver ally. Now it's payback time. One of his family elders has been assassinated, and unless the culprit is found, the resulting family war will be vicious. It's time to deliver a message to the rival family...unless, perhaps the traitor was within the Scraver's own family...The entourage gets a quick education in the unwritten laws of the underworld in the process.

## Traits

### Benefices

**Chunin** (1 pt): The character acts as a go-between for the guild, regulating family territories to ensure that they do not impinge on guild profits. While this position often gains the enmity of many family officials, they all must work with the chunin to get what they want.

**Family Membership** (1-3 pts): This Benefice is identical to the Hong Membership Benefice given in the Charioteers chapter, except that it concerns Scraver families rather than Charioteer hongs.

## The Major Merchant Houses

The five major Scraver merchant houses are currently:

The DeCaprio (pharmaceuticals and smuggling)

Taketsu (bodyguards and enforcers)

Siegel (experts in casinos and gambling)

Harrison (illegal archaeological expeditions), and

Ivankov (legal counsel)

The Ben-Hadir are rarely accepted as the sixth, largely because key members of their family have been infested by Symbiots.

## Afflictions

**Family Enemy** (1-3 pts): This Benefice is identical to the Hong Enemy Benefice given in the Charioteers chapter, except that it concerns Scraver families rather than Charioteer hongs.

**Nobody** (-1 pt): This is the starting status for characters who haven't found their way into a Scraver family. Their protection from the masters of the guild is somewhat nominal...unless they can do something to make a name for themselves. At least a tithe to the local chunin is necessary; 30 to 40 percent is more likely. It's possible to work as an associate or even a mob leader, but advancing beyond that rank requires the Scraver to start his own minor family.

This level of status can be dangerous, especially when one of the guild's blackmailers begins to ask for information on the higher status members of the character's entourage. In return, however, the Scraver should get leads (and story seeds) for possible lucrative enterprises.

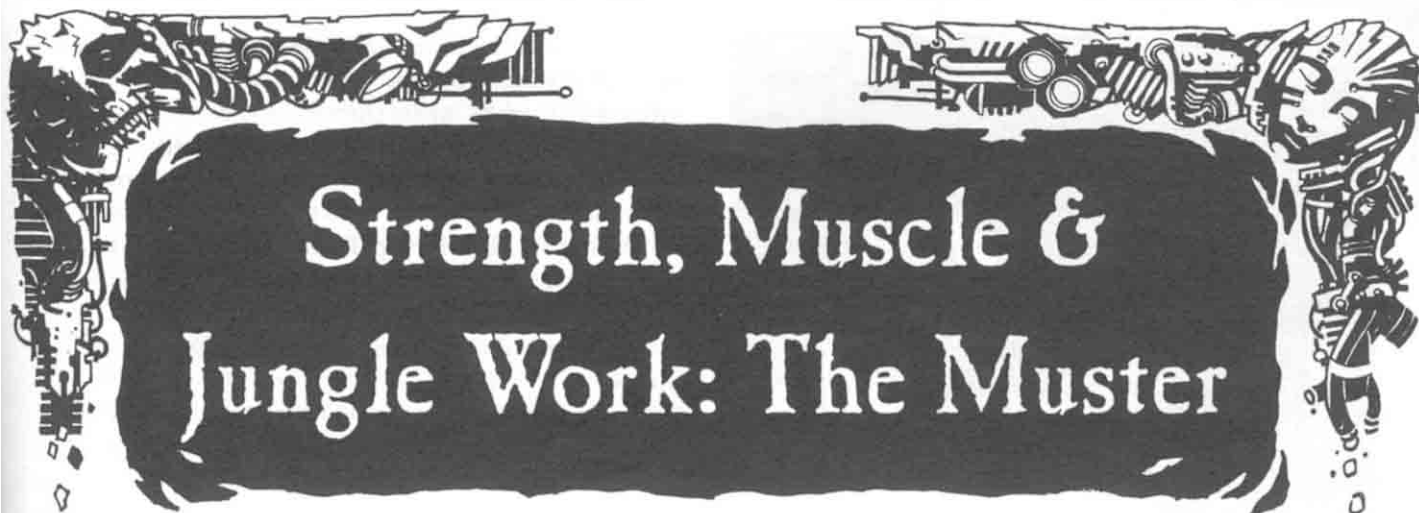
**Black Sheep Family** (-2 pts): None of the other families publicly recognizes your syndicate. Your family network is still in place, but no one outside of your syndicate will come to your aid. Perhaps, if you're really ambitious, you might be the one who can make the big score, save your family name, and get a big promotion at the end of it. Yeah, right.

**Outcast Scraver** (-3 pts): Your standing in the guild has been scandalized, and your loyalty is in question. You've strayed from the flock, and now your own family has turned against you. Maybe you've gone rogue or betrayed your superiors one too many times. It would be possible to prove your loyalty by making a big score on their behalf (in other words, work off this Affliction), but until then, the law is the least of your worries. Even the Scravers won't deal with you.









# Strength, Muscle & Jungle Work: The Muster

by James Moore

Uncle Torrence smiled at me past his muttonchops. Despite the leathery look of his skin and the deep tan he'd developed from his time on Stigmata, he still looked a decade or so younger than his 60 years. While his smile was kind, there was a bitterness in his voice when he spoke. "It's not joining the Muster that's the hard part, Oliver. It's staying in."

"I don't understand—" Even as I began to speak I stopped myself. It had been a few years since we'd seen each other, but I remembered my uncle's backhand all too well. If there was one thing he hated, it was being interrupted. I waited for his fist to strike across my jaw, but it never landed.

Instead, my uncle smiled tolerantly. "You've always been impatient, lad. Learn to enjoy your life a little more. Give me a few minutes at my own pace and I'll answer all of your questions."

I nodded my acceptance and he continued. "Like I said, it's keeping your position that's the hard part. Once you're in, it's usually for life, but there's always someone willing to come along and take your position from you and leave you with the scraps." He leaned back in his chair and reached into a pouch to pull out his tobacco and pipe. Even seeing his battered old smoking instrument brought back memories of the many holidays when he'd come to see how his sister — my mother — was faring, and he'd stay for a day or two before leaving again. Whenever he came, he brought the most wondrous gifts from the planets he'd been on in recent months. He was my sole reason for wanting to join the Muster. Everything that made him what he was, was everything I wanted for myself.

"Don't misunderstand me. Being in the Muster is a good life, but it's maybe not quite what you're expecting." He paused and lit the bowl of his battered, grackle-fox-headed pipe, sending smoke plumes rising from the carved, feral mouth. It brought back the excitement I used to feel when he told his tales. "It's not always exotic planets and fabulous treasures. Sometimes you have to spend a lot of time running through the worst port cities in the

empire to find the recruits you're looking for. Or, if you should follow in my shadow, you end up in even worse places hunting down some of the most vile heathens the Pancreator ever saw fit to allow into the universe." He looked at me again, and the smile was gone from his eyes. "I've worked in almost every part of the Muster, and while the money's always enough to live on, it's sometimes not enough to let you sleep well at night. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

I'd heard the rumors about the Muster. Everyone had. But my choices were pretty narrow at this point. I could join my seven brothers and sisters in the family bakery business, I could try to start my own career with no skills other than breadmaking, or I could convince my uncle to help me join the Merchant League. The bakeries — there were three then — would be fine without me, and I needed money to start my own company. Money my family couldn't give me. That really only left one choice.

"I do understand, Uncle Torrence. This isn't just a whim of mine. I've been thinking about this for a very long time now. I've already spoken with mother and father. They understand the choice, too."

My uncle set his pipe aside and crossed his arms over his chest, looking at me with his sun-bleached eyes for several long moments. I could almost see how he was weighing my soul in that gaze. I was afraid of what he might find there, and eventually I looked away.

"Very well then, Oliver. If you're sure this is what you want, I'll take you on one assignment with me. For the time being, you are my apprentice. If at the end of the mission you still want to join with the Muster, we can discuss the matter further."

My heart filled with excitement. I'd feared he would turn me away. "I won't let you down, sir. I'll do exactly as you say."

My uncle didn't seem to share my enthusiasm. Instead he simply nodded. "Yes, you will, Oliver. You will."



The Muster is respected as one of the finest guilds for delivering what it promises. It's a point of honor for the guild that it always carries through on a contract, no matter how problematic. But despite a shining reputation for quality, this member of the Merchant League hardly has the cleanest image.

It's not so much how guildmembers do their jobs, it's what they do that haunts their reputations — and sometimes their consciences. Acquiring laborers is often a dirty task, especially if the workers are only being used for their muscles.

From time to time — and much more often than the Muster likes to admit — they're required to find hired help wherever and however they can. If that means taking a few liberties with non-guild members' freedoms, then so be it. Despite their best efforts to hide the dirtier side of their work, the nickname "Chainers" is well earned. But for members of the Muster, the money garnered is top-notch and the benefits packages are so good that a few stains on the soul seem a small price to pay. Hard work and sweat are rewarded by the Muster — just as surely as the suns are fading.

While the slave trade is, indeed, a substantial portion of the Muster's stock in trade, it also works on far more legitimate business lines as well. When there is a demand, the guild handles the matter quickly and efficiently. The Muster is formally a freeperson's labor guild, and it treats its members with the respect they're due. Mercenary soldiers, freelance artisans, and technicians of all sorts can be found in the Muster — each ready to do whatever is required to get the job done. In return, they're granted job security and travel expenses from planet to planet.

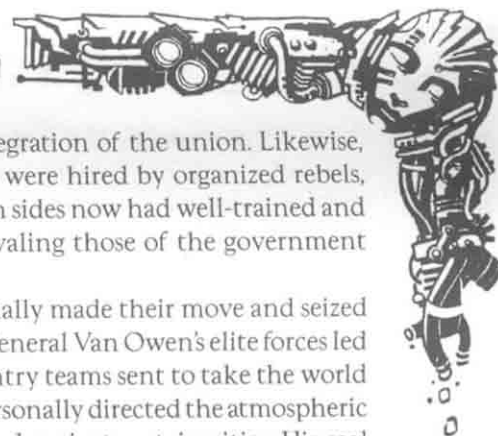
Muster placement specialists work just as hard as the laborers themselves, ensuring that the top-paying jobs are filled by members from their ranks. So long as membership dues are paid promptly, the guild members are treated with respect, and even a modicum of courtesy. Why? Because most of the leaders of the Muster worked long years themselves before graduating to their high positions within the guild. They understand the need to make an honest living, and they're perfectly willing to help others find a place where they can ply their respective trades — as long as they're willing to put a little thing like ethics aside.

## History

For those who bother to do the research, the history of the Muster is written down in black and white. During the Diaspora, there was a need for warriors who far exceeded most governments' abilities to train soldiers. Not surprisingly, mercenaries filled the gaps in troop strength. They were used as grunts in every sort of combat and even for exploring new worlds.

The life expectancy of the average gun-for-hire was short, and the pay barely gave them the chance to survive from month to month, let alone retire in comfort — if they





should manage to live that long. While several academies existed for training soldiers, once they graduated to fight battles, they were forgotten. These bold, independent troop musters later became romanticized in song and story. A long running, popular holovid series during the Second Republic was "The Ballad of the Lost Muster" — a gripping saga of Colonel Horn and his brave, freelance commandos — fighting unrewarded battles for Diasporan colonies and saving the downtrodden from rapacious noble forces for little pay and even less glory.

During Divestiture, a martial spirit swept through the Known Worlds, maybe because everyone sensed the impending threat from breakaway worlds. While the Second Republic government tried to downplay such a mood for fear of the rising power of local militias and noble-sponsored troop levies, the nobles capitalized on it, doing all in their power to promote the glory and honor awaiting those who followed military careers.

The M.S.T.R. (Mobile Strategic and Tactical Resources) was founded in such times to take full advantage of the situation. Retired General Roland Van Owen, reportedly discharged for repeatedly bucking presidential orders, took it upon himself to form an elite mercenary corps capable of handling the rebel outbreaks on far worlds. His claimed reasons for the break were that the current administration had betrayed the ideals of the Republic, selling it out to corporations and money-mongers.

Experienced mercenaries flocked to the general's organization looking for work. His highly-placed contacts ensured the best paying jobs — even if those jobs were often designed to foment more rebellions than they put down. As often as not, they were secretly hired by nobles to wreak havoc masquerading as guerrillas and rebels. They later returned to the scene of their crimes as crusading troops brought in by the nobles to aid the beleaguered Second Republic military against what were often poorly armed farmers in economic oppression. These freelance soldiers didn't care about the greater political realities they were affecting; loyalty to the general was bought with hard currency. When they worked for others, they were barely compensated for their extreme efforts and often came home owing money to the very corporations for which they'd fought. And the companies docked their pay for ammunition used, weapons lost, armor damaged and transportation back to home. But the general assured top pay and delivered it, although the money often came from noble coffers.

The general felt which way the wind was blowing and built his contacts among the nobles well. He claimed that the nobles could reestablish the old glory of the Republic, but his critics claim that he was a man in love with the pomp and circumstance of authority, and the romantic talk of the nobles swayed him to their side, thus blinding him to the realities of monarchical powers. The general's mercs were hired to train the enscribed forces of the houses, engaged by the Second Republic worlds to aid

them against the disintegration of the union. Likewise, rival mercenary groups were hired by organized rebels, with the result that both sides now had well-trained and well-equipped forces rivaling those of the government itself.

When the rebels finally made their move and seized Byzantium Secundus, General Van Owen's elite forces led many of the noble infantry teams sent to take the world back, and the general personally directed the atmospheric barrage from space levied against certain cities. His real coup was in convincing certain Second Republic generals — many of whom had served under him before — to accept noble leadership in the campaign.

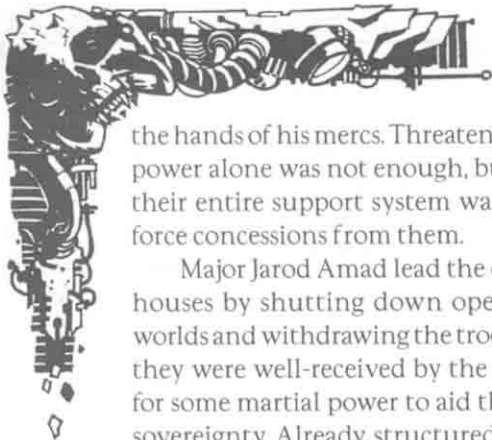
History is unclear as to whether or not the general realized the nobles' ultimate intentions. Certain accounts allege that he planned to take over the world himself and would perhaps have succeeded in taking power from his noble employers had not the Decados Jakovian agents uncovered and killed his well-placed soldiers — just after they had achieved their ground force objectives, and before they could then proceed to consolidate command for their general. Other reports, however, state that Van Owen was paid well for his part in the affair, and his willing compliance allowed his organization to continue its existence after the Fall.

Tales told in the barracks say that the general shot himself in the head years later, leaving a note saying, "All my dreams have turned to blood." His mercenary organization continued on after his death, becoming even more "mercenary," thus taking on dirty jobs no one else would do. Rumor has persisted over the years, however, about a core group in the organization dedicated to true Republican ideals, embittered by the nobles' betrayal of those ideals once they attained power and made well aware of their guild's culpability in the affair. This group allegedly plans to overthrow noble power and return it to the people. In all the years of the New Dark Ages, though, this group has made no overt attempts, which leads many to doubt its existence.

## Betrayal and Counterstrike

The relationship between the noble houses and the elite mercenaries did not long outlive the general's death. The old war-horse passed away 10 years after the Rescue of Byzantium Secundus, and the nobles immediately began trying to tear his team's loyalty apart. Thinking the mercs could be bought off with the proper bribes, houses played the soldiers against each other in clean-up operations on the farthest worlds. But when the mercs realized what was happening, they were smart enough to know they'd been had — the same old story of betrayal from previous employers.

If the nobles had only waited until they themselves had consolidated full power, perhaps their plan would have succeeded. But thanks to the general's foresight, most military support equipment and personnel were still in



the hands of his mercs. Threatening the nobles with manpower alone was not enough, but threatening to destroy their entire support system was more than adequate to force concessions from them.

Major Jarod Amad lead the counterstrike against the houses by shutting down operations on a number of worlds and withdrawing the troops to Leagueheim, where they were well-received by the nascent guilds, desperate for some martial power to aid their own attempts at self-sovereignty. Already structured like a guild, the M.S.T.R. dropped their acronym and called themselves by the name everybody else had always used: The Muster.

One month after the mercenary stand-off began, it ended with noble signatures on Muster contracts, ensuring them of their exclusive position in the military arena. From then on, those who fought against the noble's consolidation of power were cut down like ripened wheat by the Muster's overpowering assaults. It was during these years that the mercenary guild managed to seize control of Bannockburn, used its political ties and called in a few markers to make certain everything was handled in the most expedient fashion.

Many nobles, of course, questioned their reliance on these grunts, preferring their troops to be independent of guild alliance for even training. In several cases, nobles expelled Muster mercs from their territories, sometimes using actual force to make their point known.

In 4352, Quentin Siegel began consolidating the separate guilds into a Merchant League. He approached the Muster leadership and explained the benefits of joining with the fledgling confederation. The Muster would have legal representation from the Reeves, guaranteed passage to other worlds from the Charioteers, access to high-technology from the Engineers and a universe of reclaimed goods and services from the Scravers. In return, the Muster would supply firepower to defend the guilds and work as back-up for them in cases where nobles and priests felt torture and death were the best way to handle unpleasant legalities. One hand washed the other, and all would profit. The Muster leadership agreed, and, in a short while, the guilds had no more to fear from Muster-led noble forces.

## Increasing Monopolies

As time passed, the organization could not maintain its military monopoly, especially when the largest numbers of troops and equipment were in the nobles' hands. While superior, high-tech weapons training could come only from the Muster, once trained, there was little to keep noble troops from handing the information on without the Muster.

The Muster had to expand. There was little representation in the New Dark Ages for other professions, and many trained and specialized laborers were being ill-used by their noble and Church lords. The Muster turned to recruiting membership from all walks of life — all in a plan

to build their monopoly on labor.

Bodyguards were first on the list. This was followed by more specialized fields: architects, landcraft drivers and crafters of all sorts. The Muster began hauling supplies to various areas, as much as a means to maintain their connections as to pay the bills. When those bills and the debts got too large, they took over one of the most lucrative operations in the Known Worlds: slavery. The "sweat business" was previously handled by independent slave runners, but the Muster moved in to recruit or muscle out anyone who refused their terms. Heedless of the cries from the Church, the Muster promised that the slaves would be better treated than before under their professional care — they also vowed to their customers a better quality of laborer. The Church's own attempts to abolish the institution — a campaign that never really had the patriarch's full attention anyway — languished and became a fringe cause for holier-than-thou priests who didn't understand the economic realities of the new feudalism.

This caused a split within the guild, however, for some were repulsed by such a money-grubbing move on their leaders' part. Practical issues aside, the trade in unwilling human labor was considered dishonorable by many of the soldiers in the guild. In addition, the soldiers claimed, it brought a seedy element into the ranks. The debate, however, has never been settled. While certain factions in leadership have been able to downplay the slavery side of the business, their replacements enforce it even more.

Over the centuries, the Muster has increased its endeavors to encompass freemen of every field, often absorbing or obliterating its competition. When force was needed to crush the competition, the Muster was able to supply that force from within its own ranks. There's not much that the Muster hasn't done over the years to ensure the growth of the guild and to protect the rights of its members. From a force of military enforcers to an interplanetary employment agency and the only source of quality slaves in the Known Worlds, the Muster has grown large and powerful — and has every intention of continuing that trend.

## Modus Operandi

The Muster suffers from a paradoxical view of their role in the new post-war society. On one hand, they follow a strict regimen of codes when working for someone; on the other, they have no trouble bending or breaking any laws that oppose them when it comes to ensuring their proper place in the scheme of things.

The Muster believes first and foremost in protecting the rights of its members. Sometimes that causes a little friction along the way, but that's to be expected. In the eyes of the Muster, the freemen in their organization have earned the right to top wages. It's not uncommon for smaller groups on different planets to try to sneak a few non-members into the ranks of the gainfully employed. That's as it should be. But the Muster tends to look at





things differently. If the locals deserve the work, they're certainly entitled to it — all they have to do is join the Muster. If not, accidents happen almost everywhere. This is especially true among the craftsmen of the Muster; soldiers and ashtati seldom need to worry about better trained or equipped loners coming in to take their places.

While the primary duty of the Muster is to work as an employment agency of sorts, they're not above enforcement of their own rules and regulations. Anyone caught muscling in on Muster territory is going to be muscled right back out. Those who yell too loudly are just as likely to find themselves gainfully employed as soldiers on the front lines of Stigmata, where new soldiers are a heavily prized commodity. The fact that their arrival there normally involves Muster Chains and escorts with frapsticks is simply overlooked by the powers-that-be.

The Muster isn't all bad about the situation with their one-time competitors. Those who survive the ordeal are given a very reasonable wage upon the end of their tour of duty. They're also given the option of staying with the Muster or else finding gainful employment on the other side of the airlocks. There are three prerequisites other than merely surviving if they wish to join. The first is a proper apprenticeship, the second is a willingness to relocate and the last — which the guild sometimes works around — is that the potential new member must be a free-man.

It's common for ex-competitors to stay with the Muster once they've been given time to consider their other options. The wages offered normally go a very long way toward healing any possible wounds to the soul. Just the same, it's far more common for the "recruits" to either stay on Stigmata — in an unmarked grave — or learn how long they can hold their breath in the vacuum of space. In the latter cases, they are normally awarded posthumously and their salaries are then placed in the Muster's special retirement fund for the seriously injured. It wouldn't do for the soldiers who survive their tours of duty to end up as beggars, after all.

Despite this rather harsh treatment of competitors, the Muster still follows certain guidelines. The Chainers within the Muster are required to give the names and planets of origin for all of the slaves they capture. With very few exceptions, however, the names and origins of these unfortunate souls are falsified. Forged papers are prevalent among the Chainers. In theory, this information is held in complete secrecy and used to keep track of profits and losses for the guild. Depending on the location where the slaves are taken and the duties they perform, the life or death of a slave is marked as a profit or loss. Dead soldiers are a loss, as they often take expensive equipment with them. Dead laborers are a profit, while they must be replaced with more laborers before a task is finished.

In practice, the names sometimes don't make it to the proper officials within the Muster and a few firebirds end up in secret caches. The Muster frowns on this activity,

but they seldom take any action as long as the slavers don't get too greedy.

One of the least reputable but highly prized skills of the Chainers is the ability to make a person disappear without a trace. For those in places of authority, who have the proper sums of money, the Muster can arrange for an annoying rival to find herself on an auction block in the most remote area of the Known Worlds. Certain members of House Decados like the idea of their enemies suffering at hard labor on Shaprut, where their only company is among the Shantor. At least three members of House Li Halan have ended their careers in this fashion, though no records exist to prove it.

Despite the overall unpopularity of aliens, the Muster even allows non-human races to join their ranks. Gannoks are always welcome to join as long as they're willing to work their technical wonders for the Muster; they are usually rewarded well for their efforts, and few of their pranks — except those that cause fatalities — are ever punished by the Chainers. The mischievous aliens help the Muster keep a proper technical edge.

The Muster believes in equal rights for all, within reason. They will gladly provide services to anyone who can meet their price — regardless of race, religion or political affiliation. It's because of this attitude that most of the houses continue to deal with the guild. None of them can quite tolerate the thought of the Muster working for their competitors and having to make do with their own forces.

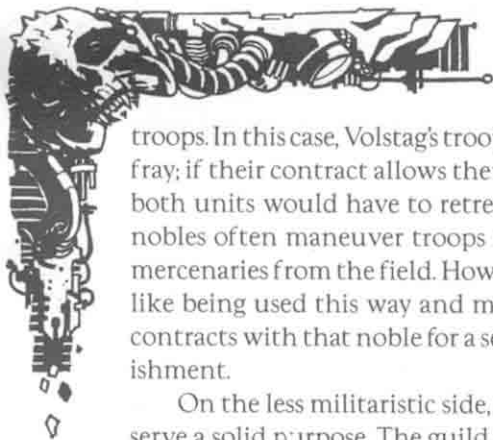
Despite this uneasy situation, the Muster believes in following through with a contract, regardless of what effects it might have. Once a deal has been made, Muster members remain completely loyal to whichever noble, guildmember or priest hires them — as long as their wages are paid. Muster guards are worth the cost, and the same goes for their soldiers. The reason for this is simple and direct: Once the Muster has given its word, the agents working in the guild's name are expected to keep that vow solemnly. In the time directly after the Fall of the Second Republic, the Muster made sure that its soldiers kept their word by executing traitors. The powers-that-be in the guild have made it known that the practice will continue into the present day.

The one exception to this rule is in mutual engagements: The Muster will not fight itself. If they have contracted troops to two nobles who later come to blows, they will not allow those troops to be used in engagements against their own. If necessary, Muster mercs on both sides will withdraw until they can be utilized otherwise (although they will not refund any moneys paid).

They do not contract to houses *per se*, but to individual nobles. Thus, one Muster unit may work for Baron Volstag Hawkwood while another unit may be in the employ of Count Shazan al-Malik. If Duke Alvarex Hawkwood went to war with Count Shazan, this would not prevent Shazan's Muster unit from engaging, unless Alvarex demanded that his vassal, Volstag, deploy his hired







troops. In this case, Volstag's troops may refuse to enter the fray; if their contract allows them no leeway in this, then both units would have to retreat from the field. Canny nobles often maneuver troops this way to force a rival's mercenaries from the field. However, the Muster does not like being used this way and may refuse to sign further contracts with that noble for a set period of time for punishment.

On the less militaristic side, the Muster does actually serve a solid purpose. The guild works to ensure that the best people are presented for any job. While that normally means hiring from within their own ranks, they aren't above persuading the occasional freelancer that theirs is the best way. Once again, accidents can happen — not only to reluctant employees, but to their families. One of the seedier jobs within the Muster is that of the recruiters who make certain that soon-to-be guild members understand the sorts of mishaps that befall freelancers. As often as not, this is handled with a simple discussion. Sometimes a little persuasion is needed. A near miss on a loved one is usually enough, though from time to time a set of Muster Chains is required to make the point clear. Rumor has it that there are a few ex-members of Temple Avesti working for the Muster who do a wonderful job persuading those who otherwise just don't get the point.

The Muster has a certain grudging form of camaraderie that often seems strained. From the lowest members to the very highest officials within the guild, there is an understanding that the people in the Muster have *earned* the right to be there. While there is much segregation between the various jobs, the group as a whole manages to get along fairly well. There is some question, however, as to whether that common link is really respect, or just possible fear.

Joining the Muster requires only a workable skill and proof that a person is free to sign up. Leaving the Muster is a different matter entirely. As a few old-timers are fond of saying, "Once you're in the Muster, you're in for the duration." Once a guildmember has paid dues, those dues are expected thereafter. In rare cases, a noble house might decide to buy the contract of a mercenary, but the cost is exorbitant. The Muster requires at least 10 years of service from any member. Afterwards, contracts are completely renewable if the guild and the freeman wish to continue their mutually equitable agreement; those who wish to leave the guild, for whatever reasons, must pay a penalty fee to leave before their contracts are finished.

There are lines of communication within the Muster that remain remarkably well-hidden, despite the fact that they're virtually in plain sight. Confidentiality is practically assured to anyone who feels the need to report someone who is considering leaving the guild — that and a hefty bonus when the next pay cycle comes around.

## Patents/Exclusives

The Muster has several inventions that are effectively marked as their own. First and foremost are the nefarious Muster Chains, which are feared by nearly everyone. True, Inquisitors are feared a bit more, but the idea of being locked into chains is often used by parents to keep their children in line; doubly so, because it's rumored that some parents really do sell their children to the Chainers. In fact, the practice is common in some areas where the belief is that the children will get better care from the Muster than their own kin can manage. At the very least, they'll get fed more than once every few days. While the sale of children is officially outlawed, there are few people in most cities who really care what happens to a few children groveling in the street. However, the practice is actually not as widespread as rumors would have the peasants believe.

Some believe the Muster actually has a special group of ashtati who seek out children with psychic talents and take them away, offering a handsome price to the parents for their silence. Most scoff at the notion, but there are some who swear they've seen the deals take place, and still more who claim they know the truth about what happens to the children. Oddly, the latter never seem willing to discuss what they know...at least not in public.

The Muster is first and foremost an agency of freemen. That being the case, their primary trade is finding the right people for the job, no matter what the job might be. There are certain areas they leave alone, however, as they are claimed by the other members of the Merchant League. They don't place pilots, except within their own ranks; otherwise, there would be serious trouble with the Charioteers. They do, however, assist the Charioteers by supplying them with information about others who are looking for pilots and they have no problem with arranging for crews to aid their fellow Leaguers when needed. While they don't actually work as information brokers — aside from finding the right person for the job — they don't hesitate to sell information to the Scravers, and at discounted rates no less. When it comes to dealing with the Engineers, the Muster is always willing to send work their way; they often work as a go-between for the Engineers and do all they can to ensure the proper security for their fellow League members. And the Muster is the first to employ Reeves when it comes down to the fine art of contract negotiation.

It can't be stressed enough that freelancers who find work without the Muster's involvement risk the guild's wrath. Be it an accident befalling the freelancer or the freelancer finding himself drafted into "service" as a soldier, the guild specializes in making certain that they are the only real choice for most employers. Any clients caught using non-Muster freelancers on the sly are also



very likely to pay for their treachery as well. Even the best freelancers make "mistakes" and end up causing disastrous delays in the work they were trying to accomplish, after which, the Muster will gladly come in and finish the job at an elevated cost. The Muster's penchant for penalty fees are well-known, and only the desperate or those dealing in extremely secretive work give serious consideration to hiring outside the guild. In the latter case, the employer is almost always wasting extra money if the Muster finds out, especially since the guild is happy to do any work at all — if the price is right.

The Muster has specialists in several fields, almost all of which deal, in one way or another, with the roots of the guild. All of which suffer, to one degree or another, from the burden of politics. Muster members can be divided up into two categories: troops and command positions.

## Troops

### Soldiers

The largest specialized group in the Muster consists of soldiers for hire. The actual freemen soldiers in the guild are among the best trained that money can buy and are proficient both as combatants and tacticians. From hand-to-hand combat to the technically illegal heavy artillery weaponeers, few are better in the field — and those who are almost certainly were trained by the Muster in one of

their academies, or they belong to the Brothers Battle. (Rumors that the Muster hires excommunicated members of Brother Battle have never been proven, just for the record.) Many noble families hire members of the Muster as personal trainers for their families and the family guards; this is one way around the need to hire large numbers of Muster soldiers as bodyguards. This is perfectly acceptable in the eyes of the Muster. The price for such intense tutelage and personalized training is very steep by way of compensating for the lower costs in the long run.

The soldiers are, despite whatever might be said in public, still in charge of the Muster. The original bylaws of the guild and all of the amendments to the same make sure of that. The High Command that heads the Muster is largely comprised of old war dogs. The soldiers know they're in charge and reflect this knowledge often with their attitudes, which is a point that sticks in the collective craw of several other factions, most notably the edifiers.

### Sentries

Aside from soldiers used for combat, the Muster also sells the services of bodyguards. The sentries are well-trained and either enhanced or actually alien, depending on the desires of the employer. Most are very paid highly and are outright lethal in combat. Sentries are known for their willingness to act as enforcers and to even die for the person they serve; this sort of loyalty always costs dearly.



but it is often worth it when the Muster is providing the service.

Sentries are typically hired on for temporary assignments, though some are actually employed as regular staff in noble houses where the need for trained security is high. Sentries technically fall under the same heading as soldiers, and most of them have worked in the field when called to do so. They have no real political affiliations within the ranks and seldom allow themselves to become involved in the petty word wars that cause most of the internal strife within the Muster.

### Ashtati

The ashtati, named after a Severan predator expert in tracking down prey, are also known by a more Urthish name: bloodhounds. As bounty hunters, they work on the shady side of the tracks to find and capture anyone with a price tag. Whether that person is a runaway noble, a missing member of the Church or an outlaw makes no difference. Just like all Muster members, they pay a portion of their moneys and gain benefits, although their pay varies from job to job. The growing need for ashtati has been a boon to the Muster of late, and membership is on the rise.

Ashtati are licensed for the work they do and must obey the local laws wherever they go. They are almost always gone, however, before any law enforcement specialist could hope to catch them, even when they bend the laws significantly. Despite the violent nature of their work, many ashtati are more open and friendly to other factions than is the norm. Ashtati are rapidly gaining a certain elite air about what they do, but they remain grounded just the same. When it comes to politics, ashtati are seldom around long enough to get involved. Their profession requires a level of vigilance that few others ever achieve.

### Edificers

The edificers are all those guildsmen who work in the construction field, from architects to carpenters to stone masons to engineers. Of all the factions within the Muster, edificers are perhaps the most protective, and those most likely to cause grievous injury to anyone foolish enough to try working in their territory. Edificers do quality work and use the best available equipment, but they often find that local groups using less advanced tech try to muscle in on their work. When that happens, edificers are more than glad to explain the facts of life with a good hammer and a saw or two.

Of all the Muster's factions, these are the people most feared by non-Leaguers. Their most common nickname is "sawbones," which is a name they've lived up to on more than one occasion. Edificers have a chip on their shoulder when it comes to the rest of the Muster; it seems they do the hardest work for the least reward, and the bylaws of the guild haven't made that impression go away. The fact is that Edificers do work harder and often under grueling conditions, and they do take in the least income of many in the guild, but their jobs rarely involve the dan-

gers that soldiers or ashtati come up against. For now, their demands for an increased cut fall on deaf ears.

### Slavers

Slavers tend to think of themselves as taskmasters, but their stock and trade is finding warm bodies for the most despicable sort of work. The slavers always guarantee that they'll find the right person for the job, but they never make any promises that the person will be willing.

Laborers cost money — that's the long and short of it. Many of the less scrupulous nobles find it easier to purchase slaves rather than pay a heavy wage for Muster personnel. The Muster understands this and satisfies the needs of their customers as best it can. Most slavers also work as foremen for the slaves they capture, or they have lieutenants there to handle the task for them.

On the whole, slavers are the most despicable members of the Muster. Their work may be important, but they aren't very popular, even among the rest of their guild. Their compensation for this dislike is a damn fine wage and the pleasures of doing as they will with the cargo they bring to other worlds. Nobody likes the slavers, but everyone in the guild agrees that they are important; if the Muster didn't handle the sordid job, someone else would do it anyway.

The slavers have a great deal of clout within the Muster, second only to the soldiers, which is solely because the slavers make the most money for the guild, and money talks; firebirds open doors and ears alike. There is a great deal of concern from the military factions that the slavers will soon take over seats of power within the guild, which is already evidenced to a certain degree by the fact that slavers now hold positions in the High Command.

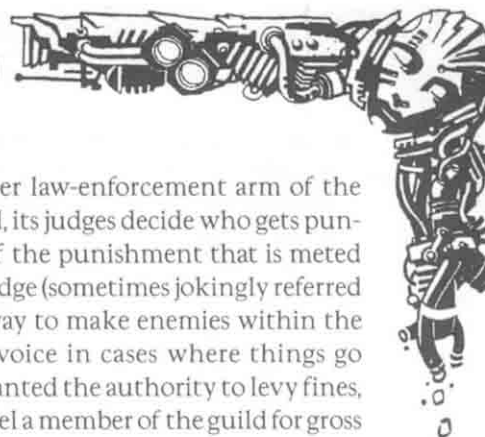
### Roustabouts

The roustabouts work cargo. More dockworkers than soldiers, they transport shipments across planetary surfaces and sometimes from world to world. The roustabouts do more than just carry supplies, however; they insure them as well. Precious cargo — living or not — is guaranteed by the roustabouts, and the heavy haulers are thus usually very adept with slug guns. Most roustabouts are ready for anything, because their jobs often put them in extremely precarious situations, more so perhaps than even the soldiers and sentries; cutthroats and thieves are everywhere, perfectly willing to kill to get supplies for their families or valuables they can use as barter.

Roustabouts normally work in large groups, contracting out to farming collectives or traders who fear for their merchandise. They often transport supplies from planet to planet, though they usually hire a Charioteer to pilot the Muster-owned ships.

Their fellow Leaguers may notice that there's always a little extra cargo space on the ships — space for a few new "recruits" or even contraband — but they're paid well to not say a word. What the roustabouts lack in immediate profit on planetary jumps is normally compensated for by





whatever they take with them on the return voyages. In the event of unexpected inspections, many roustabouts carry documents showing that they are ashtati: hired bounty hunters.

In the case of contraband, the risks involved sometimes require that the treasures be dumped and the profits lost. There are always risks; the roustabouts are willing to take them.

Roustabouts are respected within the Muster. Everyone needs them from time to time, and they are invaluable to every other faction of the guild, save perhaps the ashtati. Without the roustabouts, weapons don't get relocated and supplies don't arrive on time. While the roustabouts don't flaunt their position, they are always heard when they speak.

## Command Positions

### Taskmasters

Taskmasters are an integral part of the Muster. They're the "headhunters" of the guild who work to make certain that the jobs accepted by the Muster are filled properly and who negotiate the cost of filling the jobs. Being on the good side of a taskmaster is always a plus in the Muster; pissing off a taskmaster is the best way to get the worst possible assignment. This position is the best paying job in the guild.

The taskmaster's word is practically law in the eyes of the Muster. Once he picks someone for a job, that person takes the assignment or has a damned good reason for declining. (Good reasons include a broken spine, a shattered skull and death. Little else is acceptable.)

No one doubts the work taskmasters put in and everyone in the guild depends on them to get the work they need. Most taskmasters are picked by the local headquarters and are chosen for their ability to set a reasonable wage and make certain the working conditions meet up with guild standards. There are a few exceptions where one or more of the true powers in the guild assign the post as a reward for services rendered. In the latter cases, the taskmasters still know that they better do their job well if they wish to remain among the breathing and fully mobile.

The position of taskmaster is handed out on a temporary basis. Every new assignment is a chance for an aggressive member of the guild to become the taskmaster on a job. The best way to get the position is to actually make the deal for the Muster: The person who arranges a construction assignment, such as building a new wall around one of the established cities on Severus, has a very good chance of being given the post of taskmaster for the assignment. But there are no guarantees. The person who has the best connections, or who is owed a favor, could very well snatch the assignment away without difficulty. In the long run, the powers-that-be make the final decision, and no amount of protesting will help the situation.

### The Vigil

The Vigil is the inner law-enforcement arm of the Muster. If a job is botched, its judges decide who gets punished and the severity of the punishment that is meted out. Working as a Vigil judge (sometimes jokingly referred to a "vigilante"), is one way to make enemies within the guild. As the deciding voice in cases where things go wrong, a Vigil judge is granted the authority to levy fines, dock wages and even expel a member of the guild for gross negligence of duty. The Muster takes failure poorly, and the judge are proof of that creed.

To keep them honest, judges always work in pairs or even in groups of three. Each individual judge is authorized to punish another member of the guild, and only another judge (or a superior from High Command) can countermand that authority. It's a common practice for the Muster to pick members of opposing natures to work together, thus assuring that the groups remain impartial in all matters. At least, that's the theory; the truth sometimes differs substantially.

Vigil judges are paid a regular salary that is high enough to permit them to resist most bribes. As an extra security measure, the Muster also uses undercover judges in many areas. These hidden agents don't actually interfere with any actions or punishments meted out, but they do report to high-ranking superiors with the authority to punish judges who accept bribes or are deemed "too harsh" in the judgments they make.

Judges of the Vigil come from all factions of the Muster, and few doubt their impartiality, at least in public. When it comes to political disputes, the Vigil remains neutral. That impartiality remains intact so long as no one breaks the rules.

### High Command

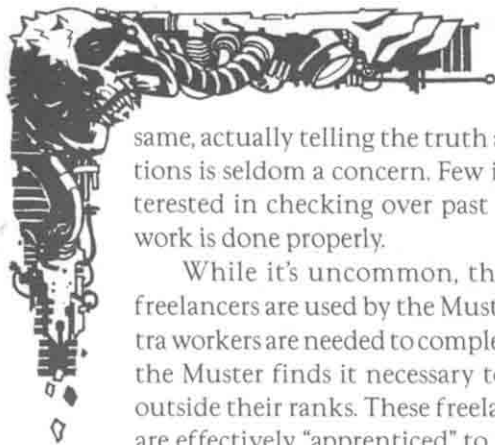
While each world with a Muster office has a Headquarters, there is only one High Command. The Janizary is the leader of the entire guild and usually operates out of Bannockburn, where he can be closest to the busiest war fronts in the Known Worlds (Symbiots and Vuldrok). However, many members of the High Command are on Leagueheim at all times to make sure guild interests are represented to the Leaguemeister.

The High Command consists of the guild's colonels (deans), traditionally drawn exclusively from the soldiers. However, one or two current deans are slavers (there is also one Roustabout), and this worries many soldiers in the guild.

## Conduct

The Muster expects a certain degree of professionalism from its members. First and foremost, the person better be able to do the job they're assigned or be prepared to face the consequences. In an age where most people don't actually have resumes, members of the Muster do. Just the





same, actually telling the truth about previous qualifications is seldom a concern. Few in the guild are really interested in checking over past references as long as the work is done properly.

While it's uncommon, there are occasions when freelancers are used by the Muster. From time to time, extra workers are needed to complete a task on schedule, and the Muster finds it necessary to use local laborers from outside their ranks. These freelancers serving the Muster are effectively "apprenticed" to their immediate supervisors. If they have any desire to join the guild, they've got to prove themselves from the beginning, and as the Vigil is almost religiously thorough in their examinations of any transgressions, it's a sure bet the taskmaster on any job watches over her charges with a very critical eye.

If a freelancer is found trustworthy and efficient in the eyes of her immediate superior, she's got a very good chance of being accepted into the Muster. The next step is making a formal request through the local HQ. Officially, this is a lengthy process—sometimes taking months for an answer to come around. In truth, the officer just asks the individual's taskmaster if the applicant is worthy and makes a decision, normally over a few ales at the local tavern.

High Command needs to be consulted sometimes, especially if a hiring freeze has been declared for a particular field. In this case, the applicant must wait for word to return from Bannockburn or Leagueheim. While the bureaucracy in the Muster is surprisingly limited, it does exist. Most applicants get a response in about the same time it takes for word to reach the taskmaster. Depending on the location, that can be a few weeks or as much as half a year.

Once accepted into formal apprenticeship, the applicant once again goes through a waiting period. The length of time it takes to actually become a member of the guild depends on how well the apprentice does on the battery of tests she must go through.

The tests used by the Muster are generations old. Most are personality tests and aptitude inspections handled by veterans of the guild. The personality tests are seldom used one way or the other and are only given as part of long-standing tradition. The battery of aptitude exams are more important; they decide the starting wage and rank of new members. While most applicants start as journeymen, there are exceptions: Those who score exceptionally well are often promoted to associate immediately.

The Muster believes in giving proper pay according to ability, regardless of tenure. Once you're a guild member, it's accepted that you're one of the best. Beyond that, no consideration is given for time in the guild. That's one of the reasons it's important to make sure you're on good terms with a job's taskmaster.

The final test many members go through is the Psi-Lobe 2000 scan, though only a handful of people even know the test exists. On Bannockburn, when a

guildmember receives her guild insignia and papers, she passes through several arches in a fairly lengthy ceremony. Rumor has it that one of these arches, hidden from view, is a scanning device that measures the potential for psionic talent. Those with psi talent are automatically assigned under the watchful eye of Dean Tereza Solace, whose special units are allegedly paid a better wage than other guildmembers, though that rumor is strictly conjecture. All guildmembers seeking higher rank must eventually do so on Bannockburn, and thus pass through this scan.

Once accepted into the guild, new members are given a three-week course on how to handle business. During this time, they are grilled on the fine art of getting the job done, regardless of the cost. The primary purpose of this course is to make clear to new members that the Muster's reputation must remain untarnished. Those who fail to learn this lesson often don't live long enough to regret it.

## Dress

While there is no formal dress code for the Muster, every member is expected to wear the symbol of the guild on their jacket or shirt and most have taken to wearing protective armor of some sort. The Muster's reputation is for excellence and, much to their chagrin, for slavery. The latter part has long since made wearing armor a necessity. The fact that most members are still mercenary soldiers just makes the armor more easily understood by the masses. Most ranking members of the guild also carry Muster Chains, though few brandish them in plain sight.

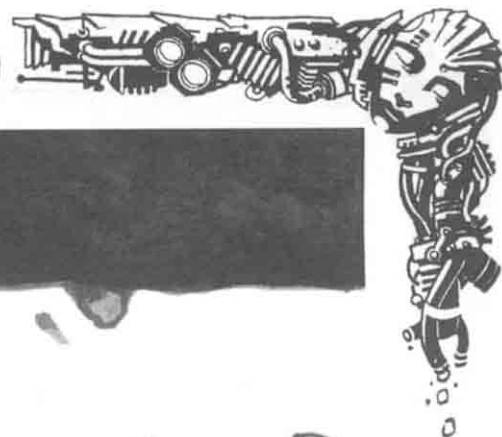
## Rank

Gaining rank in the Muster is a matter of reputation and ability. The Muster is a collective, at least in the lower ranks, and the majority of the people in charge of local affairs were appointed by their peers. But when it comes to gaining the highest ranking positions, there are three ways of getting there:

The first is hard work and a great deal of glad-handing. Anyone whose reputation is a good example of Muster ideals and who can impress his superiors with ability and personal charm is likely to go far.

The second method of promotion is to buy the position. Though there are few positions in the Muster that can be purchased, they do exist. Most of these deal with handling payments to the members and awarding bonuses, as well as collecting dues from the salaries of guild constituents. These are normally sought by members of the guild who are growing older and are in risk of becoming a liability to the guild's reputation. The jobs pay well, but the Vigil is always watching over the paymasters to make certain the money goes where it belongs. Successful embezzlement of funds is very rare.

The final method is to be born into the position. Despite the fact that the Muster is a freeman's union, the original guild creators took care to ensure that their descendants would always have a stable income and a say in how the guild was handled. While these families don't



necessarily run the guild (unlike the Charioteer hongs or Scraver families), their children are always assured admittance and usually have little trouble finding promotion.

Name and title mean little, however, without performance. Most families have a dozen or more members waiting in line for one of their own to fall short of the duties assigned. Any sign of weakness is a sure way to end up in a challenge for power. How that challenge is resolved varies from case to case, but assassination isn't exactly ruled out.

While the Muster often uses League standard ranks, soldiers use their own rank system, given in parentheses below.

**Associate (Private):** The lowest ranking full member of the Muster, an associate does the legwork of the guild, whether as an infantryman, bricklayer or manacled for the slavers.

**Chief (Sergeant):** A chief commands or trains small combat units, acts as foreman for construction sites or as a collector for slavers. Chiefs also get the job of enforcer, one who "convinces" a local freelancer to go home or seek work elsewhere.

**Manager (Lieutenant):** A manager commands platoons of mercenaries, arranges contracts with nobles, priests or guilds for building sites, or acts as a finder for slavers. He may also be the paymaster for a job, ensuring that everyone gets their pay — and that everyone pays their dues.

**Director (Captain):** A director commands armies of mercenaries, or he is an architect for construction projects. He may run slave operations to a particular, long-term client or act as a job agent and dig up work for the guild as a whole.

**Consul (Major):** A consul commands all the armies of a particular world, or she is a master architect for building designs (edificers rarely rise above this rank). She may also run slave operations for an entire world.

**Dean (Colonel):** A dean oversees interplanetary military operations, such as the entire mercenary military contracted to Hawkwood space. Few besides soldiers gain this rank.

## Territory

Virtually every planet has a collection of Muster offices, though few of these are more than central meeting places where the taskmasters hand out assignments.

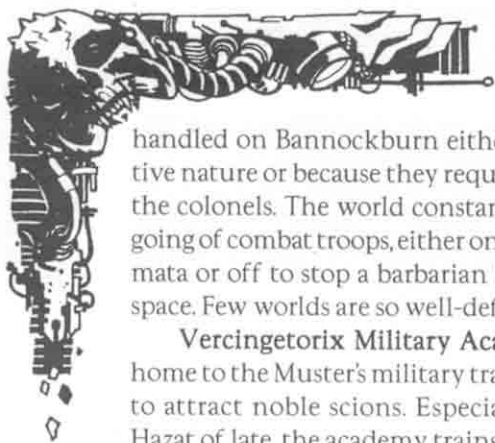
Leagueheim is the seat of power for virtually all of the guilds, and that remains true for the Muster for the most part. The Muster use Leagueheim only as a place to deal with Merchant League business and handle the day-to-day affairs of running the guild. Their main military operations, however, are run from Bannockburn.

### Bannockburn

High Command has a dozen or more projects cooking at any given time. These special undertakings are







handled on Bannockburn either because of their secretive nature or because they require the personal touch of the colonels. The world constantly sees the coming and going of combat troops, either on their way back or to Stigmata or off to stop a barbarian incursion in Hawkwood space. Few worlds are so well-defended.

**Vercingetorix Military Academy:** Bannockburn is home to the Muster's military training academy, designed to attract noble scions. Especially popular among the Hazat of late, the academy trains young nobles in the use of just about any type of military unit, so that when they command battles against the Kurgans or other enemies, they will know when to best field an infantry unit or to call down orbital artillery instead.

There is an adjunct campus at the Academy Interatta (the Jarod Amad College of War) that mainly teaches military history, strategy and tactics, for there is little room there, unlike on Bannockburn, to practice war games. The instructors of both campuses are mainly retired soldiers who either never attained colonel status or retired from politics at that rank.

The academy is named after Colonel Vercingetorix — considered a master tactician and one of Saint Mantius' trusted followers.

## Contacts

The Muster makes a point of working for everyone. In their view, there are no preferred customers. The reality of this statement is, naturally, a bit different. Those who pay the best are actually their preferred customers. House Hawkwood is especially popular at the present time, though that's only to be expected. As the ruling family of the empire, the Hawkwoods are responsible for handling the growing bureaucratic miasma. The Muster is there to help, just as long as the firebirds keep pouring in. House Decados is also given preferential treatment as one of the primary purchasers of slave labor.

Unofficially, every guild in the Merchant League is granted a certain level of preferential treatment by the Muster. The Charioteers and Reeves especially are given preferred customer status, and the favor is returned. Though the Scravers are preferred customers, the relationship is often strained, as the scavengers tend to look on several of the Muster's areas of expertise as bordering on their own specialties.

## Personages

### Janizary Halostro Sekimen

Sekimen, proud descendant of General Van Owen, is regarded with awe by most who meet him. His incredible energy and enthusiasm are infectious, and most readily agree that he could sell brute-manure to all but the shrewdest brute herders and leave them feeling like they got the better end of the bargain. Despite his impressive stature, and frightening presence, Sekimen is capable of

making anyone seem at ease in a matter of minutes. Indeed, many rumor that he is in line to become the next Leaguemeister. Most amazing, however, is the man's ability to assess any combat situation and discover its strengths and weaknesses. Many of his officers swear the Symbiots would have long since expanded beyond Stigmata if not for the Janizary's advice.

### Dean Solace

Dean Solace is one of the most hated individuals in the Known Worlds. She controls the slave trade and is rumored to possess psychic abilities — but she has never confessed this to the Church. Were it within the Church's power to grab her without causing a major political upheaval, they would surely do so in an instant. In the seedier parts of the Known Worlds, it is whispered that the bounty offered for her head is one of the greatest in the history of the empire. Just where these rumors started is anyone's guess, and just who is offering the bounty remains a mystery to all but the few who might seek the reward. As frequent as the rumors of the price on her head are those tales of the unfortunates who have tried to claim it.

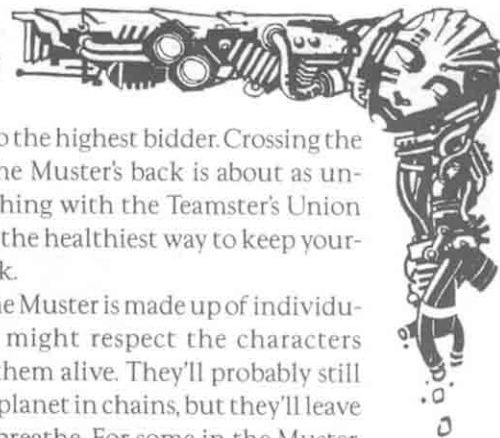
If even a portion of the allegations leveled against Dean Solace are true, she is a vile creature indeed. From creating new genetic nightmares to stealing the souls of her victims, there's not much she hasn't been accused of doing. There are even a few wild claims that Solace is responsible for the actions of the Slayers guild, though most scoff at the idea. Everyone knows the Slayers aren't real.

Solace remains sequestered in her fortress-like home on Bannockburn at all times, even going so far as to have the other members of the High Command come to her for meetings. There are whispers that her psychic talents have made her extremely vulnerable to any light, even that of the distant stars. It is certain that on the rare occasions she has an audience with anyone, she remains hidden behind several layers of veils and even a few curtains. Several battle-hardened guards surround her at all times and make certain she remains undisturbed by curious eyes.

On several occasions she has used a very attractive woman carrying her signet ring to take her place at meetings away from Bannockburn. The Veiled Woman, as she has come to be known, never speaks until a meeting takes place. Most of the people who've been with her on trips from Bannockburn to Leagueheim or Byzantium Secundus speak in whispers that she has no soul.

### Tarr and Fether

Vigil judges Tarr and Fether are allegedly the shrewdest two agents working for the Muster. Some claim the Scravers come to these two when they can't find out the truth about what's going on in the Known Worlds. Their punishments are legendary and their abilities to discover the darkest secrets have kept many a soul on the straight and narrow. Rumor has it they report directly to Sekimen and even work as spies in cases where secrecy is of the ut-



most importance. They are practically invisible and have survived the most incredible traps set by everyone from the Decados to the Vau. Just how good are they? Well, no one has ever knowingly met them, which makes it hard to find out.

## Roleplaying

### Playing a Muster Member

The Muster is an example of Known Worlds blue-collar culture. Its members labor with their hands and they demand a certain amount of respect — even if they have to pound that respect out of anyone who gives them lip. There are a number of professions for these guildsmen:

**Craftsman:** Have you ever walked down a street and looked upon the buildings there with the pride of a parent? Many in the edificers have. They can see the quality of their workmanship on their way home or on the way to the market. There are few feelings finer than the satisfaction of having built something properly. Not all the firebirds on Leagueheim can buy a feeling so fine or one that lasts as long.

**Professional:** Many within the Muster are hard-working souls looking to make the best of what life has dealt them. When on the job, there's nothing more important. Discipline is everything.

**Teamster:** Team spirit is everything. NO ONE gets the better of the Muster, and if that means a few people have to suffer for transgressions against the guild, well, that's just the way these things happen.

**Predator:** Survival is the name of the game. There are a frightening number of predators within the ranks of the soldiers and ashtati — people who feel truly alive only when they're on the hunt and preparing to make a kill. For them, the money is only a bonus.

**Sadists:** There's a special satisfaction in taking a human spirit into your hands and crushing it completely. Many within the slavers enjoy watching the fighting spirit within their captives fade slowly or crumble abruptly. The added perk of physical pleasure is only an extra incentive; the real thrill comes from breaking them and selling them to the highest bidder.

**Working Stiffs:** Sentries, roustabouts and soldiers risk their lives everyday. The tension level in their duties is often very high, and their methods of releasing tension are sometimes very extreme. Some of the best bar brawls around are started by the Muster, and often finished by them as well — especially in areas where the mercenaries hang out.

### Gamemastering the Muster

**Crossing the Line:** Now and then everyone is down on their luck, and those with ethics find it better to work for a living than to mug a local merchant. As rivals for player characters, few groups are better than the Muster. The guild is very territorial and not above breaking bones

or selling the characters to the highest bidder. Crossing the line and going behind the Muster's back is about as unwise as trying the same thing with the Teamster's Union in the 1960s — it just isn't the healthiest way to keep yourself alive and able to work.

By the same token, the Muster is made up of individuals and many of them might respect the characters enough to at least leave them alive. They'll probably still ship them off to another planet in chains, but they'll leave them intact and able to breathe. For some in the Muster, that's a fine example of kindness.

**Enforcers:** Reversing the situation works just as well if the characters are members of the Muster. There are always freelancers out there who see no reason to pay the fees demanded by the guild. Some of them are even very qualified and experienced. Worse still, it's not all that uncommon for these freelancers to pass themselves off as members of the Muster in order to get a better wage. It adds insult to injury when someone else beats you to the job and then does the job better than you could have, or even impersonates you in the process.

A group of impostors is an intriguing way of keeping the characters on the alert, especially if they manage to get away with it time and again.

**Missing Persons:** The Muster is always looking for a few good workers, sometimes as employees for hire and sometimes as slaves to place in hazardous jobs. Slavers often hold grudges from a long time back, and a good number will even hijack a person and ship him to another planet as a slave in exchange for extra money. Imagine how infuriating it would be to have your lover disappear with no obvious motive. Tracking down the right members of the Muster could be a task, because that's the sort of work most slavers won't admit to under any circumstances.

**Retribution:** Impostors working under the Muster banner can be a double-edged sword pointed directly at the throat of the average character. The Muster takes being impersonated poorly, and it also remembers when someone hires outside of the guild. A fake Muster can make life hell for the characters with only the best of intentions. Not only will the Muster take offense, the members just might decide to retaliate. That special project the characters have been paying good money for might end up stolen, sabotaged, or booby-trapped to go off at the worst possible time.

Then there's the sudden death or disappearance of the local guy who was last seen with the characters. He might have friends or family who want to know what happened to him, and he won't want to hear that the characters haven't got a clue about how he died or where he is now. If that missing person or corpse was somebody with powerful friends or had information that people in high places needed, life could get very uncomfortable at an alarming pace.



## Traits

### Benefices

**Journeyman** (1 pt): This is an apprentice's beginning position in the guild, until he or she earns promotion to associate status.

**Taskmaster** (2 pts): The character is lucky enough to have nabbed the post of taskmaster on a job. This could be a mercenary operation, a cargo-haul or a ditch-digging assignment. As taskmaster, the character gets the best pay (usually half again what others get), but he is responsible for the success of the operation; failure can mean loss of face or, worse, loss of rank (if the job was really important to the guild). Hence, running off on adventures while there is a job to do is not looked kindly upon by the Vigil.

**Vigil Judge** (3 pts): The character is a member of the Vigil — the Muster internal police. It is his responsibility to police his fellow guildmembers and make sure they adhere to the codes of the guild. This may mean simply chewing out a lazy Roustabout, pulling soldiers out of off-limits brothels in the middle of the night, or even arresting ashtati who cause too many legal infractions with valued Muster customers. Vigil judges rarely work alone and are not liked by most fellow guildmembers.

## Equipment

### Morana's Hands

TL8

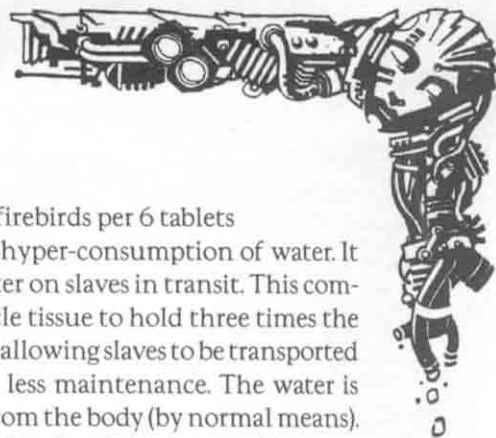
Cost: 3 Benefice, 2500 firebirds

These thin, silvery gloves are used by the Muster and Scarvers to change fingerprints. Morana's Hands are sinister tools which are very effective for altering a person's identification. Used often by Decados and al-Malik operatives, these Muster tools melt new finger prints into the flesh of those forced to wear them. The gloves ingrain the imprints of the first person to wear them unless they are reset (either randomly generated or roll Tech + Think Machine to copy a set of prints). This process is electro-impulse induced and seldom noticed by those who put on the gloves (roll Perception + Observe, -6 penalty). Note that forensics experts can often detect the tell-tale sign of a randomly-generated Morana print. The gloves can be deactivated so that wearing them will not ingrain fresh prints.

These gloves are prized by the Muster as they have obvious value in the slave trade. A person skilled in creating prints can go very far towards altering or even stealing another's identity. Morana's Hands protect the hands and wrists from acids, radiation and cold without losing their suppleness (armor 2 + 2d, hands only).







### Nitobi Neural Net

TL 7

**Cost:** Standard model single use: 1 Benefice, 300 firebirds.

Multi-use disposable: 2 Benefice, 600 firebirds

Multi-use rechargeable: 3 Benefice, 1500 firebirds

Neural Nets were originally developed by Nitobi Corp. during the Second Republic for defense perimeter deployment. Neural casters come in many sizes but the most common capture nets cover an 3m x 3m x 3m area. The neural net technology was never completely lost and is today prized by the Muster. The Nitobi Neural Net is not a physical net, but an energy discharge similar in operation to the Ur Obun stunner in that it disrupts the energy flow within a person's body. What makes the Neural Net unique is its ease of deployment and surefire results.

The Muster adopted the N-Cubed (as it is commonly called) for enlistment and slaving purposes. Small and innocuous, the golf-ball sized device can be left practically anywhere. A small inset screen allows the Neural Net to be programmed; it can react to specific levels of vibration (a person walking by, a brute bellow, etc.) and/or delay operation until a set amount of time has passed (up to 24 hours). Roll Tech + Think Machine to successful program a desired option.

The results are stunning. The character who trips an N-Cubed must roll Endurance + Vigor with a -4 penalty (except Ascorbites) or be stunned for 5 turns. Note that in the case of multi-use models, the same person may set the net off multiple times if the programmed conditions are repeated.

These devices come in three types: single use disposable, multi-use disposable (1-5 charges) and multi-use rechargeable (1-5 charges).

### Siv Drug

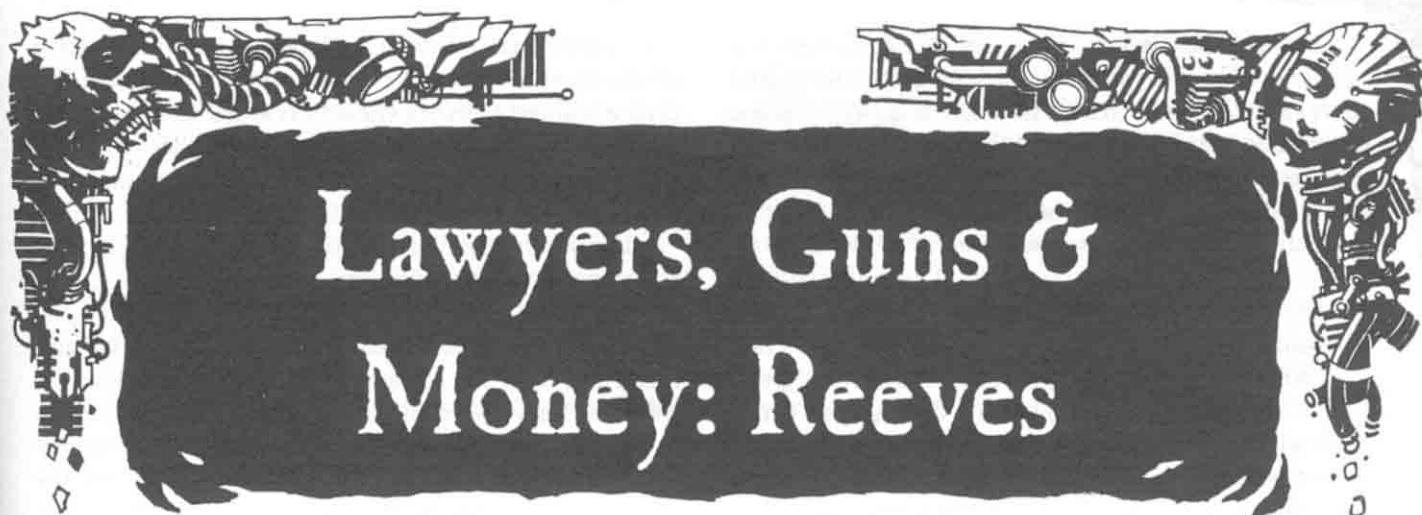
TL6

**Cost:** 1 Benefice, 300 firebirds per 6 tablets

This drug allows for hyper-consumption of water. It is often used by the Muster on slaves in transit. This compound drug causes muscle tissue to hold three times the normal amount of water, allowing slaves to be transported over long journeys with less maintenance. The water is only slowly eliminated from the body (by normal means). The noticeable effect of this drug is bloating, which can be easily spotted by anyone who is looking and is familiar with the drug's influence or knows the person. On the positive side, anyone using Siv Drug can travel in desertlike environs three times longer than normal.

Use of Siv can be harmful or fatal if the dosage is not correct. Administering the drug requires a successful Wits + Physick roll; a person's individual metabolism and weight determines the optimal number of pills (about two for an average 200 pound male in his 30s). Critical failure causes a fatal overdose. Death from Siv overdose is not pretty. The poisoned individual continues to hold water until they stretch and rupture. The only way to avoid such a fate is total fasting (or certain theurgies). There is little way for the person receiving the drug to know that an overdose has occurred until the bloating continues beyond what is expected; it is then usually too late.





# Lawyers, Guns & Money: Reeves

by Andrew Greenberg

Pieter Hardig looked at the huge pile of firebirds before him and cursed each and every coin. The thousands on the table did him little good just sitting there. A few short months ago, these coins had been working for Pieter, serving as loans to dozens of Shaprut nobles, merchants and Church leaders. Now all his debtors had paid off their loans, but no one was taking out new ones. Pieter had his own debts to pay off, and without a steady stream of payments, his operations were in serious jeopardy.

This was all that accursed woman's fault, he swore. Once Pieter had been the sole Reeve of any stature in these parts of Shaprut. Then Katlista Iribad had arrived with the full backing of powerful Reeves back on Leagueheim. She had contacted his old clients, giving whatever it took to get their business away from him. Some told him that she had offered far lower interest rates than he. Others hinted at promises of more than money. A few refused to meet his eye or answer his questions; they were seemingly afraid of the brewing conflict of which they had unwittingly become a part.

They knew, just as Pieter knew, that someone was making a concerted effort to ruin him. He no longer had the full backing of his guild, and he was little more than a freeman without that assurance and at the mercy of whichever group might try to co-opt him. Something had to happen, and happen now, for the many enemies he had earned over the years were already circling.

Katlista was only the most immediate aspect of the problem. Someone else in the guild must have seen him as weak — or dangerous. Pieter had long thought that his position on Shaprut kept him safe from most of the political machinations on Leagueheim, but it also kept him out of the loop as to which Reeves would disapprove of his activities. Perhaps his loans to Father Enahs and his missionaries to the Ukari upset someone. Maybe his new alliance with Baroness Hasima al-Malik, and handling her disagreements with House Decados, had ruffled feathers. More than likely, however, someone had discovered his ties to the Third Era, which

was a secret pro-democracy group.

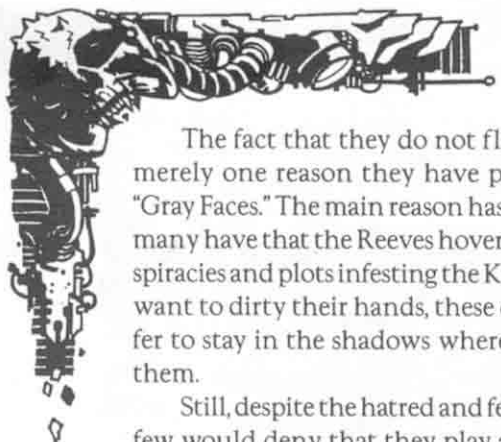
Pieter knew he was not the only Reeve in the group. While it was a small organization, it had branches on a number of planets, especially within al-Malik and Hawkwood space. Members concealed their involvement in the group, but Pieter had met a few Gray Faces at cell meetings on other worlds. The more Pieter pursued this line of thought, the more sure he became that this was at the heart of his problems. One of those Reeves must have been a plant, thus a spy for others in the guild.

He could not blame Katlista for this. She was no doubt just an ambitious young Reeve, probably the daughter of some established family who was being used by others within the guild to keep him from upsetting their plans. Maybe she was just a warning, and if Pieter backed off his democratic activities, they would call her off. Pieter shook his head. He could not risk this. Other Reeves were not the only ones who could hide their true motives. Pieter himself would have to delve deeply into his own guild. Neutralizing her would be the first step. Father Enahs had ties to the Inquisition and owed him a favor. Having the Avestites look at Katlista's business would be a sure way to use it up.

That would give Pieter the breathing room he needed. A trip to Criticorum might be in order. Meeting with the Reeve bankers and advocates there would give him a golden opportunity to find out who was after him. It would also provide him a chance to find — and eliminate — the spy in the Third Era.

An Eskatonic once quipped that the Reeves are undergoing the harshest penance in the Known Worlds. After all, the Pancreator has cursed them with two of the most hated roles: bankers and lawyers. The Reeves hardly act like stricken martyrs. Perhaps the richest of guilds, its leaders have one of the highest standards of living in the Known Worlds — the equivalent of the Second Republic's lower-middle class.





The fact that they do not flaunt this great wealth is merely one reason they have picked up the sobriquet "Gray Faces." The main reason has more to do with the fear many have that the Reeves hover behind most of the conspiracies and plots infesting the Known Worlds. They don't want to dirty their hands, these critics murmur, and prefer to stay in the shadows where their victims rarely see them.

Still, despite the hatred and fear so many have of them, few would deny that they play an important role. Their money builds cathedrals, helps keep spaceships flying, and allows nobles to feed their peasants during hard times. Their advocates have saved more than one neck from the gallows and sinner from the stake. It would seem that most people hate every Reeve except for the one with whom they work.

## History

The Reeves background is perhaps the most convoluted of all the guilds, not hidden by lies and untruths as much as it is by complexity and intricate details. No one can point to a single moment and say, "This is when the Reeves began." The guild has grown and changed innumerable times, merging with other groups, absorbing some and being absorbed by others, until there is no way to tell which of these were the original Reeves.

Those desperate to give the guild some starting date point to the first use of the name, used to denote Diaspora-era gentry forced from their lands by nobles and who resorted to space piracy in order to survive. Some of these pirates, like Mal O'Gracie and Robin Gryphon, created legends that live on to the present day. Current guild members dispute this origin, however, and say the Reeves' name comes from the merger of two Second Republic financial giants. Each proved unwilling to take on the other's name, and so they sought an entirely new one. Detractors say they opted for "Reeves" due to a common ancestry among the pirates, though the Reeves themselves say it comes from their roles as magistrates and sheriffs during the Diaspora.

## The Second Republic

Both of these companies grew out of the last days of the Diaspora, when those with money gathered to reunify humanity. The nobility, despite its military strength, found itself unable to stop the rise of the Second Republic. Those who tried found themselves isolated, as the wealthy merchants and capitalists co-opted their allies and bought other nobles and as much of the peasantry as they could. The creation of the Second Republic was primarily a bloodless event, begun on several worlds and then spread to others. World leaders found it both politically expedient and economically valuable to join the growing confederacy. By 3500, this growth was complete, and the Second Republic took its place in the heavens.

The increase in companies looking to take advantage of this new stability was nothing short of explosive. Everyone wanted a piece of the action, and it seemed as if no scheme was too wacky to succeed for a while. While the Second Republic went through its share of boom and bust cycles, it spent much more time booming than busting.

During these growth periods, many companies with a presence on one or two worlds expanded to others, either through aggressive salesmanship or mergers with pre-existing firms on those planets. The companies that later merged to form the companies that would someday become the Reeves specialized in bringing together various companies on different worlds to form whole new corporations. While dozens of firms specialized in this area, the ancestors of the Reeves proved especially adroit. Most of these ancestors, like Griffin and Sons or 2C, were family operations — a legacy that the Reeves embrace to this day.

While corporate mergers were their primary activities, other operations also attracted fame or notoriety. Money-lending, real estate transactions, and insurance are just some of these areas. Griffin and Sons also specialized in reconnecting families split up during the Diaspora, as well as dislocated refugees and newly freed slaves. 2C worked with bounty hunters tracking fugitives who fled from planet to planet. Their past connections to piracy faded into the mists of time as their new role in finances brought them legitimacy. They, and similar groups, began engaging in mergers just like the ones they had facilitated. The merger between GLOCOM and CK Ltd., which created Reeve Holdings, occurred in 3868, which was when the Second Republic was at its peak — and beginning its descent.

In those final days, the great corporations that had done so much to spread the Second Republic had ceased to do so. While their competition had once spurred growth, for good and ill, they now found stability in stasis a preference. They actively undermined competition and vehemently sought monopolies. When the welfare computers crashed and the nobles captured Byzantium Secundus, it was with a great deal of rejoicing by a public sick of the corporate powers. Of course, the public never expected to be disenfranchised or, more importantly, turned into serfs.

## The New Dark Ages

Nobles seized the massive manufacturing concerns, while others either hid their assets or found some accommodation with the new power structure. Many of the leading financiers took these routes as well, and more than a few helped fund the nobles' power grab and were eventually absorbed into the noble families. Reeve Holdings, on the other hand, found a new way to survive. When the Second Republic currency collapse wiped out most of the remaining finance companies, the Reeves had already converted much of their money into loans to the nobles who were beginning to squabble over what was left of the Sec-



ond Republic. While many of these nobles never repaid their loans, enough did to keep the Reeves running and independent; this is also where the Reeves reputation for aggressive collections came into being.

While some other corporations survived by converting to guilds, the Reeves survived by playing the nobles off of each other. The Reeves had access to a great deal of wealth, and no house wanted another to own them. By surviving the initial grab fest, the Reeves put themselves in the position to be a dominant corporation of the New Dark Ages.

Then they encountered a new and more implacable foe. The Universal Church had finally come to terms with the nobility and was looking for fresh sins to purge. Usury was an obvious one. The Reeves' reliance on think machines was another. The nobility did not interfere with the Church's attempts to crack down on the Reeves; in fact, many stopped paying off their loans in the hope that the Church would shut down their creditor for good. Isolated and under pressure, Reeve Holdings sought out the only allies it could — the guilds.

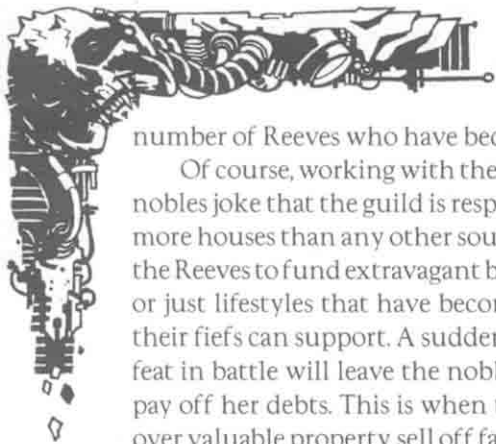
Initially contemptuous of these "faux corporations," the Reeves soon found that they needed such support. Adopting a hang-together-or-hang-separately attitude, the Reeves dropped "Holdings" from their name and became a guild of "associated promoters, advisors and facilitators." They were one of the founding members of the

Merchant League, and nobles soon found themselves even more obliged to make good on their outstanding debts.

The Reeves did manage early on to make temporary accommodations with the Church, aiding it in 4235 when the Church found itself caught between the nobility and the Avestites. Reeve moneys allowed the Church to send its own fleet to Pyre, and behind the scenes, Reeve scholars advised Church diplomats on how best to resolve the crisis. While the Avestites have never forgiven the Reeves, the Church backed off from criticizing the guild for a time, preferring to intercede to keep interest rates from becoming too burdensome. In the post-Emperor Wars time, that the Church now borrows money to build cathedrals and expand monasteries may have something to do with this concern.

The Reeves have used their growing respectability to fill more roles in the New Dark Ages. While they have become the main bankers, rivaled only by the Brother Battle order, they also fill the roles of advisors and advocates throughout the Known Worlds. By collecting on defaulted loans, they have also taken over small businesses and properties throughout the Known Worlds. Since trade is not their main concern, however, they usually sell these off as soon as possible. They have kept some, but most are distributed to friendly guild members and nobles — at a profit, of course. The number of leading guild members who have profited in this way may account for the large





number of Reeves who have become Leaguemeister.

Of course, working with the Reeves has its risks. Some nobles joke that the guild is responsible for the decline of more houses than any other source is. Nobles will turn to the Reeves to fund extravagant building programs, armies, or just lifestyles that have become more expensive than their fiefs can support. A sudden natural disaster or a defeat in battle will leave the noble without the money to pay off her debts. This is when the Reeves move in, take over valuable property, sell off family heirlooms and force the noble to disband expensive military units. They also extend new loans (at higher interest rates) to the house, and the spiral continues until the house has sunk into obscurity.

Thus, the nobles watch their association with the Reeves closely even as they see it grow. Most of the leading Dark Ages figures have used the services of a Reeves advisor, Vladimir being the best known exception to this rule. He went his own way at the same time that his enemies, especially the Hazat, began relying more and more on the guild. Since Vladimir's death, demand for Reeve advisors and advocates has grown even larger, and Emperor Alexius worked closely with the guild even before he became head of House Hawkwood.

## Reeves and Empire

Any major event leaves some people wondering just how much of a role the Reeves had in it, but nothing has inspired as many rumors as Alexius' rise to power. His Reeve advisors worked closely with him in his many diplomatic endeavors. Their bankers extended larger and larger loans to him during the Emperor Wars. Indeed, his purchase of the great Holy Terra armament find consolidated his power, and the Reeves provided the millions necessary for it — both in the form of firebirds and assurances of future firebirds.

Since Alexius' coronation, the Reeves have embarked on a massive lending program, funding the rebuilding of worlds crippled by war. Record numbers of nobles from across the Known Worlds have sought out loans to rebuild their fiefs, and they use these same fiefs to secure the loans. Scores of guild members are taking the opportunity provided by this unprecedented peace to expand their businesses, and the Reeves are funding this as well. Even the Church has gotten into the act by borrowing money at lower interest rates to rebuild the many religious centers destroyed in the conflict.

A few guild members, nobles and priests have begun to look upon this with dismay. Some Charioteers believe the Reeves own the deeds to more spaceships than they do. Nobles worry about what may happen if the Reeves begin foreclosing on the vast tracts of land that have become collateral for great loans. The priests feel concerned that the Reeves are becoming absentee landlords on a massive scale, controlling territory on many worlds, but with little concern for the lives and trials of those who

## Whither the Ships

If the Reeves were once pirates, then what happened to their pirate ships? Even if they were not pirates, they once had ships to handle their interstellar deals during the last days of the Diaspora and the dawn of the Second Republic. The common assumption is that they sold them off and used the profits to fund their early loans.

The Reeves maintain that they sold what few ships they did have and donated any armed ones to the League Fleet. Some people, especially within the League, doubt that any group as prudent as the Reeves would divest itself of all its armed craft. They believe some of the craft are still in use, either on special courier duties or making collections. More worrisome is the idea that the Reeves might have cached some for a future emergency. A hidden supply of high tech warships could be a major factor in any conflict.

live there.

Alexius himself has not borrowed much from the guild since becoming Emperor, but even his coffers have become stretched thin with the efforts of rebuilding an empire while paying off his existing debts. Plans to create many more firebirds have been frustrated, and the Reeves have begun pressuring him to give them control of the Imperial mint.

## Hierarchy

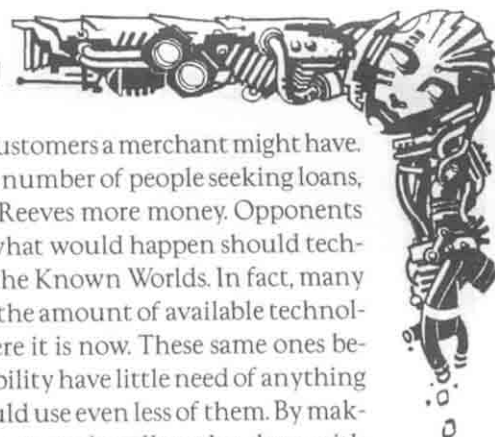
The leading Reeves do their best to keep a low profile even within the League. Even members of other guilds who regularly interact with the Gray Faces rarely meet the more powerful Reeves and deal instead with trusted underlings. A Charioteer may believe that the Reeve who loaned him 100,000 firebirds to buy a new ship must be a high muckety-muck within the guild, when, in fact, it is the grandchild of the person who actually controls the money.

The fact that so much of the guild is family-oriented makes this confusion even more pronounced. A character may know that Minamoto is a powerful figure in the guild but never realize that the Minamoto with whom she is dealing is the daughter of that notable. These family dynasties make up the heart of the guild, and several of them can trace their ancestry back to the Reeves' earliest days.

Indeed, many Reeves view these dynasties as the heart of the guild and create positions if there are more children than jobs. The flip side of this is that the Reeves actively discourage any descendants from leaving the fold. The guild goes to great extents to keep them in-house by offering money, responsibility and prime posts to those who express an interest in leaving. While some other







guilds say the Reeves use force to keep their kids in line, the Reeves will let their children go their own way, but only extremely grudgingly.

This means that most Reeve leaders have lived their entire lives within the influence of the guild. Their loyalty to the guild is extreme, though some worry that their loyalty to their families is even more so. Some of these families, like the Griffins and the Minamotos, have held power for generations and can trace their lineage longer than many nobles can. While the families rarely arrange marriages for their members, they do expect spouses and children to become part of the guild. They then train the children to become Reeve leaders, and they enlist the aid of the pedagogues guilds (see Minor Guilds) on a regular basis.

Even though some of these children may feel they are destined for leadership, advancement within the guild is fairly democratic. An apprentice serves under an experienced consul for at least five years before gaining commission as an associate. From then on, his promotions are determined by his peers. Groups of Reeves gather regularly in congresses to promote (or deny promotion) to those of lower ranks. Such gatherings are usually regional and provide an excellent chance to improve one's guild connections.

The higher level gatherings, such as the ones to promote Reeves to consul or dean level, are affairs involving representatives from a number of worlds. These congresses handle a wide variety of issues in a very civil and orderly fashion. Reeves from around the Known Worlds meet, go to a variety of conventions and diversions, and appear to be the best of friends.

These displays of camaraderie make the Reeves seem to be an extremely cohesive group, and that would be true were the guild not so splintered by its many internal squabbles. In fact, its critics would have even more reasons to complain if the group were not so divided; were they united, there is little they could not accomplish.

The most obvious area of disagreement (at least to those within the guild) is between those who would like to see a Third Republic come into being and those who support the status quo. Those with democratic leanings feel the Reeves could make far more money if the nobles were brought into line and the role of the Church decreased. Those who oppose such a move point to the falls of the First and Second Republics as proof positive that the common people cannot be trusted with suffrage. While they would like to see the Reeves role in governance increase, they see no reason to include anyone else in that equation.

A second area of disagreement, often falling along the same lines as that regarding democracy, has to do with the spread of technology. While the Church has made it clear who can handle the burdens of it and who cannot, the guilds have not always been in agreement. After all, selling a mechanical reaper to peasants would substantially

increase the number of customers a merchant might have. This would also raise the number of people seeking loans, which would make the Reeves more money. Opponents of this philosophy fear what would happen should technology spread through the Known Worlds. In fact, many Reeves would like to see the amount of available technology limited beyond where it is now. These same ones believe the Church and nobility have little need of anything beyond weapons and could use even less of them. By making the guilds the only group to handle technology, with the Reeves at their head, they would make the universe safer for everyone. This group especially opposes freemen, unaligned to any guild, with technological training.

A third division, and one of which most Reeves are unaware, consists of the growing "cult" of Mammon. While not a religious cult as most people know them, its adherents refer to it as such. Its followers hold that the acquisition of wealth and money are the highest goals and should be pursued with unwavering single-mindedness. Their goal: to buy the stars.

## Democrats

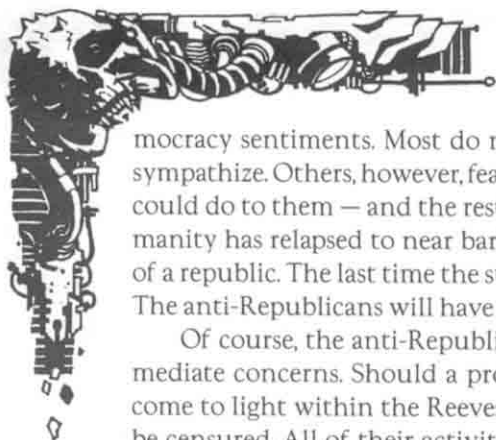
Those Reeves who harbor pro-Republican sentiments might be a minority, but they are a very active one. Whether motivated by idealism or a desire to make more money, they believe that spreading the franchise to more people would improve conditions for all. They hold that the problems with the Second Republic were either surmountable and that the nobles forced a fall that need not have happened, or that humans can learn from the past and avoid the mistakes of the previous republics.

These Reeves have gathered in small cells with like-minded individuals to promote their agenda. They understand that such a change is unlikely to occur during their lives. However, they do feel that they can make small changes that will not only improve things now but pave the way for bigger changes later.

Some of these cells have organized with others, and groups like the Third Era have been the result. The Third Era is a small organization of those who favor democracy. It began in Hawkwood space during the Emperor Wars and has spread to neighboring worlds. Composed primarily of guild members, its leaders know that any action it makes could be seen as illegal. Promoting the fall of the nobility may not appear as a crime in any legal texts, but it is a capital offense all the same. Thus, its members move slowly and pretend that the secret organization is only a fraternity where the debates sometimes get a little out of hand. Those who actually take action within the group, by printing banned texts or spreading literacy to serfs, do so secretly. They tell only other members about the Third Era that they are sure they can trust, and so far, the group's existence appears to have remained a secret.

## Anti-Republicans

Of course, most Reeves know that some of their fellows, especially the younger ones, are spreading pro-de-



mocracy sentiments. Most do not care or else privately sympathize. Others, however, fear what such a movement could do to them — and the rest of humanity. Twice humanity has relapsed to near barbarism after the collapse of a republic. The last time the suns began fading, as well. The anti-Republicans will have none of this.

Of course, the anti-Republicans also have more immediate concerns. Should a pro-democracy movement come to light within the Reeves, the entire guild would be censured. All of their activities would undergo scrutiny both from the nobility and the Church. The Reeves have earned a certain amount of freedom within which to act, and they do not want to lose it.

Finally, the anti-Republicans also have a philosophical underpinning for their concerns. They feel that the vast bulk of humanity is incapable of governing itself. They do not necessarily agree with the noble view — that such a position can only go to those born to rule — but they do not feel that commoners can handle such a responsibility. Governance belongs in the hands of those who have trained for it since birth. Others should just back off and let these experts handle things. That this group consists primarily of Reeve advisors and advocates does not bother the anti-Republicans at all.

## Mammonists

Founded shortly after Vladimir's death, this group began when Dean Gilles Feeman finally became disgusted with the way the nobles were handling themselves. Originally an advocate and councilor to House Li Halan, Feeman became convinced that the only accomplishment the nobles could pull off was to plunge humanity into an even worse level of barbarism. While Feeman cared little for what might happen to other people, he had no interest in being dragged down with them. As a result, he became a banker with the sole purpose of ensuring a greater standard of living for himself. His ultimate goal was to own everything, so that when everyone else collapsed into blackness, he could afford a new way to survive.

Feeman realized he could not do this alone. He began enlisting the aid of others that he felt were equally greedy. He began his tiny organization as a set of advisors for other bankers, providing insights on how to better conduct their business. His seminars dealt with becoming more dedicated to wealth, and he would provide innumerable ways for Reeves to concentrate on becoming richer. He would then approach those who seemed most committed to making money and make a special offer.

These select few would meet late at night, deep in the vaults of a rich ally. There Feeman would take them through the rites of Mammon. Feeman never presented Mammon as an actual entity, always stressing its role as a concept. The techniques and practices he taught his followers were primarily ways to enhance their concentration and dedication to accumulating wealth. Secrecy was always a priority, however, for their actions still smacked of

heresy, and the guild had already upset Temple Avesti.

The group continued even after Feeman's death, and despite occasional lows, it has become larger and larger. Its members are some of the richest Reeves, who all strive with unwavering determination to become even wealthier. It now consists of three levels of members, though the lower levels are not aware of the higher.

At the bottom are those Reeves who have joined as a way to expand their connections and influence within the guild. For them it is more like a lodge than a sect. The second level includes those who regularly practice the rituals as a way to improve their dedication and level of success. Their adherence often borders on fanaticism, and they usually progress rapidly through the guild. The final level of members remembers Feeman's original fears.

These Reeves believe humanity is destined for an inevitable decline into utter barbarism. They seek to ensure their own comfort, becoming richer and richer while secretly spreading their influence throughout the heavens. When humanity does slide down into the lower depths, they shall own everything and maintain their old standard of living. In addition, they will be as gods to the rest of humanity, forever far above their brethren.

## Responsibilities

Reeves expect their fellows to follow orders from higher ranking Reeves to the best of their abilities. Of course, if the Reeve believes an order is detrimental to the guild or himself, other Reeves expect him to quietly appeal to even higher ranking guild members who will order the first order rescinded. Thus, Reeves build up networks within the guild and learn quickly the fine art of diplomacy.

This training begins during childhood, when Reeves begin their apprenticeship. Those born into Reeve families generally begin their apprenticeships when they turn 11. They are immediately under the authority of the older apprentices and get stuck with the worst assignments — copying endless rows of numbers, running errands across town, and cleaning up after incontinent visitors. They learn to either assign these duties to younger apprentices or else get an older apprentice to give them something better to do.

When their five years are up, they approach the head of the office in which they have worked about becoming an associate. This is usually a formality, and it is practically unheard of for that request to be denied, or to be granted before five years have passed. As an associate, the Reeve is considered the equal of all other associates, though he is still well advised to follow the requests of older associates as well as the orders of their betters.

Associates generally carry out the legwork involved in Reeve business. They investigate the credit worthiness of borrowers, research old laws for advocates, handle paperwork too complicated for apprentices, and carry out the dirty work of collections, which for the most part, in-

## At-Large Reeves

Most Reeves get assigned a territory early in their careers and spend the rest of their lives making loans on Madoc or advising a promising Li Halan noble as he rises through the ranks. Some, however, have no such position. Known as at-large Reeves, these guild members work by assignment and go wherever their work takes them.

The most obvious examples of at-large Reeves are the special collections teams. Other Reeves call them in when a particular loan has gone into default and they see no way to get the money back. Special collections teams fly out and make raids to regain the owed money; they do this as quietly as possible. They almost always try to pin the blame for the raid on someone else, be it pirates or a competing house.

Another well-known kind of at-large Reeve is the advocate specialist. These advocates have made one kind of law their specialty and get called in on those kinds of questions. Some handle Church law primarily, and while most of their work might be on Holy Terra, doctrinal questions can occur anywhere. Other examples are renowned trial advocates, celebrities who can pick and choose their cases based on how interested they are in them.

The Reeves give other experts troubleshooting roles. Those who have proven themselves especially adroit at determining someone's credit worthiness get consulted on important questions. A few Reeves have become at-large investigators and determine not only credit worthiness, but also try to find the truth for advocates dealing with especially difficult cases or information for noble advisors. Calling them spies would be impolite but not especially wrong.

involve little actual physical work. Some associates, however, spend time on the special collections teams, where they undergo weapons training. They learn to infiltrate noble estates and guild complexes in order to remove anything of value that can go toward paying off bad debts.

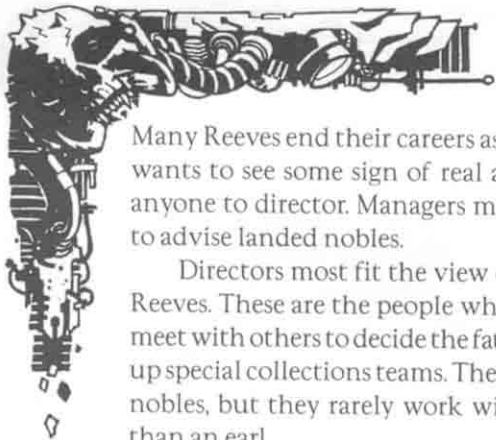
Associates who serve well can gain promotion to chief level, generally within 3 to 10 years of making associate. This can happen faster for especially promising Reeves, but if it takes longer, other Reeves have probably labeled him unfit for further advancement.

Chief is the lowest level at which a Reeve appears as an advocate before judicial tribunals or has the responsibility to approve or reject loans. Chiefs may also gain assignment to low-ranking nobles as their advisors.

At manager level, the Reeve takes over the day-to-day operations of an office — making sure it runs smoothly and efficiently. Reeves at this level handle a wide variety of duties, and should be as skilled in law as in finances.







Many Reeves end their careers as managers, and the guild wants to see some sign of real ability before promoting anyone to director. Managers may also earn assignments to advise landed nobles.

Directors most fit the view other people have of the Reeves. These are the people who handle most advocacy, meet with others to decide the fate of their loans, and head up special collections teams. They may remain advisors to nobles, but they rarely work with anyone of less status than an earl.

Directors who gain distinction or advance the guild's interests can become consuls. Consuls generally oversee Reeve operations for much of a planet. They begin to back off from the day-to-day handling of loans and court cases in order to handle big picture issues. Those consuls who advise nobles mainly deal with counts.

Gaining further promotion to dean requires some serious politicking. Deans usually have the responsibility for entire planets, all of their family's operations, or for significant aspects of guild business — like loans for new spaceship construction. Deans are also advisors to dukes and nobles of similar status. Their authority creates a great deal of competing jurisdictions, but by the time a Reeve has reached dean level, she is expected to know how to work well with others.

The leader of the entire guild is the senior dean. He sets guild policy and answers to the Leaguemeister. He is chosen from the ranks of the other deans. Since the Leaguemeister has been a Reeve for so many years, the position of senior dean is merely a figurehead post.

## Advancing in the Reeves

Since gaining rank in the Reeves is a relatively democratic process, guild members often feel that they must work harder than their fellows in the League to advance. There is no guaranteed route to the top. Reeves must make as many allies as they can, for one strong sponsor will not get them promoted in the face of widespread resistance.

Of course, coming from a prominent family helps a great deal in gaining a promotion. The character has a strong number of allies behind her automatically, all of whom support her. Additionally, other Reeves assume from habit that she has the proper background and training to handle any sort of assignment the guild may give her.

Most Reeves believe that doing one's job well is a sure route to advancement. Making loans that bring in money or providing skilled advocacy is a definite factor. Some ambitious Reeves go all out and make as many loans as they can or tackle the most difficult cases. These Reeves are surprised when less successful Reeves get promoted before them.

What these Reeves have not realized is that guild leaders prize discretion above talent. They want a guild that succeeds quietly, not flamboyantly. Those Reeves who insist on calling attention to themselves only hamper their

## Use of Titles

While the Reeves use the League-standard titles, they prefer not to call attention to their rank. A Reeve will rarely introduce himself as "Chief Locual," preferring to use his name, as in "Adam Locual." They believe that this method sets other people at ease and helps to avoid calling attention to themselves. Also, it means someone they are dealing with will not feel snubbed when dealing with an associate or a manager. They will, of course, tell someone their title, if asked.

advancement. After being passed over for promotion a few times, most Reeves realize this and learn to either act more subdued or else have others take public credit for their successes — while quietly spreading the word about how well they did. Those who can do this are believed to have mastered the secrets of diplomacy.

Furthermore, Reeve leaders tend to take an area's prosperity into account when deciding how well a Reeve has done. Reeves lucky enough to live where fortunes have risen are assumed to be doing their jobs well. Those who live in areas of decline are thought to be slacking off, regardless of how prominent or discreet they have been.

## Leading Families

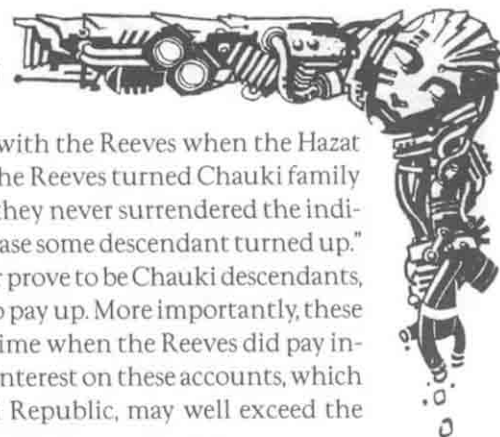
More than a score of families play key roles in the Reeves, but at least three stood out all through their years. They can trace their involvement with the guild back to the Second Republic at least, and their ancestors have all made their marks. Younger members of the family are urged to contribute to the luster of the family name.

### The Griffins

Their most distant ancestors founded Griffin and Sons, others turned it into one of the financial powerhouses of the Second Republic, and still some helped Reeves Holdings weather the fall into the Dark Ages. Now their descendants look to bring humanity back out of its tailspin. While their money-lending activities are extensive, they often make their marks as advocates and advisors. They have a close relationship with the Charioteers and have been advisors to innumerable al-Malik nobles.

### The Minamotos

The Minamotos do their best to appear as the grayest of the Gray Faces, but the family has gone through turbulent times. Powerful during the Second Republic, they were instrumental in setting up the plots and schemes that helped the corporation survive the Fall. They then saw their position eclipsed by other families and found their operations targeted by the Church. Following the reconciliation with the Church, the Minamotos began rebuilding their operations, only to see themselves stymied time and time again by outside factors. They have



managed to accumulate great wealth and prestige despite this bad luck, but it has marked the house. Its members tend to look on non-Reeves (and even on some Reeves) with disdain. They are some of the guilds' leading opponents of a new republic, and their current leader has gone to great lengths to begin limiting the amount of technology that is commonly available.

### The Winters

Perhaps the richest of Reeve families, the Winters have avoided any type of controversy in their slow acquisition of wealth. In fact, they are not known much outside of the League, and only a few know who they are within it. Their leader, Senior Dean Melissa Winters, is easily the most prominent of their members, but she has expressed interest in stepping down from her position to devote more time to running the League Bank. She only became senior when her predecessor, Tyrus Spear, became Leaguemeister. Stepping down as senior would also allow her to devote more time to her other passion — the study of Mammonism. The Winters family count themselves as some of Dean Feeman's earliest followers, and Dean Winters would like to spend more time contemplating its tenets.

## Reeve Operations

The Reeves' staple activities are banking, advocacy and advising, but they have their hands in a variety of areas.

### Banking

The League Bank began as a Reeve operation and is still run almost entirely by the guild. Banks operate primarily as safety deposit boxes in the 50th century — protecting peoples' valuables for a fee. As a general rule, the Reeves charge 5% of any deposit someone makes, and they require at least a 10 firebird deposit at a time. People can withdraw their money at any time just by presenting their contract, also known as scrip. Needless to say, the Reeves do not pay interest to their depositors, but their bank is perhaps the safest in the Known Worlds. Individual Reeve offices serve as collection and disbursement points, though only the most secure keep a lot of firebirds on hand.

Over the centuries, the Reeves have built up a huge amount of money in their vaults, and they loan this money out to anyone who needs it. Some of these accounts, like those for noble houses, date back for centuries, and a few even pre-date the Fall of the Second Republic. While some of this money is kept on its planet of origin, far more gets shipped back to Leagueheim for safe-keeping. This proved fortuitous during the earliest years of the collapse, as numerous depositors disappeared when their jump routes closed. The Reeves have kept their deposits on the books, just in case, but have gotten used to considering this money their own.

This has created a potential problem with the rediscovery of Iver. First of all, many members of House Chauki

had their own accounts with the Reeves when the Hazat wiped them out. While the Reeves turned Chauki family funds over to the Hazat, they never surrendered the individual accounts "just in case some descendant turned up." Should the nobles on Iver prove to be Chauki descendants, the Reeves would have to pay up. More importantly, these accounts date back to a time when the Reeves did pay interest. The accumulated interest on these accounts, which date back to the Second Republic, may well exceed the guild's net worth.

The guild has long feared just such an event, and it has done its best to discourage those looking for lost worlds. Almost no guild banker will fund such an expedition, and some powerful leaders have quietly pressured Emperor Alexius to reign in his Questing Knights. Alexius has yet to listen to them, however, and the guild leaders' fear about losing this wealth could lead them to take drastic steps.

### Money Lending

The basis of the Reeves' financial well-being comes from loans and securing debts. Their loans range from the very small (five or less firebirds to down-on-their-luck freemen) to the tremendous (the hundreds of millions in firebirds and loan securities given to Alexius, which proved instrumental in his winning the Emperor Wars).

This is not the sophisticated operation of the 20th century. Most loans are based on a personal knowledge of the debtor and her condition, not some impersonal credit sheet. Someone in need of a loan is well-advised to contact the Reeves ahead of time and create a relationship with whomever handles the process. Most decent-sized trading areas have one leading Reeve and a few apprentices. Bigger areas might have two, while the major cities on each planet might have a half dozen or more; though some of these would primarily be advocates (see below).

During the Emperor Wars the Reeves largest creditors were the Royal Houses, all of whom took out massive loans to fund their expanding militaries. Now they are trying to pay off their debts, and the other guilds have taken their place as the main source of new accounts. These guilds are taking this rare period of peace to expand their operations, and the Reeves now fund their ship construction, factory developments and slaver operations.

The Church has also become a significant borrower recently. Numerous cathedrals and monasteries suffered damage during the Emperor Wars. Nobles saw them as a prime way to turn a planet against its old rulers, and House Decados and Li Halan became especially adept at killing off old priests and putting their own supporters in their place. The Church, especially its more orthodox members, want to see these centers of worship rebuilt, and Church moneys are not always adequate. Bishops have taken to borrowing from the Reeves as a result and promised a cut of their collections for the next century — or longer.

Most loans have a set cost and term associated with



them. If a guild member borrows 100 firebirds today, he must repay 125 firebirds within six months. Others get secured by a specific asset: For instance, a noble might turn over the revenues from a lucrative mine until the loan is paid off. Reeves rarely leave the payment terms open. In those cases where they say the interest rate is 50% per year, to be paid back whenever possible, Reeves either have it backed up by some strong collateral, like a spaceship, or their goal is to drive someone so far into debt that she will always be in their service.

## Collections

The flip-side of making loans is the collections process, which is an even more dangerous activity in the 50th century than it was in the 20th. In addition to the natural reticence most people have in parting with their firebirds, the Reeves can rarely call on police or the courts to help them. After all, many of their debtors own the police and the people who make the laws.

Thus, the Reeves have made collections an important part of every apprentice's training. The most basic tactic is for the affected Reeve to refuse to make any further loans to someone until she pays off the current one. If that fails, the Reeve slanders the debtor's name to anyone who might care. If the courts are at all sympathetic, they will also bring suit. If the debtor still does not pay, the Reeve can ask other guilds to stop dealing with that person, though how well they comply with this depends on the

Reeve's influence.

If all of these efforts fail, the Reeves get serious. They either hire a collections team (also called pirates and bandits), or use their own, or ask for a special collections team from the guild. These teams go in, grab whatever is of value, plant evidence blaming someone else, and get out. They do not always shift the blame, however; there are definitely times they want everyone to know that it was the Reeves who got their money back.

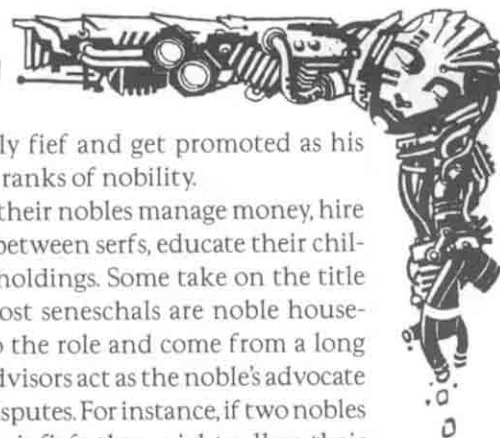
The Reeves do rent their teams out to other people, either for special needs or to train their own debt collectors. This lending usually happens when a noble has problems collecting taxes his serfs owe him. Training the tax collectors gives the Reeves three advantages: First, the collectors charge a pretty firebird for their training; secondly, it helps ensure that nobles can pay off their debts; finally, it means the noble qualifies for bigger loans in the future.

## Advocacy

A lesser known, but equally important side of the Reeves is its role in law and advocacy. A wide variety of courts fill the Known Worlds, and Reeves have a place in almost all of them.

The most common courts are the local magistrates, where peasants or freemen appointed by the local noble hand out justice as needed. Few of those called before such courts have the resources to afford an advocate, and most





of the magistrates would have no idea what to do if one showed up.

The next most common kind of court is the city court. Generally funded by wealthy cities that have purchased a degree of freedom from their noble rulers, these city courts try crimes and hear suits brought by their inhabitants. Reeves make occasional appearances here and often are their judges. Imperial courts have much in common with the city courts, but a committee of bureaucrats appoints the former's judges.

Ecclesiastical courts theoretically have jurisdiction everywhere, but, in practice, they only get used when a case involves the Church or no other laws cover a situation. The Church seems to have laws for everything. Anyone accused of a crime before these courts had best hope he has a Reeve on his side.

Where the Reeves do most of their work is before the regency (noble) and Imperial tribunals, which handle criminal and civil cases that cut across standard jurisdictions. The noble tribunals judge those wrongs performed by a noble of one house to another. Imperial tribunals study issues of trade and commerce involving more than one star system; most of these tribunals are called to handle a specific case and dissolve when they settle that case. For instance, if a Decados baronet discovered deeds that proved that his family controlled a fief run by the Li Halan, then a tribunal with nobles from both houses and a mediator from a neutral party (like the Church) would all gather to weigh the evidence. Either party might hire a Reeve to present its case.

Most Reeve advocates spend their careers before only a few courts. They get to know the judges and (when they exist) juries extremely well. All advocates emphasize that they would rather know the judge than the law, which does not necessarily mean that Reeves bribe the judges, though that does happen. It denotes instead that Reeves win based on their relationships with the judges and their knowledge of the judges' likes and dislikes.

Other advocates play a more dangerous game — traveling the stars and trying cases wherever they happen to be. These at-large advocates never fully know the intricacies of local politics and risk offending everyone if they are not careful. Laws are often questionable and judges have a great deal of leeway in deciding what they are. These advocates learn to combine a strong knowledge of legal principles, diplomatic customs, a keen mind and an ability to manipulate anyone. Note that Reeves will almost never try cases against one another. Only one side should have Reeve help, and if both sides have worked well with the guild, then the Reeves may pull out altogether.

## Advisors

Advocates also serve as advisors and negotiators and help nobles and guildmembers in their jobs while learning the secrets of the Known Worlds at the same time. A Reeve might begin working with a noble even before that

noble inherits the family fief and get promoted as his charge rises through the ranks of nobility.

Reeve advisors help their nobles manage money, hire workers, judge disputes between serfs, educate their children and manage their holdings. Some take on the title of seneschal, though most seneschals are noble householders who are born to the role and come from a long line of the same. These advisors act as the noble's advocate and negotiator in most disputes. For instance, if two nobles dispute the borders of their fiefs, they might call on their Reeves to study the issue and resolve it for them. Reeves could work for one or both of the parties, and they do their best to avoid charges that they are acting for the good of the guild over the interests of the nobles.

Nobles pay their advisors based on contracts they (or their house) negotiate with the guild. This contract usually includes a salary commensurate with the advisor's experience (anywhere from 20 to 50 firebirds a month), protection and room and board. Usually the Reeve has to give part of this to the guild, though the guild will sometimes subsidize the advisor if she is working with an especially important noble.

## Investments

While the bulk of Reeve loans work as previously described, with the guild getting a predetermined amount back for its money, others work as investments. Reeves give someone money in exchange for a permanent stake in whatever the money is going to. For instance, if an Engineer needs money to establish a new power generator on Pandemonium, the Reeves will give him the money in exchange for 25% of the money his station brings in. The loan is never paid off. For as long as the power station exists, the Reeves get their cut.

Other loans have turned into these investments when the debtor failed to pay the loan off in a timely manner. Thus, the Reeves have acquired an interest in a significant number of fiefs this way, with nobles forced to give them the income from key farms forever. Needless to say, this is not something the nobles like to discuss.

Despite the hefty chunk of change that the Reeves take, the investments' primary owners do gain some benefits. The Reeves keep a close eye on the operations and offer a steady stream of advice on ways to make them more profitable. They will also let other Reeves know about their interest in the property, and they will steer other business toward it. If the Reeves own part of an emerald mine, then a noble's advisor might recommend that he buy his gems from it.

The Reeves' biggest investment is the League Bank and its headquarters on Leagueheim. They have sunk millions into this institution and expanded its loan-making capabilities and collections efforts. It has returned a huge amount on their investment. They would prefer that it was purely a Reeve affair, but they had to sacrifice it in order to gain the support of the other guilds, who would

## A Piece of Every Firebird

The Reeves have developed innumerable other ways to make money. Some guild members joke that the Emperor should just give them a piece of every firebird he mints because the Reeves will get it anyway; if they negotiate a deal, they will want a piece of it. If they help a Scraver get permits to salvage at an old dump, they will want a percentage of any money the deal makes, as well as a fee. They may also insist that the Scraver take out a loan from them to ensure that he has the capital to complete the dig.

Reeves work together to keep this happening; they send their customers back and forth between them. If a borrower wants someone to look over a mortgage contract, the banker will recommend a Reeve advocate. The advocate might then suggest a construction firm in which the guild has an investment. If the building requires the approval of a local council, then the Reeve advocate will spread bribes to the guild's allies on that council. As far as the Gray Faces are concerned, there is no reason for them to not be involved in every deal.

not carry out boycotts for the Reeves if it remained solely in their hands. It is officially run by a board of directors from all five major guilds, but the Reeves handle its day-to-day operations and keep most of its profit.

With this glaring exception, the Reeves usually remain hidden investors and keep their involvement in business a secret. They fear that if people knew just how extensive their holdings were, then there would be a backlash inevitably. They may well be right.

## The Universities

Shortly after Vladimir's death, the Reeves made a sincere effort to expand their involvement in the field of education. While they rarely teach (except law), they often run the administration of schools and universities. The Reeves have developed a close relationship with the pedagogues guilds and try to work closely with it. Of course, the Reeves are sure the pedagogues need their guidance, while the pedagogues complain about the heavy-handed way Reeves try to control who and what they teach. A few Reeves have lived their entire lives within the academic environment; these include some of the Known Worlds' most prominent philosophers.

## The Media

Another area where the Reeves have invested a great deal of money is in printing presses, magic lantern studios, and what few broadcasters still remain. They sometimes manage these outright, and do their best to keep them from getting into trouble with local authorities. Young

Reeves, generally associates and apprentices, handle the day-to-day operations — reporting all the news that their chief sees fit to print.

## Town Criers

The Reeves have also started a network of town criers in urban areas. These town criers report news to people who cannot read or afford radios. Again, just what is news is left for the Reeves to decide. The Reeves began these operations shortly before the Emperor Wars, and the wars definitely slowed their development. Nobles objected to any news source that they did not control, and the Reeves either lost control of some or pulled them out of risky areas as a result. Reeve-controlled town criers operate primarily on Imperial and League worlds, though they hope to expand their operations now that the wars have ended.

## Politics

The Reeves have become intrinsically bound to politics of all types, and they are as likely to show up in Church disputes as in noble debates. They provide two of the key ingredients for politics — money and justification. They can come up with a plausible sounding excuse for anything anyone wants to do and provide the funds to make it happen.

The Reeves are also not afraid to use their investments to get their way. Does a Scraver need 1000 firebirds to expand a casino? Then she should support the Reeves at the next League election. Does a priest need money to cover up a scandal? Then the Reeves had better be able to count on his support from then on. The Reeves have ties to anyone who uses firebirds (which they believe means anyone of worth). Some also joke that this explains why the Gray Faces hate the Vagabond guild so much — they have no control of its members.

## Reeves of Note

### Dean Carmichael Yoster

The Reeves' primary fears when making their massive loans to Alexius in the last days of the Emperor Wars were how to collect should he default and what to do if he lost. Yoster, while an early opponent of the loans, had already changed sides to the pro-Alexius camp, but only grudgingly. And, when someone suggested that the League Fleet be prepared to collect the debt if need be, and another implied that the fleet could also ensure that Alexius not lose, Yoster became the man for the job. The Reeves did what arm twisting was necessary to make someone with little combat experience commander of one of the mightiest fleets in the Known Worlds.

Of course, Alexius did win and has been using both his personal holdings and the Imperial coffers to pay off much of what he owes. While the main reason Yoster became League Admiral has faded, his own desire to remain in charge has grown. He has come to enjoy the pageantry



and power of his position and begun to see the many possibilities of his force. The fleet's official responsibility is to keep the spaceways free for merchants, but the main reason it has grown as strong as it has is to keep the noble houses or Church from looking to grab what belongs to the League. Yoster is beginning to believe that the fleet does not have to just be a deterrent. Certain worlds would do well if they were more open to the guilds. Opening those markets can be done at the barrel of a gun as easily as anything else. Additionally, were Yoster not head of the fleet, someone else might be using those ships to look for lost worlds.

### Consul Derrick Luden

As Senior Dean Melissa Winters' Chief of Staff, Consul Luden has wealth and contacts throughout the Known Worlds. As Dean Winters' lover, he has her unwavering support and a position as heir apparent. Finally, as the leading Mammonist, he has a secret network of power brokers under his control. While Winters has generally used the Mammonist tenets to increase her wealth, Luden wants to move the sect closer to what he sees as its original purpose — control of the stars. To this end, he has started making deals with Muster slavers and funding secret expeditions to lost worlds in order to enslave their populations.

### Chief Darrell Barrows

Darrell Barrows has gained a significant amount of name recognition as an advocate. He might have even more had he not changed his name from Winters to Barrows as a youth. He keeps his association with the family a secret, much to their relief. Barrows has established himself as an at-large advocate and travels from world to world and fief to fief, defending peasants against charges from their nobles, or freemen from the guilds. He has upset more than his share of powerful people, not the least of which are Reeves, for Barrows seems to relish the chance to go head-to-head with more established advocates in court. This like of his has gotten him into some trouble, as has his prodigious drinking. Still, those he has helped have been more than glad to help him in return, and he has stayed one step ahead of his enemies.

### Dean Ivan Temple

Temple has seen his once thriving money-changing business falter with the Emperor's rise to power. Everyone is trading in firebirds, and his collection of sparklers and claws does him a minute amount of good. He has resigned himself to this, however, and has looked for new ways to increase his wealth. Temple has agitated long and hard to get the contract to run the Imperial mint, but he has yet to succeed. Temple is getting desperate and thinks that only a major scandal, like widespread firebird counterfeiting, will get him the control he desires. Temple has begun to put into motion a plan to bring that control about.

## Roleplaying Playing a Reeve

The concept of "Gray Faces" makes the Reeves appear as a unified organization of unimaginative conformists doing their best not to be noticed. While they certainly do their best to avoid being noticed, the Reeves are neither unified nor unimaginative. There is far more diversity within the guild than its enemies give it credit for.

The first thing a player should decide is whether or not his character is from a prominent family or has ties to one. Such an alliance increases his chance of success within the guild, but it also makes him beholden to the family's policies and interests. Next, he should consider what sort of role he plays. Most Reeves handle a flurry of different assignments, but some specialize. A few examples follow.

**Loan Enforcer:** Lacking notable family ties, the character has decided that his best bet is to serve all of the families by bringing in the money they are owed. He should surround himself with allies who are expert in a variety of areas, from social skills to firearms.

**Crusading Advocate:** The Known Worlds have their problems, but ways to work within the system do exist. The character travels from court to court, solving mysteries and preventing injustices. He had better have a skilled team around him, though, to research cases and prevent revenge from those whose plans he foils.

**Ardent Capitalist:** Armed with more money than common sense, the Reeve has decided to strike it rich. Innumerable schemes for accomplishing just that spew from his brain, and he will need to hire some talented help to make them work — or get him out of trouble when they fail.

**Unifier:** The character knows just how fractured the guild (and the League) is. Thus, his main goal is to increase unity and decrease tension. Good luck.

**Anti-Republican:** The masses are in no way ready for democracy and, frankly, they are quite incapable of handling it. Admittedly, things would be better if the Reeves ran everything, but the status quo is fine for now. This character works well as part of a noble's entourage.

**Mammonist:** Similar in many ways to the Ardent Capitalist, the main difference is that the Mammonist loses money rarely. His eyes are centered on that firebird, and he never changes the object of his affections.

**Advisor:** As part of a noble's entourage, the Reeve has pinned his success to the noble's. The better the lord does, the better the advisor does. The Reeve would prefer that this happen peacefully, but if things get dirty, then so be it.







## Gamemastering Reeves

The Reeves have a hand in almost everything, and even when they do not, they will either be blamed or make a bird somehow. The following are just a few examples of the dramas with which they become involved.

• **Burn the Kitchen to Get the Cook:** An enemy of a local Reeve has decided that the best way to get revenge is to destroy the local economy and bring the Reeve down with it. He burns warehouses, taints the water, spreads rumors of antinomy and brings in Scravers. The Reeve asks for the characters' help in stopping him. On the other hand, maybe the enemy hires the characters to do his dirty work.

• **Collateral Damage:** A routine job guarding a semi-valuable package has just gotten really dangerous. Its owner owes the Reeves money — a bunch of money. The Reeves decide that it is time to collect. Maybe they just pay the characters to get the package for them. Naw, that would be too easy. Of course, they could be setting the characters up to take the blame....

• **Day in Court:** Trumped up charges are not an everyday affair in the Known Worlds, but they do occur far too often. This time it has happened to one of the characters. Perhaps a local lord needs a scapegoat for a murder he committed. The characters not only have to find out what really happened, but they must present their evidence in

court — and live to do so.

• **Scholarly Pursuits:** While universities in the 50th century are hardly bastions of free thought, they do get to pursue lines of thinking that would get others in trouble. Antinomy is not one of these lines, however. The characters need to put a stop to these foul practices before the Inquisition finds out and puts an end to the entire university.

## Traits

### Blessings

Business Mind (2 pts: +2 Wits when money is involved)

Tight-lipped (2 pts: +2 Calm when being forced to divulge secrets)

Trustworthy (2 pts: +2 Empathy when getting someone to divulge secrets)

### Curse

Scheming (+2 pts: -2 Charm when money involved)

### Benefices

**Advocate** (1 pt): The character is recognized as an attorney and will find himself welcome in most courts. Hmm, maybe this one should be an Affliction....

**Creditor** (1-6 pts): Someone owes the character money and has not been able to pay it off. This means the charac-

ter can boss him around — within limits. The points equate to the debtor's rank. A knight would be one point while a duke would be six.

**Family Membership** (1-3 pts): This Benefice is identical to the Hong Membership Benefice given in the Charioteers chapter, except that it concerns Reeve families rather than Charioteer hongs.

## Afflictions

**Family Enemy** (1-3 pts): This Benefice is identical to the Hong Enemy Benefice given in the Charioteers chapter, except that it concerns Reeve families rather than Charioteer hongs.

## Learned Skills: Lores

**Finance:** This has more to do with the nasty rumors and gossip about money than it does with its accumulations. People with this skill either know how people make their money or how to find it out.

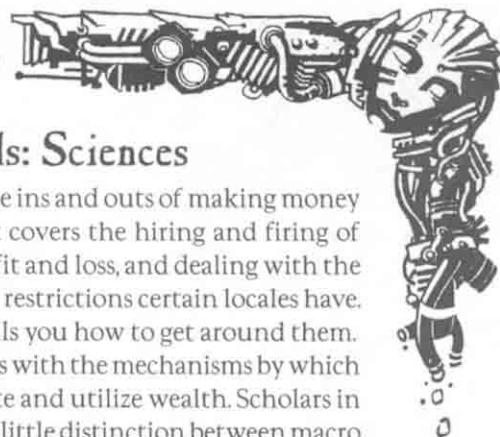
**Law:** This involves the various legal systems in the Known Worlds. It can also be bought as a specific type of law (Clerical Law, Courts Martial, etc.), which gives more specific information.

## Learned Skills: Sciences

**Business:** Involves the ins and outs of making money in the Known Worlds. It covers the hiring and firing of people, determining profit and loss, and dealing with the often arcane and archaic restrictions certain locales have. The Bureaucracy skill tells you how to get around them.

**Economics:** This deals with the mechanisms by which people and societies create and utilize wealth. Scholars in the Known Worlds make little distinction between macro and micro economics, and the worldly science has fallen into a sorry state. Still, those with some understanding of it will be able to understand their businesses better.

**Politics:** Political science has also fallen into displeasure, but understanding how and why people relate to the governments can give a character a distinct advantage. It can also send him into gales of laughter.









# Minor Guilds

by James Moore and Andrew Greenberg

Not all guild members get to travel between the stars, seeking adventure and profit wherever they may. In fact, most freemen, like most serfs, never leave the area of their birth, and spend their lives doing the exact same work their parents did. This is especially true of the many minor guilds, which make up so much of the League's membership. If your parents were Brewers, as were their parents before them, you can expect to be the same.

These minor guilds, while neither the most glamorous nor most profitable parts of the League, are its foundation. A world might be able to survive without the Muster taking its people away to become slaves, the Charioteers selling shoddy goods at high mark up, the Scravers extorting every talon they can, the Engineers offering

items no one can understand, or the Reeves charging interest on everything that is left. Try to take away its head Purger, however, and see how quickly the planet goes to shit. Filth would build up like mad, disease would run rampant, and everyone would have reason to fear the plague.

These minor guilds are not without their place in dramas. All sorts of surprises can appear in the sewers for the Purgers to deal with. Traveling Pedagogues run into all kinds of situations no one could have ever expected. Brewers often serve as community leaders, dealing with threats as diverse as conmen and noble quirks. The minor guilds serve an important role, one which their more successful brothers on Leagueheim ignore to their own detriment.

# Brewers

On most worlds, even the basic ingredients of life are suspect. Food is scarce and often tainted. Pollutants defile the air, causing diseases never before seen. Even water is suspect, bringing with it cholera, dysentery and worse. The average serf has no clue as to the basic elements of sanitary living. Thus the Brewers guild has grown, making drinks far healthier (and funner) than most water, until now it is one of the most respected of guilds.

The Brewers guild is representative of the minor guilds. While it has a hierarchy on Leagueheim and full membership in the League, its average member will never have any use for this structure. The common image of a Brewer — located in a small town, working his apprentices like mad in an endless quest for profit — is an accurate one. They may interact with other Brewers in nearby regions, but may never see a Brewer from another continent, much less another planet.

Many Brewers consider themselves little more than serfs, though they do know that they are superior. Some were serfs, sold by their family and their owning noble to an established Brewer who needed an apprentice. They interact regularly with their bonded neighbors, and often hold a place of honor and prestige in the community.

Of course, not all Brewers remain in some backwater village. Large cities often have competing Brewers selling different brands of beer, ale and liquor. Criticorum's Brewers ship their wares to all surrounding worlds, and have a strong reputation for selling quality goods. Some of these individual Brewers have giant operations under their control, involving hundreds of apprentices and dozens of chiefs.

The major function of this guild, other than to keep its members free from noble control, is to limit this sort of competition. Most communities only have one Brewer, and she can call on League resources if someone, be it a freeman, noble or priest, tries to set up an operation in her territory. The major exception to this comes in wine making, which is dominated by nobles and the Church due to the amount of land required to grow the grapes.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Strength, Endurance, Wits

**Natural Skills:** Impress, Observe, Vigor

**Learned Skills:** Artisan (Brewing), Empathy, Redemption (Craft)

**Blessings/Curse:** Heavy Drinker (2 pts: +2 Endurance against getting drunk), Well Liked (1 pt: +1 Charm)/Haughty (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around serfs)

**Benefice:** Riches (3 pts)

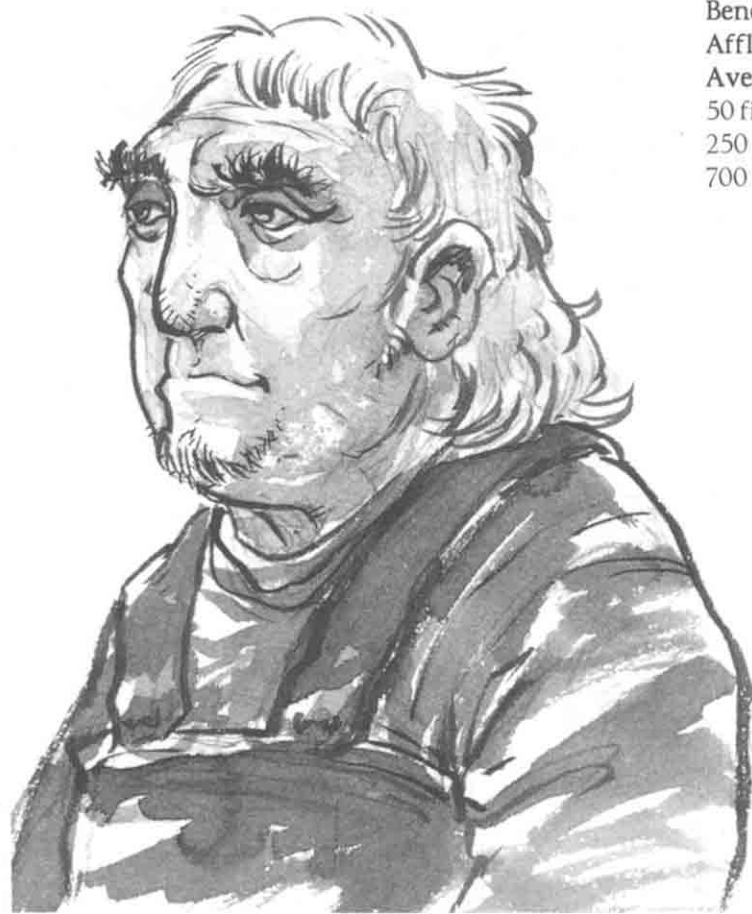
**Affliction:** Addiction: Alcohol (+2 pts)

**Average Yearly Income:**

50 firebirds for apprentice Brewers

250 firebirds for being the only Brewer in a small town

700 firebirds for being the leading Brewer in a city



# Bureaucrats

There are those who believe, wisely, that any job can be handled if you find the right person. Proof of this is found in the Bureaucrats. This small guild is perfectly content doing the work that anyone else could handle but that no one else wants to do. Have forms to fill out? Need to make a complete accounting of every transaction in the last five years for your superiors? Is inventory behind schedule, with the taskmaster coming tomorrow to make certain that everything is in place?

The Bureaucrats are waiting. Not only are they efficient, they're also discreet. If there is a paper to be pushed or filed, this guild is the one to call.

It amazes some of the nobles just how much one or two of these stiff, arrogant and often sullen souls can accomplish in only a few days, and the Church certainly considers them a blessing. Even the other guilds come to these paper pushers, half-jokingly referring to them as a "guild's guild." It's a simple fact of life: Records must be kept, paper work has to be done for anything to run smoothly, and no one in their right mind actually enjoys doing it. Truth be known, the Bureaucrats are at least half responsible for the success of the Merchant League. Without their special attention to detail, most of the guilds would have long since fallen into squabbling factions, arguing over misplaced wings or crests.

Nobody likes the Bureaucrats but everyone seems to need them. In some cases — when nobles decide it's time for the people to pay their taxes — many even fear them. It's the Bureaucrats who determine how much each person pays, and the empire has hired a large number of these boors to ensure that every firebird owed gets where it needs to in a timely manner. While Bureaucrats are not so world-wise as the Reeves and not nearly so likable (people skills are not considered high on their agenda), they get the job done.

Most importantly, they know when to keep their mouths shut. Where there's paperwork, secrets are all too often revealed. The guild charges well for its services, but it knows how to keep quiet — or rather, it knows how to make it seem like it can be trusted.

In actuality, the Bureaucrats have one of the most efficient gossip networks running. Most of the Leaguers know this, and the Scravers, Reeves and Muster are perfectly willing to pay extra to either get information or keep certain data secret. Nonetheless, Bureaucrats have a reputation for honesty that is second-to-none, and they are

trusted with legitimate government seals and signatures.

Unofficially, and for a small fee, they will validate or disprove the signatures of authorities from almost anywhere. They will also deliver signed, sealed documents from one location to another. The Bureaucrats are an important guild, and they know it. Fortunately, they haven't opted to do anything about the balance of power. With the dirt they have on everyone else, they could surely cause a great deal of chaos if they set their minds to it.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Introvert

**Natural skills:** Observe

**Learned skills:** Academia, Bureaucracy, Inquiry, Read (Urthish, Latin), Search, Think Machine

**Blessings/Curses:** Jaded (2 pts: +2 Calm in stressful situations)/ Scary (+2 pts: +2 Impress — everyone fears the tax man)

**Benefices:** Obligation to employer (2 pts)

**Average Salary (per year):**

50 firebirds for beginning Bureaucrats

100 firebirds for established Bureaucrats

200 firebirds for commanding Bureaucrats

300 firebirds for master Bureaucrats





# Gourmands

Civilizations rise and fall, but good cooking is eternal. At least in the eyes of the Gourmands. This guild is as specialized as they come, and they take their tasks very seriously. The Gourmands are not, contrary to the derogatory terms thrown their way from time to time, "cooks" or "chefs." Anyone calling them that is likely to receive a chilling glare in response. Gourmands are responsible for hiring the proper cooks and chefs; they are also responsible for making certain that everything coming close to the palette of their employers is of the very finest quality.

When nobles have parties, when visiting dignitaries come around, even when the lords and ladies wish a late-night snack, the Gourmands work to ensure that everything is perfect. More than caterers or decorators, the Gourmands work as managers of the kitchens and dining rooms of the nobles, the very wealthy and, in some cases, the Church.

Cooks and chefs tend to design meals to please their own taste buds. Gourmands make certain the desires and needs of their employers come first. It's the duty of the Gourmand to find the finest ingredients for the kitchen staff, to plan meals for visiting associates (an often challenging task, especially if the visitors are not human) and — most importantly — that the food be safe to eat.

The most skilled Gourmands are also highly trained to detect poisons in the foods of their employers and to test every course of food sampled by the same. Assassination is an old game and poison has always been a preferred method when secrecy is desired.

The Gourmands are adept at detecting poisons with their tongues and, in some cases, with think machines that can indicate when rare toxins are employed.

Poisons are often very insidious, designed to work in several parts: Gourmands are trained to know the vital components of these deadly brews for what they are. More than one noble owes a life-debt to the Gourmands. However, more than one Gourmand's career was cut short early by serving a

particularly hated noble: One can only build up so much poison in one's system before it takes its toll. Indeed, for this reason, the guild requires that employers pay a stipend to stock a hefty supply of antitoxins of all varieties.

Beyond dealing with deadly dishes, the Gourmands must also have a strong knowledge of the exotic foods brought to a noble's house. Off-world succulent fruits and meats are often dangerous, not due to their physical make-ups but because of the bacteria or parasites they carry. Several species of microscopic insects and larvae are responsible for the deaths of hundreds who simply didn't know any better. The fruit was fine, but the infections didn't sit well. Properly trained Gourmands don't come cheaply: Too often a less expensive apprentice doesn't bring the appropriate skills to the job and ends up either ruining a party with the wrong selections or rotting in his grave because he didn't notice the bug or toxin that meant his downfall and the death of his employer.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Perception, Tech

**Natural skills:** Charm, Observe

**Learned skills:** Artisan (Catering, Cooking), Etiquette, Remedy, Science (Toxicology), Search, Think Machine

**Blessings/Curses:** Keen Taste (2 pts: +2 Perception with taste only)/ Fastidious (+2 pts: -2 Calm in chaotic social situations)

**Benefices:** Well-Traveled, Think Machine

**Average salary (per year):**

50 firebirds for beginning Gourmands\*

150 firebirds for established Gourmands\*

300 firebirds for master Gourmands\*

\*Doubled for food tasters

## Learned Skill: Artisan (Catering)

Catering involves far more than merely the ability to cook. Caterers are responsible for hiring entertainment, arranging the decorations for a room, the seating arrangements, and the smooth delivery of all meal courses to all guests at a function. A poorly catered affair will reflect badly on the noble for whom the caterer works, and that can lead to fates far worse than merely joining the unemployed.

## Learned Skill: Artisan (Cooking)

Cooking involves the proper preparation and presentation of foods ranging from simple roast beast to pastries delicate enough to melt on contact with the tongue and flavorful enough to be remembered favorably for years to come. Many apprentice cooks specialize in baked goods or meat preparations, but master cooks, also known as chefs, are expected to understand the proper preparation of any conceivable meal.



# The Oubliette

Madness often seems inescapable. Since the very moment when the suns began to fade, more and more people have begun to fear that the end is near, and the comforts of the Church are not enough for many of the lost souls in the Known Worlds. On many worlds, madness means death. There are too many who look upon the ravings of the insane as a sign of demonic possession – and in some cases, they're right to do so. Those whose minds couldn't hold up to the pressures of their lives have found themselves burned alive or hanging from the business end of a noose.

But in the larger cities, where civilization is more than just a word, the Oubliette is prepared to tend to the needs of the mind-crazed. The Oubliette is a growing guild, one that specializes in the treatment of those who've succumbed to their fears. Many of the mind-physicks working for the Oubliette are trying to rediscover the lost art of healing fragmented minds, but a few already understand the workings of that most complex organ. The sane-houses run by the Oubliette are one part facility for healing and four parts experimental labs for the study of insanity and its root causes. Frankly, most of their methods are on par with those used by the Inquisition. The abilities of the Oubliette are crude and dangerous to the average patients; only paying customers are saved from the worst sorts of experimentation.

The Oubliette has two types of clients: those who pay and receive treatment, and those who are used as guinea pigs. The wealthier the client, the more carefully the patient is handled. There are no government subsidies for the Oubliette. What moneys this guild makes comes from the treatment of nobles and wealthy patrons who see the benefit of the sane-houses in treating the deranged – officially, at least. More than a few patients who've come to the Oubliette were fully functional members of society when they were brought to the doctors. Some are purchased through the Muster and some are left with the Oubliette as a way of removing a potential threat to somebody in power. Sometimes it's best to leave an enemy alive, especially if too many questions might be asked about his death. But the madness that is infecting the Known Worlds since the suns began to lose their glow is accepted by most, and even those who question it often don't wish to peer into the darkness of the Oubliette for fear of what they might see. A family member who is murdered is a cause for revenge; a relative who goes insane is a source of embarrassment.

The mind-physicks have learned many surprising things about pleasure, pain and their impact on the human psyche. Experiments with electricity, various chemical compounds and certain plants have also revealed an amazing depth to the human mind. Only by using the

sane and the insane alike can safe comparisons be made. For that reason alone, the Oubliette accepts the "gifts" they receive.

The Oubliette actually does good in some cases, but only for those with the money to afford proper treatment. The numbers of peasants and poor who never come out of the sane-houses alive are staggering, and more than any noble would like to admit.

The Oubliette does dangerous work. Several of the mind-physicks have succumbed to the very ailments they try to treat. There are those patients who speak of the things dwelling in the darkness between the stars, and the words they speak are both compelling and terrifying. These "dark minds" are a problem the Oubliette is trying hard to understand, but there is some evidence that what they speak of is beyond mortal comprehension.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Tech, Ego

**Natural skills:** Charm or Impress, Observe, Vigor

**Learned skills:** Academia, Empathy, Focus, Inquiry, Lore (Mind), Physick, Read Urthish, Science (Psychology), Stoic Mind, Torture

**Blessings/Curses:** Analyst (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when interviewing someone)/ Righteous (+2 pts: -2 Calm when judgment questioned)

**Benefices:** Cloistered, Refuge

**Average salary (per year):**

50 firebirds for beginning Mind-Physicks

100 firebirds for experienced Mind-Physicks

200 firebirds for master Mind-Physicks

400 firebirds for successful Mind-Healers



# Pedagogues

The pedagogues make up not one but innumerable guilds of teachers, all with their own specialties. Their differences are not clearly defined, however. They are not divided up by subject, as in an alien languages guild or life sciences guild. Instead they organize based on who their students are. For instance, members of the Governess' guild, which instructs and cares for the young children of nobles, have to teach basic math, literacy and manners, as well as knowing first aid. The Nannies guild, which rears the children of rich merchants, has to ensure that its members know the same skills, but the two argue bitterly over which is better.

The higher the level of education provided, the more specific the subjects the guild teaches become, but even at the highest level, pedagogues must know a variety of subjects. For instance, Lecturers, who teach university instructors, have to have a basic knowledge of many subjects. The Proctors guild, which originally helped other guilds test prospective apprentices, has grown to include all aspects of administering to students and other pedagogues, and is especially powerful at the Academy Interrata. Of course, the best known pedagogues, the Tutors, often traveling from place to place teaching whoever they can. Thus they

have to be able to at least pretend to know something about everything.

The Tutors are both the largest pedagogues guild and the most watched. Its members roam the known worlds, seeking positions with noble families or rich merchants to train their children. Some tutors have used their posts to great advantage, as in the case of Conlokasis, who went from teaching Li Halan youth to becoming a key advisor to Duke Kamatari Li Halan, Prince Flavius's granduncle. Others have used their authority to less noble aims, robbing and even kidnapping their charges or teaching forbidden doctrines.

As a result, both the League and the Church keep an eye on the guild, responding to reports of troubles as quickly as possible. Right before the Emperor Wars began, the Church had begun insisting that it needed to sanction all Tutors. The outbreak of war turned its attention elsewhere, but with peace the Church may well renew its demands.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Tech, Extrovert, Calm

**Natural Skills:** Dodge, Impress, Observe

**Learned Skills:** Academia, Empathy, Inquiry, Lore, Remedy, Sciences, Social (Oratory), Social (Teaching), Speak (Latin)

**Blessing/Curse:** Authoritative (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when place in command of others)/ Disrespectful (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around authority figures)

**Benefices:** Gossip Network, Passage Contract, Secrets, Well Traveled

**Afflictions:** Cloistered, Obligation

**Average Yearly Income:**

75 firebirds for teaching young children

250 firebirds for having a post at an established institution

500 firebirds for being an established instructor at the Academy Interrata





## Promoters (Shills)

Even in the Known Worlds, where literacy is low and mass communications at a minimum, there is a demand for those who can manipulate public opinion. Savvy nobles want to maintain a positive image in their serfs' eyes, merchants want to create a demand for their products and even priests like to see their doctrines espoused by commoners. Many try to affect public relations on their own. Smarter ones go to the Promoters guild and find somebody who can do it right.

The Promoters guild rose to prominence shortly after Emperor Vladimir's assassination, when various nobles began pressing the case to make themselves regent. Several early regents ensured their success by hiring promoters to lobby other nobles and present them in the best light. While not all regents used them, enough did to establish the guild's reputation.

Now there are a number of Promoters on every planet, and they shill for everything from trade goods to causes (alien rights, free trade) to individuals (merchants running for League office, nobles proposing matrimony). It is not uncommon for members of this guild to be on opposite sides of an issue, and spend as much time bad mouthing each other as supporting their own side. Indeed, they view such situations as chances to improve their status within the guild, and will trumpet their successes for months on end.

Promoters tend to focus on what passes for mass media in the Known Worlds, but they also utilize rumor campaigns and bribes to accomplish much of their agenda. For instance, a Promoter hired to improve Count Vlad Decados's reputation before a visit by a prospective bride will pay town criers to spread news of some glowing accomplishment (true or not), hire a team to threaten his worst detractors, bribe a priest to use the count as a positive example in a sermon, donate money in the count's name to some major cause, convince a higher ranking noble to stand next to the count at a party, and even ask the count to stop feeding serfs to his pet water dragons — though the last example is the least likely.

Most of these assignments are short-term contracts, generally lasting less than a year. The Shill gets paid a set fee, has his expenses covered by the contractor, and usually arranges for a bonus based on how successful the promotions are. What the Shills really hope for, however, are indefinite contracts to promote some person or product for the rest of their lives. These are rare but extremely valuable, and sometimes get passed from parent to child for generations.

Emperor Alexius, while a natural client for the Promoters guild, does not use its services. He has contracted with the Masque (see the **Fading Suns Players Companion**) to spread tales of his glorious accomplishments. The Promoters worry that this method might catch on, and some have threatened to ruin the careers of performers who do such shows. The Merchant League has yet to decide if the Masque is indeed interfering with another guild, but the political pressures are mounting.

### Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Extrovert, Passion

**Natural Skills:** Charm, Impress

**Learned Skills:** Inquiry, Knavery, Local Lore, Social (Oratory), Streetwise

**Blessing/Curse:** Born Huckster (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when promoting something)/ Sleazy (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert getting someone to trust you)

**Benefice:** Gossip Network (more to spread information than to receive it)

**Average Yearly Income:**

50 firebirds for an assistant Promoter (who handles the dirty work)

200 firebirds for a Promoter working from contract to contract

500 firebirds for a Promoter with a number of long-term contracts



# Purgers

Some scholars theorize that cities are inherently filthy places, and that no matter what kind of a priority civic leaders put on an area's cleanliness, their community will always accumulate more waste than it can handle. The Purgers count on this fact. Whether hauling scraps from a noble's castle, trudging through filthy sewers or shipping toxic wastes from one contaminated zone to another, the Purgers make their wealth off of society's leavings.

The stereotypical image of a Purger is of a broken-down, foul individual leading around an even more broken-down and foul brute cart, calling for people to bring out their trash. This is only one of the guild's duties, however. Waste disposal systems must stay operational, radioactive and chemical wastes need to disappear, and someone has to run the recycling plant on those rare planets that actually still have one.

Most of these efforts get paid from a city's tax coffers, though others (especially toxic waste disposal) are funded by specific guilds or nobles. The Purgers guild on each planet handles specific contracts for that planet and its inhabitants, but there is little in the way of interaction between Purgers on different planets. While the guild has an official dean on Byzantium Secundus, he has little influence over the rest of the Purgers.

This is partly because of the low status Purgers have

both on their home worlds and within the League. The Charioteers prefer to not take them from world to world, fearing that they would drive off other customers. On planet, Purgers generally have little interaction with the rest of the population, which views them with a mix of distrust and disgust. After all, the Purgers do not just dispose of the trash. They go through it removing anything of value or interest.

Thus the Scravers are the only major guild to deal with them on a regular basis, seeking both useful items and useful information. Certain Scraver leaders have tried to incorporate the Purgers into their own structure, but without success. Not only do the Purgers object to losing their independence, but many Scravers find the idea objectionable. After all, on certain worlds, especially within Li Halan space, the Purgers are not allowed to mix with other people, except while carrying out their official duties.

The Purgers probably suffer the worst from the Li Halan caste system. While they make a substantial amount of money in removing trash and selling anything of value they may find, they can only deal with other people through official Church intermediaries. Purgers on Kish and Icon are especially well known as being in-bred and odd. They sometimes use their wealth to ferry in new blood from off-planet, but as a general rule they can only deal with one another.

This is not the case on every world, however. On Byzantium Secundus, for instance, the Purgers are respected associates of the Authority, the planet's leading guild. The Istakhr Purgers recently opened a branch on Stigmata, removing wastes generated by the Stigmata Garrison — and studying all trash for any signs of Symbiot infestation. Symbiot spores have already claimed the lives of a few Purgers, but the Emperor pays them well to remove this most noxious of refuse. Where the Purgers have been less successful, however, is in spreading their influence to the Vau worlds. The Vau take care of their own trash.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Strength, Endurance, Perception

**Natural Skills:** Observe, Vigor

**Learned Skills:** Knavery, Local Lore, Remedy, Search, Stoic Body, Streetwise, Survival

**Curse:** Quasimodo (+2 pts: -2 Passion when seducing others)

**Benefice:** Secrets

**Affliction:** Outcast (+1 pt)

**Average Yearly Income:**

50 firebirds for apprentice Purgers

100 firebirds for Purgers with their own route

500 firebirds for Purgers with major contracts



# Stewards

Many freeman have wealth but yearn for social standing or at least connections in high society. But they inevitably fumble at such affairs due to poor speech, posture, dress or opinions. What to do? Hire the Stewards to teach you how to be upper class! These men and women keep up-to-date on the latest styles, trends and gossip, and pass it along to their clients. Plan on selling Shaprut wine to nobles? Have a steward teach you the ins and outs of noble parties and celebrations.

Of course, one of the biggest faux pas you can make is to let the nobles know that your style came from a Steward. Nobles look down on Stewards and their students as pretenders, aping the manners of their betters. Nobles might send some of their minor householders to the Stewards, hoping to improve a lackey's deportment, but only because they would never expect that servant to be nearly as refined as they.

Still, someone needing to deal with the better class of society has little option in the matter. It is either the Stewards or nothing. As a result, the Stewards live in an elegant sort of no-man's land — too cultured to mix with the common rabble and too low-born to mix with nobility. Their membership in the League is reluctant but necessary. Most of their clients are merchants (generally Charioteers) and becoming a guild was the only way the Stewards could ensure that their lucrative positions would not be usurped by guild-owned tutors. As part of the League, they insist that other guilds avoid teaching etiquette to their members.

Of course, the Stewards have to justify this monopoly, and they do so by staying aware of every trend in noble manners. While House Torensen might preach about the eternal nature of good conduct, the Stewards make their money by teaching not only the basics but by providing regular updates on what has changed. Are pigtails the current rage among men? Should women wear mink or Cadizian mirhem? Ask a Steward.

The lengths to which Stewards go to become the first to learn these tidbits are legendary. Since they are not invited to the noble events where such matters get determined, they must find alternate sources of information. Bribing servants and planting bugs at parties are just the beginning. Stories of Stewards found hidden under tables at dinner parties or caught taking photos from trees seem to crop up every year. Still, Stewards who know what is hot are always in demand.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Perception, Calm

**Natural Skills:** Charm, Impress, Observe, Sneak

**Learned Skills:** Academia, Arts, Etiquette, Read, Social (Acting)

**Blessing/Curse:** Gracious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert with guests)/Insecure (+2 pts: -2 Ego around social betters)

**Benefices:** Secrets, Gossip Network

**Average Yearly Income:**

100 firebirds for a beginning tutor

200 firebirds for a regularly employed Steward

400 firebirds for a Steward who always knows what's new





# Wordwrights

In any age, there are people who love a good scandal. Most must satisfy themselves with the gossip of their friends and neighbors, or the whispered rumors from their workplaces. But the highest classes have a special treat: the written word and published book. The privileged not only have older books to enjoy (some outlawed by the Church); many find their secret delights in the biographical adventures of their peers. It's a fairly common practice among the upper classes (noble and guildsman alike) to have one's notes of travels and adventures printed and bound as a gift to friends. Perhaps the most scandalous of these tomes include *Lady Amelia's Bedroom*, *The Great Gargoyle Hunt*, and the recent *Armstrong: My Time Among The Barbarian Worlds*. All three of these books, and many others like them, hold a great deal of truth between their pages. They are, after all, autobiographies — scandalous books filled with sexual deviation, murder and mayhem; adventures enough to satisfy a dozen people. Each was written by a noble and each is a thinly disguised work involving that noble's past. Without the changes to names and places, each would likely result in an unpleasant investigation by the Church.

Beyond that, however, each has one other thing in common: It was actually written by a Wordwright. The written language is a skill few in the present times have mastered. In order to avoid looking like an imbecile, many of the wealthier and more infamous authors go to the Wordwrights for a little "polishing" of their otherwise exceedingly mundane lives.

The Wordwrights are skilled craftsmen, able to turn the longest stretch of boring text into something worth noticing and enjoying. Few who read the adventures of Armstrong (said chronicles now in their seventh volume) realize that these tales are written from notes about the life of Lord Andreas Hawkwood.

now retired from the harsher political games and mostly satisfied to sit in his den writing about his past, before the empire was finally rebuilt. All they know for certain is that whoever Armstrong really is, his life has been incredibly interesting. And the secrets revealed about other nobles — their identities also hidden under pseudonyms — are delightfully dangerous. What also remains unknown is how amazingly boring the man's life actually is; without the Wordwrights, the adventures of Armstrong would best be used to light a fire on a chilly night. Scandals of every sort are laid bare for all to see, but done so safely. More direct autobiographies are also revealed in this manner: factual details of battles won and lost and explorations to forgotten worlds are treasured among the privileged. But it's those whose names have been changed that always catch the most attention.

What the Wordwrights do is not only a source of scandal, it's also a dangerous task. Should the wrong people in the Church ever find out about the truth of these tales, they would be most eager to get the real names and dates for these adventures. The sexual sins committed by Amelia alone would all but ensure the downfall of her house and the punishment of the Wordwright responsible would be almost as harsh.

For that reason alone, the Wordwrights are very discreet. That most of them are also scribes of the Church, who find that writing down these tales of passion and danger is far more interesting than transcribing yet another of their superior's interviews with the local magistrate, is the best kept secret of all. Discretion is more than a promise for the Wordwrights. It's a solemn vow, and one the guild intends to keep if only to ensure that the Inquisition is kept a safe distance away. It is not only nobles who come to the Wordwrights; just recently released is a book that has already been marked for destruction wherever it's found: *Blood On My Sword: Confessions Of A Brother Battle* is rapidly reaching the equivalent of best-seller status.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Wits, Passion or Calm, Extrovert or Introvert

**Natural skills:** Observe

**Learned skills:** Academia, Artisan (Writing), Inquiry, Read Urthish

**Blessings:** Shrewd (2 pts: +2 Wits against attempts to fast-talk)

**Benefices:** Secrets

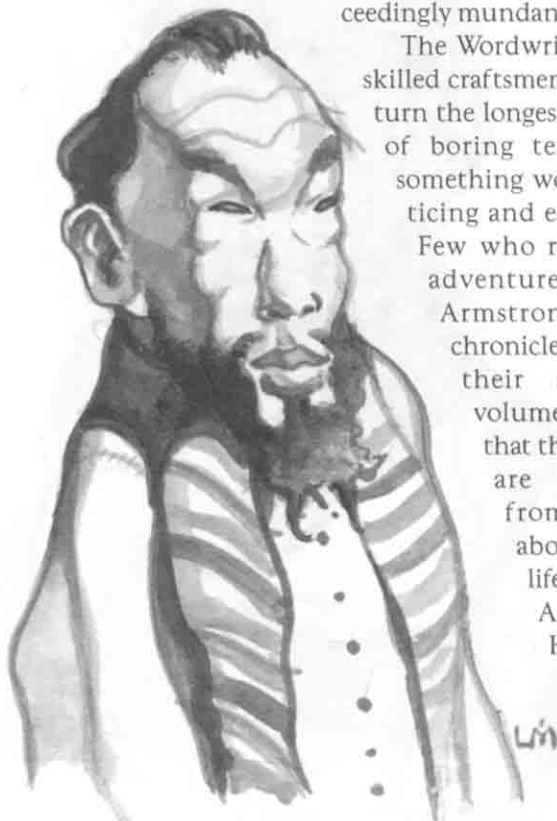
**Average Salary (per year):**

75 firebirds for beginning writers

150 firebirds for established yarn spinners

225 firebirds for skilled tale tellers

300 firebirds for master storytellers



# Wranglers

Wranglers are as close to old-fashioned Urth cowboys as you're likely to see. Many of these folks spend months on end tending to herds of brutes or nurturing the delicate sea creatures some nobles find preferable as pets or food.

Seasoned Wranglers can easily tell if a brute's been eating the wrong sorts of grains or whether there's a risk of the animals stampeding as an Avestite can tell if you've been sinning.

Wranglers watch over the herds of riding beasts and food stocks, and they also train them and are adept at minor medical surgeries, such as musk-sac removal for brutes and shoeing the riding beasts. Wranglers work long hard hours on the range, often living off the land for months at a time, and they are usually good at predicting the weather and determining which forms of local fauna are edible for themselves and for their herds. Plants or animals that look like their harmless cousins but that hide nasty surprises few fool Wranglers.

Wranglers don't just sit on the range. They are also responsible for restocking the nobles' private preserves, training the riding beasts for leisure and war alike, and caring for the beasts in the nobles' stables. Hitching animals to wagons and training them to perform any number of tasks are all a part of the day-to-day life of a Wrangler. They are considered more "hands on" than the noble house Trusnikron, if somewhat less adept (although the guild has produced master beast handlers said to rival the noble house's best).

Being a Wrangler requires few skills taught in books — but don't make the mistake of thinking they're ignorant just because most are illiterate. Wranglers are skilled craftsmen in their own right, trained in animal husbandry, hunting, herding and even the manufacture of saddles and harnesses. Long lines of family names are associated with the Wranglers; those with the longest histories are usually the best paid. The Wranglers aren't quite as consolidated as most guilds; they're more of an association of convenience than a formal gathering for the protection of Wranglers everywhere. There is a definite pecking order, and the chances of advancement aren't the best, unless a noble family or a merchant with money to spare is opening a new ranch. Still, the pay is good, and the likelihood of running out of work is slim, unless a disaster, natural or otherwise, should befall the stead where a Wrangler is employed. The heads of families are normally

the *de facto* leaders of the local Wranglers. While each worker is paid enough to live on, the head of the family in these cases normally receives the lion's share of the money, which are used not only to tend to his own needs, but those of the entire family.

Most Wranglers tend to keep to their own, which is probably for the best. The stories of Wranglers coming into a town and ruining a tavern or two are fairly accurate. The Wranglers work hard and play just as fiercely.

## Suggested Traits

**Characteristics:** Strength, Endurance, Perception

**Natural skills:** Observe, Shoot, Vigor

**Learned skills:** Beast Lore, Drive Beastcraft, Remedy, Ride, Survival, Tracking

**Blessings:** Beastmaster (2 pts: +2 for non-combat interaction with animals)/ Uncouth (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert at society functions)

**Benefices:** Family Ties

**Average salary (per year):**

30 firebirds for beginning Wranglers

75 firebirds for seasoned Wranglers

150 firebirds for veteran Wranglers

200 firebirds for master Wranglers









# On the Edge: Yeomen (Freelancers)

by Ross Isaacs

Bain clicked the safety off on his assault rifle and looked both ways down the alley. The path looked clear. Turning around, he grabbed his prisoner and pushed him forward. The man's hands were bound behind his back and connected to Bain by a long chain. They started toward the starport. The prisoner, once a sheriff, stood accused of poaching on his lord's lands — an embarrassing situation for his Hawkwood employer, and a job he didn't want to give to the Muster. That's where Bain fit in.

The alley was narrow. The two apartment buildings on both sides blocked out the sunlight. The air was stale and cool and smelled like urine. Squatters had set up an underground economy on these back streets — here a barber cut hair under a single bulb, and there a woman sold old magazines, and urchins hawked bits of tech. It was crowded, but certainly better than the main streets of Istakhr. A little girl carrying a water jug on her head passed by without giving Bain a second glance.

The route Bain selected took longer, but it was safer. The alleys afforded their own benefits: Bain could keep track of the area better, could see who was around better. It would be easier for a pursuer to get the drop on him in the marketplace, where the sounds and sights might bewilder him. It was a route he'd used before — successfully. Bain pushed the prisoner for no real reason. The wretch stumbled and fell to the ground.

"C'mon," Bain growled and tugged on the chain.

The two continued to make their way down the alley. Another two streets and a left turn and he'd be at the starport. He could slip into docking bay 42 without being seen, make the exchange with his employer and collect a hefty fee. That was his mistake — counting his money too soon. The prisoner stopped short and Bain ran into him.

"Get moving!" Bain pushed him again.

That's when he noticed what blocked their way. A beautiful woman, with long blond hair in a ponytail and dressed in stiff synth armor, pointed a pistol at Bain.

"You should have come to us first. We would have only taken 10 percent," she said. Bain figured she must have stepped out of one of the stalls. Damn, he'd been predictable.

"I'll give you 10 percent now," he said amiably. Then he heard someone come up from behind. Bain turned and saw another beautiful woman dressed in armor, identical to the first. His jaw tightened — it was the deadly Alessandro Twins, the Muster's best.

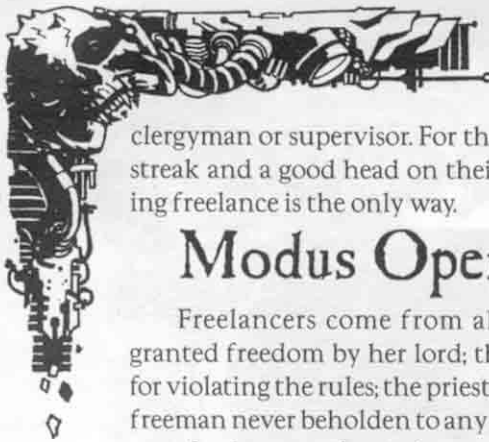
The first woman laughed, then: "How about you give him to us and we let you live." Bain wondered idly if he was talking to Nikki or Thala.

"Take a walk. Free and clear," the second woman said before he could answer. Bain turned his head and saw she had a blaster shotgun on him. Cute. He thought for a moment — he might take out one, but not both. The twins might catch each other in the crossfire, but he couldn't count on it; and the prisoner would die in the crossfire. Not that he cared, but the Hawkwood did.

It was a good deal. Anyone else would have taken him in, too, or else roughed him up to make their point. Bain lowered his gun, dropped the chain, and walked away.

Freelancers are entrepreneurial freemen who opt out of the guild system and who prefer to take their chances on their own. More independent than Charioteers, these free agents sacrifice protection and stability for autonomy and freedom. They don't have to pay guild dues, or have to adhere to guild dictates. Nor can they call on the resources of a guild — safe houses, information, back-up. Yeomen fill a niche for those nobles, priests and even guildsmen, who don't want any guild entanglements. The guilds themselves have a love/hate relationship with yeomen; although they are often too small to be noticed by the Merchant League, neither does the League encourage independents. The trouble comes from local guilds.

Freedom isn't a typical circumstance in the Known Worlds; almost everyone has someone over them — a lord,



clergyman or supervisor. For those with an independent streak and a good head on their shoulders, however, going freelance is the only way.

## Modus Operandi

Freelancers come from all walks of life: the serf granted freedom by her lord; the guildsman kicked out for violating the rules; the priest fallen by the wayside; the freeman never beholden to any faction. For whatever reasons, freelancers refuse to become tangled up in guild politics or regulations. Aliens can also be found among the ranks of yeomen. While the intergalactic guilds are more egalitarian than the other factions by accepting alien species into their ranks, individual prejudices cannot be controlled. Sometimes, aliens find themselves ostracized by rank-and-file members, or by customers that refuse to deal with them. Some aliens prefer to work alone and relegate themselves to the fringes of society or to serve their own kind.

Freelancers are too small for the Merchant League to notice for the most part. Smaller, local guilds represent a greater danger to the lone entrepreneur; the smaller the pie, the more intense the battles, as the saying goes. Every profession has its own local guild, from magic lantern theater owners and cobblers to innkeepers. Freelancers typically provide the same services as these guilds, usually at a substantial discount. The Authority on Byzantium Secundus is a good example. They do not like independents horning in on the turf of member guilds; the Authority ruthlessly drives out the freelance tour guides, courtesans and cab drivers who attempt to operate in Byzantium's agora.

Yeomen wouldn't exist if there wasn't a niche for them to fill. The houses, Church and guilds hire freelancers for a plethora of reasons. Some employers do not want the guilds to become aware of certain tasks, either because they are politically sensitive (a Hawkwood noble trysting with a Decados lady), or potentially embarrassing (a priest with a fetish for Second Republic pleasure devices), or explosive (carrying messages between Third Republic cells). Information is a commodity more valuable than gold to some, and few trust the guilds to keep their secrets for them. It is so much easier to snuff out a lone yeoman with too much information than to silence an entire organization. Some jobs require an independent outsider. A local bishop, suspecting the al-Malik of protecting a coven of psychics, for example, would send a freelancer to investigate; why risk the life of a loyal follower when an expendable yeoman is available? Further, yeomen provide a measure of plausible deniability, which is often the reason the guilds themselves use them.

Working on the fringes of society can be dangerous. Yeomen are not employed to do the easy or above-board jobs. They're part of the underground economy, avoiding official restraints and entanglements. When trouble comes, they cannot turn to the protection of a guild. That's

the price they pay for eschewing the guild structure. Often, yeomen aren't given all the information they need to complete the job. A freelance troubleshooter hired to transport a box isn't told what's inside (and she should know better than to ask, or worse, to look). If the job doesn't kill them, their employers might. Freelancers are privy to the intimate secrets of the rich and powerful, or the merely vindictive, and they eventually become a threat to these secrets. Freelancers find employment because they're expedient and expendable.

Many of them don't set out to provide questionable services but end up that way. An independent innkeeper running a clean establishment might be approached by a nobleman in search of "exotic company." It's assumed, because he's not beholden to any guild, that he procures such services. Yeomen skirt the line between legitimate and criminal activity, whether they like it or not. Some professions might be classified as illegal, so to be an independent is to be a criminal, such as the independent miner working his stake on Shaprut. The story of Agul Kilbourne is instructive, and one frequently told among yeomen. Kilbourne, a freelance guide, was hired by mad Prince Xian Li Halan to transport his favorite concubine to his country villa. Upon arrival, the prince next charged the guide with the job of watching over this woman. When he tired of her, Prince Xian demanded Kilbourne kill her. Kilbourne refused and fled, and Prince Xian accused him of an affair with the concubine and thus hired an assassin. While an extreme example, Kilbourne's story shows that freelancers may occasionally find themselves employed beyond their usual area of expertise.

Yeomen survive by avoiding trouble and by knowing when a job is too big for them or puts them uncomfortably in the spotlight. Fencing stolen goods is one thing; selling a unique golem stolen from the Engineers is quite another. Similarly, working for a minor or unlanded noble can be safer than working for Prince Hiram Decados. Successful yeomen know where they can operate, how far they can go and when to throw in the towel.

One way to avoid trouble is through pay-offs. News travels fast around the agora; if the local lord takes bribes, the rumor mill will bring it to light. Few people actually come right out and solicit a bribe, though it's quickly apparent who is open to it and who isn't. They may hint around it, like the bishop who exclaims, "If only you would give to the Church to absolve yourself of your sinful past," or they may simply wait until an offer is made. In this, style plays a factor; crassly tossing a bag of coins to a priest in front of his acolytes elicits a different response than sliding a few coins into the proper pocket.

Bribing a noble or priest can be a sticky undertaking. Many prefer to hide the appearance of a *quid pro quo*. For some nobles, offering a cash bribe is considered gauche at best, and insulting at worst. Many royals believe themselves above material concerns (preferring to allow underlings to handle the accounts; often, bribing the people

around an important personage is just as good). Church officials similarly frown on corruption within their ranks. In cases where money is undesired, pay offs can come in the form of favors. Is the local lord having problems with poachers? Perhaps she'd like the situation handled for her. Would the local guild leader like a bottle of vintage scotch every month? One might find its way into his hands. Does the deacon's mother like Obun music spheres? Then a "gift" might smooth things over.

## Business Concerns

A freelancer, no matter his business, must jump a lot of hurdles if he wants to stay in business:

**Supplies:** Yeomen have to obtain supplies from someplace, either illegally or from a guild. An independent club owner has to get her alcohol from somewhere, and she has to be creative to avoid discovery. If the local Taverner's Guild finds out, they may demand part of the profits or put her out of business altogether. Turning to alternate means of supply (i.e., the black market), the freelancer plays a dangerous game; those think machine parts may have come from a burglary at an Engineer warehouse, and the rightful owners may come looking for them. Many freelancers have been put out of business because a guild discovered an illegal supplier and beat his sales information out of him.

**Finances:** Any business requires capital to finance it. An independent Fixer has to buy parts and tools. A yeoman bounty hunter needs ammo and medical care. The owner of a speakeasy has to buy alcohol and provide entertainment. There are millions of little expenses an entrepreneur must pay for — many unforeseen. The money has to come from somewhere, but freelancers can't simply apply for a loan from the local Reeve; the Gray Faces would turn around and alert the pertinent guild (or would they?). A yeoman must either be independently wealthy or obtain alternate means of financing (e.g., yeoman loan sharks, a generous noble, found money).

**Information:** Freelancers must keep abreast of the marketplace by looking for any piece of information that can help business. Charioteer merchants can identify an increase in demand for fans on Pyre, using that guild's intelligence resources. Yeomen don't have those kinds of resources, but they must keep an ear to the ground for useful tidbits. Who's hiring? What do people want? Who takes bribes? How vigilant are customs officials? Do the Muster allow competition on Byzantium Secundus?

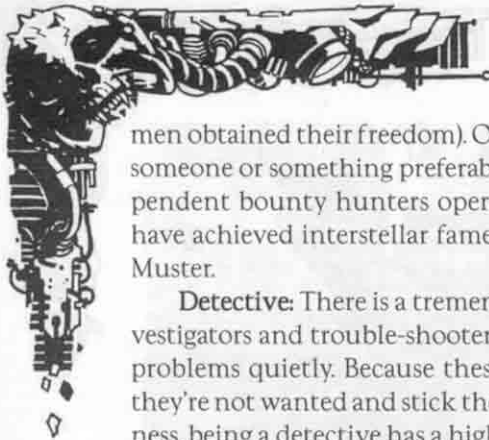
## Professions

Yeomen tend not to have an exclusive patent on a process or service. They offer the same services and goods as the guilds, often at a cheaper price. If a freelancer has a patent on something, you can bet the guilds will come to take it away. Here are typical yeoman services:

**Bounty Hunter:** The Muster can't go chasing off after every runaway serf (which is, ironically, how many yeo-







men obtained their freedom). Occasionally, the bounty is someone or something preferably hushed up. Most independent bounty hunters operate locally, though a few have achieved interstellar fame and a position with the Muster.

**Detective:** There is a tremendous need for private investigators and trouble-shooters, thus, people who solve problems quietly. Because these people often go places they're not wanted and stick their noses into other's business, being a detective has a high mortality rate.

**Personal Security:** Bodyguards are always in high demand by those who think they're more important than they really are. Typical customers include insufferable priests and paranoid guildsmen and nobles who want an entourage but can't attract one on their own. Some have been turned down by the Muster or Scravers or can't afford them, and have nowhere else to turn. These yeomen range from simple bullies with delusions of grandeur to highly sophisticated experts who prefer to work on their own.

**Pilot:** Mostly former Charioteers who struck out on their own, these pilots excel at smuggling, piracy and transportation. Some continue to work for the guilds by transporting contraband and attacking rivals. Because of the costs involved, freelance pilots are rare.

**Entertainment:** These yeomen operate everything from gambling houses to brothels. They cater to sophisticated tastes and a select clientele. The infamous hermaphrodite brothel on Cadiz is a popular example. These people don't live on the edge so much as they define it. Although they provide services even the Carnivalers avoid, local entertainment guilds don't like the competition.

**Fixers:** Independent tech redemptionists, scavengers and artifact dealers. Operating out of stalls or selling their wares from door to door, these yeomen find, repair and sell the odd bits of tech they come across. Others specialize in repairing a particular kind of gizmo. A rare few figure out how to replicate tech and go into business for themselves.

## Conduct

It doesn't take much to become a yeoman besides having personal freedom. Beyond that, an entrepreneurial spirit, tenacity and brains are required. There are no initiation requirements, or rules for behavior, dress or advancement, and no leadership — that's the point of not joining a guild. Yeomen make up the rules as they go, depending on their own moral compasses. Of course, freelancers who step on people's toes aren't going to be in business for long.

## Territory

The old joke about the three words that spell success in business — location, location, location — applies all the more to freelancers. Where a yeoman operates not only

means the difference between success and failure but sometimes life and death. Yeomen don't have their own established territory. They're tolerated to different degrees in various places. One day, the Drovers put up with an independent driver operating in their midst, and they clap him in irons the next.

The biggest threat to yeomen comes not from the Merchant League, who have bigger fish to fry, but from local guilds. Because the economic pie is smaller, the battles for profit are more intense. On the one hand, the large mercantile centers of Byzantium Secundus, Criticorum, Istakhr and Criticorum tend to be safe. The resources of the smaller guilds are finite, which makes it easy for a freelancer to lose herself in the press of humanity and the din of commerce. These centers of commerce are an irresistible lure to independent merchants. On the other hand, the guilds don't like outside competition in their own backyards and sweep through an agora periodically. It may be possible for a yeoman to get away with being a technician in a suburb of Byzantium Secundus, but in the city proper, the Authority handles those contracts. Eventually, the yeoman will be discovered.

Many believe the agoras on less important worlds, like Kish or Aylon, are better suited to yeoman activity. There the competition isn't supposed to be as fierce, and the local guilds are allegedly more tolerant. Others have found that they stand out more in smaller markets. On planets on the edges of Known Space, like Stigmata and Manitou, the guild structure is not as strong, making them hives of yeoman activity.

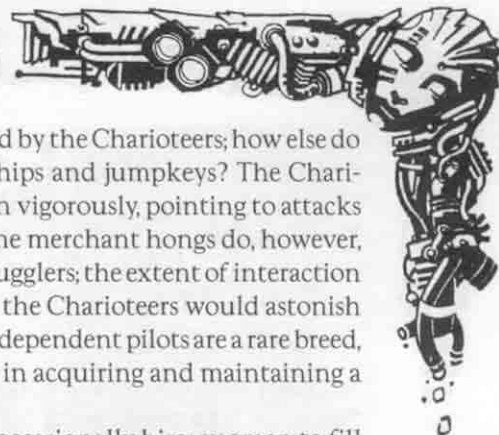
## Customers

It's impossible to characterize the relationship between all yeomen and every customer; there is no stereotypical archetype. Even though a group might claim to not hire freelancers, individual members might. Little beyond custom prevents Sir Montague Hawkwood from employing the occasional independent, for example. Yeomen operate in a shadowy world, and each has her own list of loyal customers.

### Noble Houses

Employing freelancers provides the noble houses with a measure of privacy and security. Sometimes a yeoman operates under noble protection, having acquired a royal patron. Benevolent nobles prefer to patronize local freemen artisans and merchants. The local guilds don't like nobles employing freelancers and lobby hard for this to stop. Working for royalty has a downside, however. Asylum offered one day could be revoked the next at the whim of the patron or for the right price. A freelancer cannot depend on the loyalty of a noble employer.

**Hawkwood:** Because the Vuldrok frequently employ yeomen, the Hawkwoods crack down on all independent agents. Princess Victoria Hawkwood has issued orders barring them from agoras under Hawkwood control. It re-



mains to be seen whether or not Emperor Alexius will follow suit and clamp down on freelancers across the Known Worlds. Despite this official censure, some house members continue to employ freelancers. Should a yeoman's contacts with the Vuldrok be uncovered, House Hawkwood would strike swiftly and with a vengeance.

**Al-Malik:** It's believed that House al-Malik began as a merchant family, and some poorer relations continue to work as freelancers. Another rumor suggests House al-Malik maintains close, but secret, ties with the Merchant League through yeomen frontmen. Freelancers employed by the al-Malik are thought either to be disgraced nobles, guildsmen trying to conceal their League ties, or independent go-betweens. For unexplained reasons, guilds don't seem to object much when this house employs yeomen, which further fuels suspicions.

**Decados:** The nobles of this house employ yeomen in a variety of capacities. Many Decados take perverse pleasure in the irritation that this causes local guild leaders. They also enjoy the autonomy and secrecy such clandestine arrangements provide. The Decados hire freelance repairmen with cybernetics experience to maintain their more bizarre implants; to obtain illicit goods from various independent dealers; and to engage exotic entertainers barred from the entertainers' guilds. The Jakovian Agency likes to hire yeomen as patsies.

## The Church

The Church upholds the feudal order even more stridently than the nobility. Everyone has a place in the cosmic order represented by the three factions, and freelancers violate this symmetry. The same dangers that apply to dealing with the nobility also hold to Church patrons, with one added wrinkle — excommunication. For many freelancers, being thrown in a noble's dungeon is preferable to the Inquisition's; unsatisfied Church customers have been known to turn yeomen over to Temple Avesti.

**Temple Avesti:** Because yeomen cannot be tracked easily, Avestites tend to be suspicious of them. They often accuse freelancers either of being antinomists, rogue psychics or heretics, or of aiding and abetting such vermin. Lacking the guild protection, they also make convenient scapegoats. Simply being a yeoman is proof enough for many Avestites.

## Merchant League

The relationship between the Merchant League and yeomen is complex. In solidarity with local guilds, the League decries freelancers publicly. Yet, when it suits their needs, the interstellar guilds employ yeomen. If a freelancer manages to survive local guild policing, the Merchant League is likely to recruit him. Some yeomen were once guildsmen, or they received guild training through a professional contract, which furthers complications.

**Charioteers:** Detractors among the nobility and Universal Church suspect several pirate bands are in fact

freelance pilots supported by the Charioteers; how else do they obtain their spaceships and jumpkeys? The Charioteers deny the allegation vigorously, pointing to attacks on their own vessels. Some merchant hongs do, however, employ freelancers as smugglers; the extent of interaction between freelancers and the Charioteers would astonish outsiders if they knew. Independent pilots are a rare breed, because of the difficulty in acquiring and maintaining a ship.

**Muster:** The Muster occasionally hires yeomen to fill contracts, especially if the person has proven himself in one of the local markets. Muster agents keep an eye out for yeomen who have aroused the anger of a local guild, because they're obviously effective at what they do. While they don't like it when their own members go freelance — believing the guild should broker every contract — the Muster is unwilling to completely crack down on independent contractors. Doing so would shrink the pool of available skilled labor.

**Scravens:** This guild can be a yeoman's best friend or worst enemy. While it hires freelancers for a number of jobs, these are usually dirty, criminal activities and operations that can land the freelancer — if he gets caught — in a lot of trouble. His Scraver accomplices have the guild to bail them out, but the guild rarely wastes its pull on an expendable yeoman. Nonetheless, the Scravens rarely muscle yeomen around much; they prefer to hire them. Any down-on-his-luck yeoman can always find a few firebirds from the Scravens. Just don't try to cut in on their action — this they do not forgive.

## Others

**Vuldrok:** These barbarians, although part of a loose confederation of lost worlds, need advanced technology and credible information, both often obtained through yeomen. Some free agents resent the nobility or despise the empire and find their way to the Vuldrok. Jobs typically are repairing damaged equipment, smuggling weapons and explosives, assassinating enemies and obtaining intelligence. For this reason alone, House Hawkwood cracks down on freelancer activity on their worlds.

# Personages

## Solomon Lem

On Criticorum, on a small side street called Beggar's Alley, there is a small speakeasy run by Solomon Lem. A runaway serf, Lem fled Grail by hiding in the hold of a merchant cog. He fears discovery of his dark secret to this day. He easily blended into the crowd and worked a succession of odd jobs at the various eateries around the agora. Lem saved his coins, eventually opening his small dive.

Lem's club is a hive of criminal activity, a place where you can buy anything. Lem sells everything from counterfeit jumpkeys to proscribed tech. He also does a brisk business in forged documents and information. The al-Malik haven't closed him down, it's believed, because of a



local lord's addiction to Zip (a bioengineered narcotic), which Lem supplies. Others believe Lem passes information to the Mutasih — the al-Malik secret police. The local Taverner's Guild has shut him down twice, but Solomon always manages to reopen, which leads many to believe he has powerful allies.

### Burkino Hite

Born and raised on Leagueheim, Burkino Hite once flew ships for a minor hong before being kicked out for various infractions of the Charioteer code of conduct. Pilots in his situation typically end up working the docks and shipyards or providing some service catering to pilots. Hite, however, obtained his own vessel and jumpkeys. Prevented from plying the jumproads as a merchant, he turned to piracy. Hite commands a shipload of buccaneers in and around the Manitou system, where he enjoys the protection accorded by proximity to the Vau.

He has become a legend after years as a privateer. Stories of his attacks are enough to worry travelers to Cadiz and Icon. Hite is widely reported as killing those who resist his demands and setting those who comply adrift in life pods with no supplies. More outlandish stories, such as those of survivors being blinded so they can't identify him and of him eating grilled babies, should be taken with a grain of salt. After the taking of the *Vanguard*, the Li Halan put a bounty on his head. Few photos exist of Hite, and little is known about his ship; for all anyone knows, he could be living out in the open among the protected population of Manitou.

## Roleplaying

### Playing a Freelancer

All yeomen share one trait in common: They are true mavericks, entrepreneurs beholden to none — or so they believe. In the world of *Fading Suns*, everyone owes someone something. The ties may not be formal, like vassal to his lord or parishioner to his priest, but they bind as tightly. Yeomen are at the whim of political winds and personal temperaments; this week's friend could become next week's foe, and the yeoman has no place to turn. Always remember, there is a price to pay for independence.

Ask yourself some questions:

How did you become a yeoman? Were you a guildsman, kicked out for violating the rules? Did you leave on your own? Were you a serf given your freedom by a noble? If so, why? You might even be an alien, on the fringes of society, trying to make a living any way you can.

What services do you offer? A yeoman sells something people want. What do you do? Did you learn your skills from a guild, though a professional contract (a common method)? Or is it a family secret handed down through the generations?

Do you have any special relationships? Friends in a guild you can call on for help? Favors owed to you by

someone? A nobleman you're blackmailing? A priest you once helped? Survival depends on the strings you can pull.

Who are your enemies? Every yeoman has them; guildsmen whose territory you've muscled in on; nobles dissatisfied with your work; the priest who fears for your soul.

How do you fit into the group? This isn't an easy question. Most other characters will belong to a faction like the House Hawkwood or the Charioteers, and they may take a dim view to freelancers. If that's the case, the yeoman will have to hide his activities. On the other hand, the group may know about and support a yeoman in their midst; they can go places the other characters can't. (It's not recommended that the player character yeoman work for someone else in the group. Once the job is over, the reason for staying together vanishes.)

**Character Stereotypes:** Pilot, merchant, artifact dealer, artifact hunter, repairman, weapon maker, inventor, tinker, smuggler, assassin, bounty hunter, detective, information broker, fence (drugs or stolen goods), artisan, author, bodyguard, mercenary, wandering jack-of-all-trades (trading services for food, shelter, and transportation), club owner, entertainer

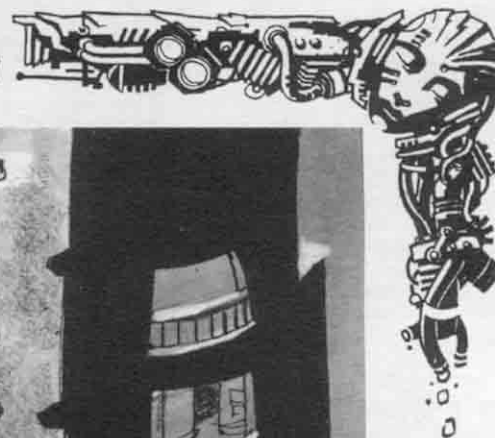
## Gamemastering Yeomen

Any of the many dramas already suggested in various *Fading Suns* products can be made more interesting with the inclusion of a yeoman. As player characters, they provide a ready enemy — the guilds (both local and interstellar) — and an easy plot complication. As non-player characters, they provide an added degree of mystery — who are they working for and how are they involved?

• **Ushabti Tox:** The yeoman is hired to locate a missing object of tremendous value and/or great power — the Ushabti Tox. Stolen from a private collection or League research laboratory, it has made its way to a large city filled with mystery and intrigue, like Istakhr or Byzantium Secundus. A cast of memorable characters seeks the Ushabti Tox, drawing the yeoman into a web of lies, hidden alliances and danger: The wealthy merchant with his Muster gunsels; the femme fatale with a hard-luck story; the noble who claims it's a family heirloom. The character tracks down leads, while trying to stay alive and to avoid any guild entanglements.

• **Montague or Capulet?** A noted and easily recognized noble is engaged in a torrid love affair that would destroy his reputation and bring shame to his house if it were discovered. He hires the character to act as a go-between. Increasingly, the jobs become more difficult to fill. At first, it's simply passing love notes between the two. Then it becomes arranging trysting places. In the end, the character ends up protecting the paramour from a vendetta (and involving entanglements with the Muster). Lots of people would love to uncover the affair, which would make the yeoman's life interesting to say the least.





## Traits

### Blessings

Crafty (2 pts: +2 Wits when seeking new business opportunities)

Smooth (2 pts: +2 Charm in business-related situations — parties, bribery, interrogations)

Tenacious (2 pts: +2 Calm when intimidated)

### Curses

Indiscreet (+2 pts: -2 Charm in situations where subtlety is called for)

### Benefices

**Edge** (varies): The character holds the patent on a process or owns a device that allows her to be a freelancer. The secret of making think machine chips (5 pts), reattaching severed limbs (3 pts), or the distilling of a fine wine has been in the family for generations (1 pt). This can also take the form of some rare device that aids in the character's work, such as a magic lantern show projector (1 pt), Askari golem (10 pts) or Philosopher's Stone (25+ pts). Keep in

mind, the more appealing or unique the special edge, the more the guilds will be interested in acquiring it (through means fair and foul). The more desirable or rare the Edge, the more points it should cost.

### Afflictions

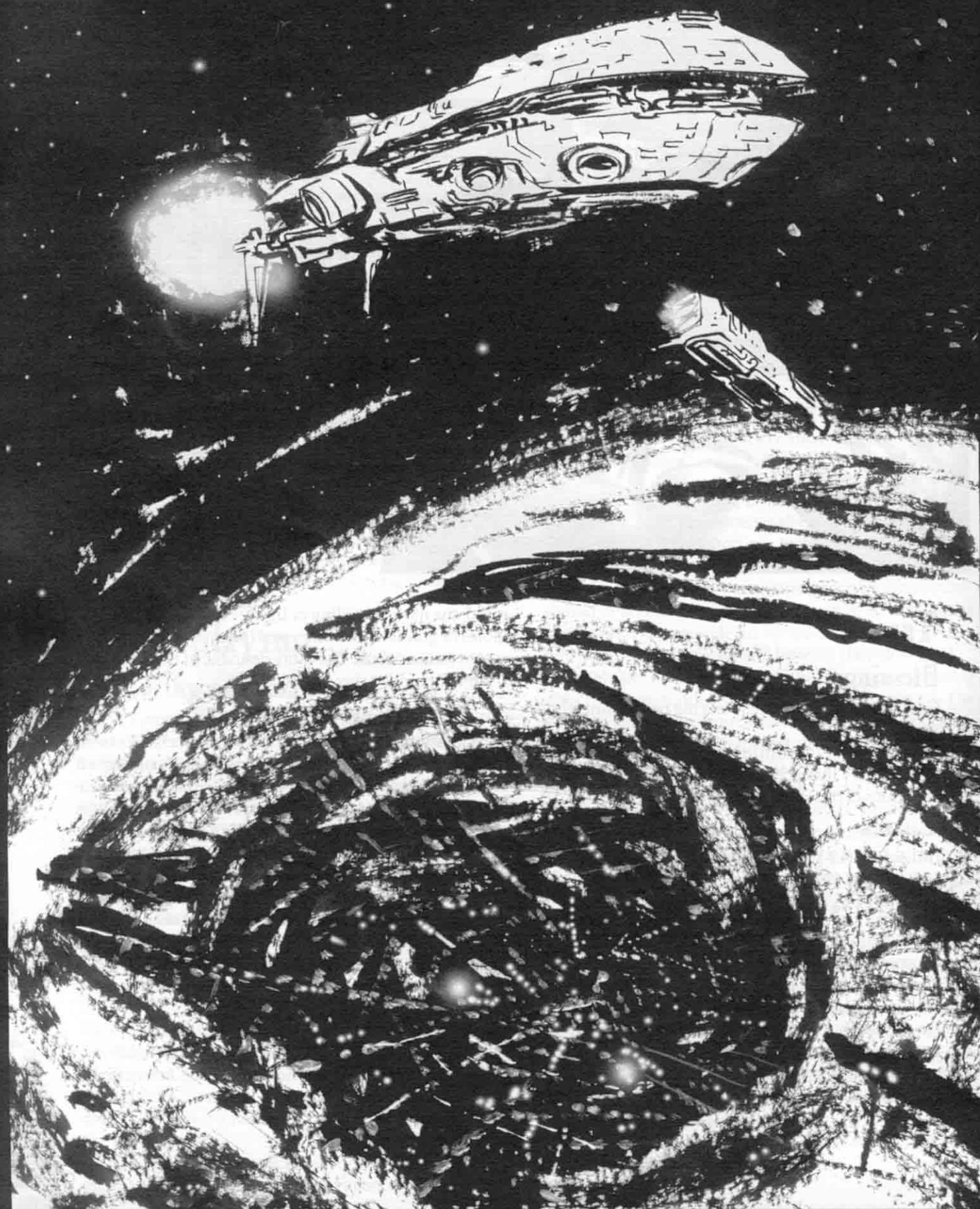
**Questionable Ties** (1-4 pts): The character is associated with people of questionable character — suspected antinomists, a psychic coven, Vuldrok barbarians, etc. She may have assisted only a member of one of these groups in the past, or she may be suspected of being a member. This can take the form of suspicions and rumors that, while untrue, plague the character, affecting non-player character reactions to him. The rumors could be true. At higher levels, these questionable ties attract the attention of someone in power and an investigation is launched. Tenacious enemies — those who continue to dog the character's every step — should be bought with Vendetta.

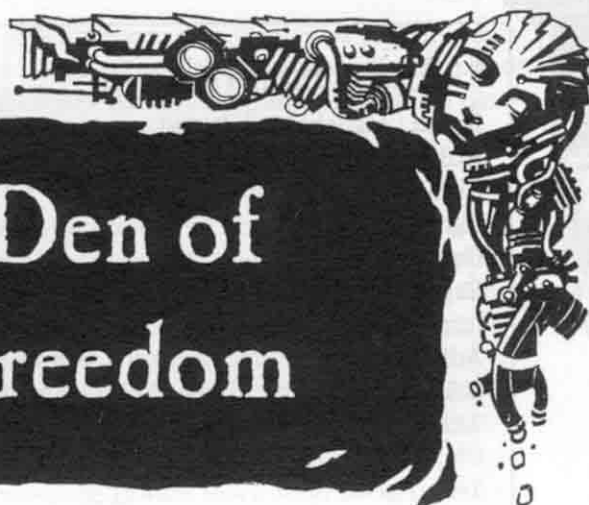
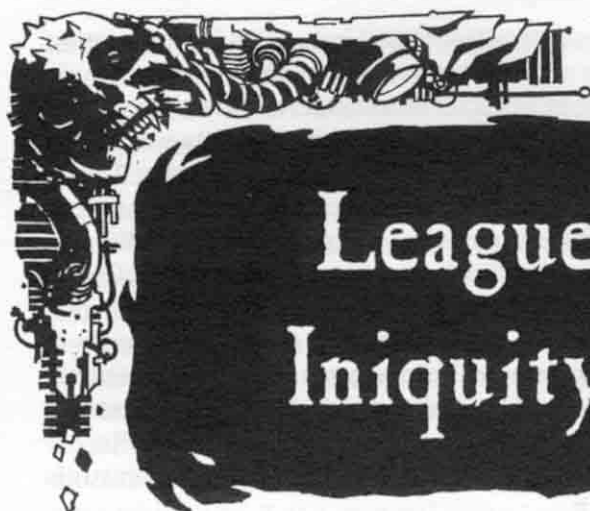
1= Rumor

2= The rumors are true

3= Causes gossip; affects die rolls in social situations

4= Attracts attention (nobles, Temple Avesti, Imperial Eye)





# Leagueheim: Den of Iniquity and Freedom

by Ross Isaacs

Leagueheim. The name conjures visions of technological marvels, cybernetic perversions and damnable pollution. Nobles crave its riches. Priests revile it as a modern Inferno. Yet, Leagueheim is more than the sum of its infamy. Founded during the Diaspora, it is a shining beacon of technological innovation and free trade. It is the last bastion of a time when humanity challenged the stars and seized destiny for itself — the Second Republic. As the seat of the Merchant League and home to hundreds of lesser guilds, anything can be had here, from precious Pygmallium to sophisticated golems, from blasphemous magic lantern shows to genetically engineered war-slaves. Majestic, breath-taking, overwhelming, colossal, sordid, evil — all these terms have been used to describe this tiny planet.

## History

Early in the Diaspora, a group of corporate middlemen fled the crumbling First Republic because they objected to the collusion, central planning and price fixing practiced by the zaibatsu. Economic and political decisions were made by consensus reached in the boardrooms of the zaibatsu — so much ore produced by this company, so many refrigerators sold by that company. Market share came out of the barrel of a gun, as one corporation muscled in on another's territory. These radicals, entranced by ancient myths of a true free market economy, sought a world where capitalism and democracy reigned supreme, where everyone had a right to produce and sell what they wanted.

These "capitalists," as they called themselves, flung themselves out into space to create their version of uto-

pia. They found it in a planet they christened Liberty. The early colonists fanned out across the planet's surface to build a democratic capitalist system. Success depended on quality, hard work and pluck — not on collusion, protectionism or monopoly power. On Liberty, an individual could rise above class or caste and become a millionaire or a great political leader (an idea the nobility doesn't want spreading today).

The people of Liberty built a mighty mercantile empire over centuries of isolation. In this they were aided by their central location at the hub of over a dozen worlds. Trading with nearby planets, their message of democracy and open markets spread. Over time, other planets petitioned the central government to join Liberty: as allies at first. Trade agreements, enshrining Liberty's principles, were signed. Eventually, the planet became the nexus of an energetic, formidable empire known as the Liberty Confluence.

In 3500, the Confluence became one of the founding members of the Second Republic. The planet was led by President Maxwell Clayton and a coalition of Liberty's corporations. Heretofore, they argued that humanity survived but did not prosper. This pocket of humanity lived on, while that pocket died out. A medical advance benefited humankind on one end of the Known Worlds, but not the other. Calls for a "League of Planets" (as it was called back then) soon swept the planet. The people of Liberty believed strongly in the basic credo that guided them from the beginning and wanted to remodel the Known Worlds in their image. For the next 500 years, their efforts would be a resounding success.

At the pinnacle of the Second Republic, hundreds of worlds were governed by so-called "Republican" principles



## Leagueheim's Traits

**Name:** Leagueheim (Liberty)

**Ruler:** Merchant League

**Cathedral:** Orthodox

**Agora:** Emporium

**Garrison:** 8

**Capital:** Kesparate

**Jumps:** 2

**Adjacent Worlds:** Aragon, Madoc, Midian

**Solar System:** Midget 1, Leagueheim 2 (Racer), Darkside

3, Gasbag II 4, Gasbag (The Nuggets) 5, Asteroid Belt 6,

Ghost 7, Niven 8

**Tech:** 7 (some 8)

**Human Population:** 4 billion

**Alien Population:** 4 million

**Resources:** Mineral ore, oil, manufacturing, trade

**Exports:** Industrial goods, financial services

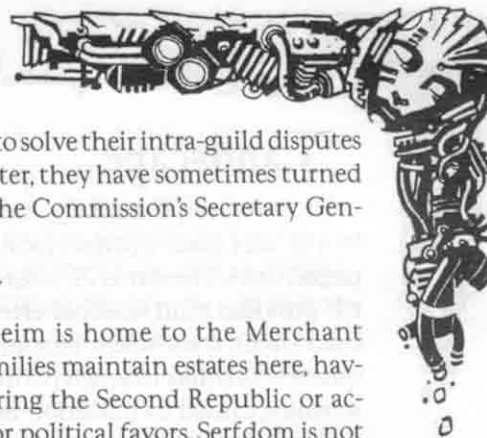
**Landscape:** Much of the surface is covered by megalopoli of towering spires and sweeping arcologies. Areas exhausted by years of industrial activity, or no longer useful, are abandoned as wasteland. Some nature survives as parks and preserves for the wealthy.

of democracy and free trade. Unshackled from starvation, servitude and war, humanity explored the universe, developed sophisticated philosophies and created scientific breakthroughs. Society rapidly and radically evolved.

The promise of Liberty could not last forever. The rot spread to Liberty when the Second Republic became corrupt. Ideals held for so long were jettisoned by politicians and corporate officials eager to enrich themselves. Corporations seeking stability and predictability sold favors, protected markets and interfered in the natural process of commerce. Perhaps the local government could have rallied the Second Republic or revitalized it, but it wrestled with its own internal problems. When the Second Republic fell, the ideals that had guided the planet for centuries fell with it.

Once the hub of open markets and free trade, Liberty became the seed for the nascent guild structure. Into this pot were thrown the ingredients that would one day produce the likes of the Scravers, Muster and Charioteers. Throughout the early New Dark Ages, the planet served as a haven for fleeing Second Republic officials and corporate officers. Money, technology and know-how flowed into the planet. It's at this time that the planet was renamed Leagueheim and became the capital of the Merchant League. Despite this influx of resources, the loss of adjacent worlds could not be stopped; many of the dozen or so shut their jumpgates down. Leagueheim became the





last refuge of a dying way of life. It would soon have to defend that for which it stood.

The noble houses and Universal Church sought to quickly humble the upstart Merchant League. Among the nobles, the Hazat posed the greatest threat. The Hazat had led the charge against the central government on Byzantium Secundus during the Second Republic. Leagueheim stood in the way of their expansion plans, and they desperately needed the League's resources. The Hazat amassed their armada and struck against the Merchant League. The other houses (notably the Decados and Hawkwoods) sought the planet's riches for themselves and came to the League's defense; in return, they were awarded special contracts or granted small titles of land. The Hazat, meanwhile, took it as a personal affront and swore revenge.

Throughout the Emperor Wars, Leagueheim remained untouched. It was neutral ground, and all factions came to deal with the Merchant League. Like Vienna on 1960s Urth, Leagueheim became a den of rival agents seeking supplies, information and allies. When the League threw its support to Alexius, the Eduardo branch of the Hazat led an invasion force to the planet. Vague statements from Alexius pledging support for Leagueheim, and the threat of Second Republic planetary defenses circumvented the attack while the offer of valuable land on Leagueheim removed the sting to Hazat pride. With the coronation of Alexius as the Phoenix Emperor, many on Leagueheim believe things should be quieting down on their world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

### Leagueheim Now

Leagueheim is home not only to the five major intergalactic guilds like the Charioteers and Muster, but also to hundreds of smaller guilds such as the Apothecaries, Courtesans, Exterminators, Purgers, Mercurians and so on. The planet is a hodgepodge of competing interests and rival factions. Politics between the guilds can be fractious; Charioteer merchants don't trust the Scravers; the Purgers guild feuds with the Exterminators guild; the Carnivalers want a permit to perform on the street, and the Masque objects. On a world where every possible need or desire is seen to by a guild (and often more than one) everything is a fight.

While each of the guilds oversees its own affairs within its precinct, someone must oversee the planet's day-to-day operations. That job falls to the Commission. Similar to the Authority on Byzantium Secundus, this guild is responsible for providing basic government services. The Commission serves as a neutral third party, contracting out services to other guilds, to prevent any one guild from gaining an advantage over the others. The Commission polices the agora, provides sanitation and maintenance services, collects rents and taxes, manages immigration services and settles disputes between merchants. Al-

though the guilds prefer to solve their intra-guild disputes through the Leaguemeister, they have sometimes turned to the "good offices" of the Commission's Secretary General.

### The Nobility

Although Leagueheim is home to the Merchant League, several noble families maintain estates here, having purchased them during the Second Republic or acquired them in return for political favors. Serfdom is not as widespread an institution on Leagueheim as it is on other worlds, as there are less noble fiefs than usual. Most Leagueheim families have associations with some guild or other tracing back centuries, allowing them to buy freedom from vassalage. Houses Hawkwood, Decados and al-Malik maintain holdings on the planet, the Shelit lease space from the Engineers and House Xanthippe keeps one of their moonhavens on Leagueheim's moon. Even the Hazat own land on Leagueheim. Each house pursues its own agendas, even here.

The Hazat and League enjoy a period of détente. Though they would never admit to it, the Hazat fear whatever engines of mass destruction that the League has at its disposal. It's widely believed the Engineers maintain an arsenal of mutagenic bombs, ion cannons and planetary shields, about which the League is ominously silent. The Hazat operate out of their estate on Leagueheim, trying to purchase weapons that they claim will be used on the Kurgans; a few guildsmen suspect they are for use on them, despite the Hazat's growing attempts to gain the League's favor for their crusade against the Caliphate.

### The Church

The Church is welcome here, for even guildsmen have souls and fear for them. Despite its hostility toward technology, the Orthodox Church cannot afford to write off four billion human souls. The great Cathedral of St. Kaufman rivals those of most other major worlds. Although the Church keeps the Inquisition on a short leash on Leagueheim, the synod remains active. Fully half the priests on Leagueheim report to their off-world superiors on everything from local events to transcriptions of confessions. While the Church Universal has done little to reign in Leagueheim's sinful ways, they save these reports for the day when the League's power wanes. And some of these reports come in handy to get someone to see things the Church's way.

In addition, the Eskatonics run several small ashrams, where individuals can seek spirituality in their own way. This sense of openness and spiritual exploration appeals to many on Leagueheim. The Orthodox Church is less pleased about some of the connections forged between some guilds and this sect (most notably with the Charioteers), but it is even more displeased with the rumors of Preceptors operating under guild sanction in many cities.

## Landscape

Liberty is an Urthlike planet rich in metals and gems. It originally made a perfect location for settlement by entrepreneurs. The day is 22 hours long, and a minor axial tilt provides mild seasonal effects. Gravity, though less than Urth's, is sufficient to support life, while the atmosphere is Urthlike (though polluted). In fact, atmospheric warming caused by pollution makes the planet's climate decidedly tropical.

From orbit, the planet looks like it suffers from a malignant blight, like the cheek of a diseased serf. A single city spreads, cancer-like, across most of Leagueheim's land masses. Where the Muster precinct begins and the Charioteer's ends not even natives can say. Every guild, no matter how small, administers its own section of the titanic megalopolis, so that on one side of the street, Scraver justice rules and on the other the Purloiners are in charge. Those areas left unclaimed are left to the Commission (along with the agora). This is Kesparate.

## Kesparate

The city is a giant terracite hive of activity during the day. Freeman leave their giant apartment blocks and travel to the glass and steel canyons where they work. To the north is the mighty space-port of the Charioteers, ships dropping from orbit like leaves in the autumn. The air is abuzz with flitters and skimmers darting here and there. Factory smokestacks belch methane, carbon monoxide and dozens of other industrial waste gasses. On certain days in some areas, the populace must go out wearing rebreather masks. Sunlight rarely penetrates to the lower levels, yet the city shimmers with heat and activity.

At night, Kesparate comes alive with illumination. Some towers, lit by large spotlights, become shafts of light made solid, or honeycombs of individual office lights. In the Scraver district, giant billboards show holographic light shows, advertising this, that and the other. Graceful, curved arcologies, still glowing from the residual heat of their solar panels, look like the humps of some sea serpent undulating through a concrete sea. The streets are awash in crazy neon cipherings, calling out to tired, jaded workers, announcing all manner of entertainment or products.

## The Pollution Zones

Not every part of the world city is populated. Some sections, called Pollution Zones, have been abandoned over the years — the product of rampant capitalism. When a factory outlived its usefulness, or a mine or oil field was tapped out, it was simply abandoned. When the planet was the seat of the Liberty Confluence, these areas were reclaimed and made productive; old buildings were demolished, waste materials cleaned up and new apartment buildings erected. At first, the Second Republic government allocated money to continue this effort, but cleanup efforts faltered as it declined. The city of Kesparate rose

up and around these industrial nightmares.

Wastelands of toxic waste, industrial rubble and exhausted mining operations, the Pollution Zones are bordered by tenements housing Leagueheim's poorest. The only wildlife found in these areas are those weeds and animals who have adapted to the poisonous environment. This is the only nature most Leagueheimers will ever see. Occasionally, extermination squads must go in to take care of the mutated vermin. The Commission has recently authorized the construction of walls to contain these areas. Despite the danger, squatters try to eke out an existence, scavenging for anything of use and growing crops along polluted waterways.

## Nature

To be sure, some areas of pristine nature survive. Wealthy guildsmen maintain mansions and their attendant grounds for their pleasure. Several noble houses keep tiny fiefs here and attempt to preserve the native landscape. Finally, several guilds own land, which they use as living laboratories, much in the way 20th-century Urth corporations claimed parts of the Amazon Rainforest. Agriculture, however, is largely provided for by hydroponics.

## Denizens

### The Brahmins

The name refers to the descendants of the original settlers of Liberty. Many went on to become fabulously wealthy, and thus shaped the planet's political, social and cultural life. Today, critics note that few people outside the upper classes seem to care what these people say and do. Others note ironically that several founding guildsmen (such as the Gailbreaths) are the Brahmins, and thus, they continue to influence the planet's fate.

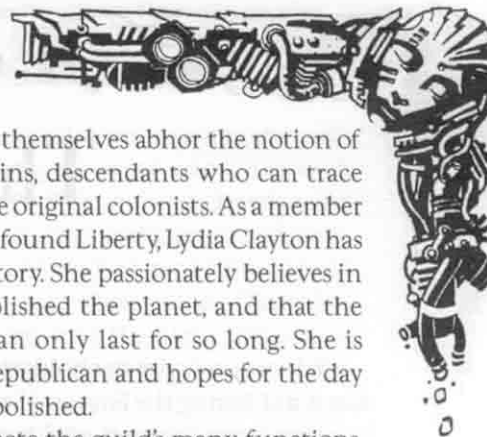
### Hissing Cockroach

Vermin are as ubiquitous in the Known Worlds as humans. These insects came to Leagueheim at the same time as the first colonists, aboard their ship, hidden among the many cargo containers. For millennia, they remained typical, terran cockroaches. During the Second Republic, they made themselves known, emerging from ancient industrial ruins. They can chew through all but the most dense material and are extremely aggressive, preferring live prey to refuse. Leagueheim's problem with the insects mirrors the "Killer Bee" infestation on Urth; the Commission sends in extermination crews armed with flamethrowers and ceramsteel armor. The high pay offsets the high mortality rate.

**Quote:** "I don't care how poor we are, Alice. I'm not joining the Exterminator's Guild!"

**Description:** After centuries of living in toxic swamps, the typical Urth cockroach mutated. Still the same size and color, virtually nothing distinguishes them from their terran cousins. Like normal roaches, they prefer dark-





ness, when they come out of hiding to eat. One female roach is capable of producing thousands of young. Hissing cockroaches attack by swarming over their prey, which suggests a hive mentality (though this hasn't been proven). They get their name from the warning sound they make when attacking. Their bite is now toxic.

**Body:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Endurance 1

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 4

**Natural skills:** Dodge 2, Fight 2, Sneak 5

**Weapons:** Bite (1d DMG)

**Vitality:** -3/-1/0

### Bile Blooms

This weed's beautiful purple bloom belies its dangerous nature. It appears as a single stalk atop which grows a bulb similar to a poppy. When touched, it bursts open to release its poisonous seeds. Breathing the spores can result in death. By carefully clipping the unopened bulbs and rigging them inside objects that open (such as briefcases, doors, boxes, etc.), several guilds use the spores as a weapon.

**Exposure to Spores:** Spores inflict 6d of damage for three turns to those who breathe the spores, ignoring armor and energy shields (breathing devices may stop the spores from reaching the lungs). Victims can roll Endurance + Vigor per turn; each victory point prevents one point of damage. Vorox are immune to this poison. Antitoxins exist and can be found in most bazaars on Leagueheim; they are usually synthetic imitations of Vorox anti-bodies.

## People

The people of Leagueheim are not the stereotypes depicted in Church sermons. No matter which guild they belong to, natives of Leagueheim tend to be independent and strong-willed. As the descendants of those who embarked on a social experiment, they are the inheritors of centuries of political and economic freedom. A sense of optimism, a "can-do" attitude, is common among Leagueheimers.

### Lydia Clayton

The Current Secretary General of the Commission. The Clayton family is the closest thing Leagueheim has

to nobility, though they themselves abhor the notion of royalty. They are Brahmins, descendants who can trace their lineage to one of the original colonists. As a member of the family that helped found Liberty, Lydia Clayton has an immense sense of history. She passionately believes in the principles that established the planet, and that the current guild system can only last for so long. She is unashamedly a Third Republican and hopes for the day when all guilds can be abolished.

Her job is to coordinate the guild's many functions. Every week, cabinet secretaries responsible for various and sundry departments meet to discuss water consumption rates, particulate matter per cubic feet of air, and the continuing crime problem in the agora. Clayton is an effective administrator and enjoys the support of the five major guilds. How long this support would last once she moves out of the arena of civil service and into politics remains to be seen; the guilds would not sit idly by if she rallied support for a Third Republic.

## Dramas

• **Ill-Gotten Goods:** Members of a noble house or part of a nobleman's entourage, the characters are on Leagueheim to purchase something proscribed either by the Church (a Soul Shard, golem, etc.) or common decency (information, slaves, etc.). They must locate a dealer, negotiate a price, avoid potential double-crosses, and get the item off world. Naturally, others find out about the goal and get involved. Or the characters could be on the other side, a guildsmen or rival noble out to stop the purchase.

• **Murder She Wrote:** An Ukari Scraver merchant is found murdered in her shop in the agora. Before she expired, she wrote a word on the floor with her own blood. It is an Ukari word nobody understands (it means "Betrayal"). The Scravens and Charioteers blame each other, for it is well known that a pilot fought with the victim the day before. The incident has all the makings of a bloody feud between the two guilds. The characters are either on one or the other side, hired by the Commission to investigate or simply caught up in the violence.

# The Academy Interatta

by Andrew Greenberg

Education no longer holds the same prestigious position it did during the First and Second Republics. Indeed, learning is now suspect, and both the nobility and the Church (as well as some League officials) actively discourage wide-spread schooling. Fewer than 25 percent of the Known World's population can spell anything other than their own names or handle multiplication. Less than 10 percent even approach the level that once passed for literate. Most of these received their instruction either from Church schools or private tutors (generally pedagogues).

The glaring exception to this attitude lies within the hallowed halls of the Academy Interatta. Here knowledge remains a beacon, summoning students from all the Known Worlds. The Academy trains the brightest and most promising League members, as well as occasional nobles and priests. Here they learn how to handle and develop technology, run guild operations, make war and much, much more.

## History

Leagueheim has supported a large number of colleges since its earliest days of human habitation, but these tended to be small, privately run affairs, in it mainly for the money. After the Fall of the Second Republic, the planet found itself with an abundance of talented individuals fleeing chaos and serfdom. Many of these went to work founding the guilds, but others sought to preserve their knowledge for all. These are the true founders of the Academy Interatta.

The main campus lies far from the most heavily developed parts of Kesparate, in what used to be Sophonus College. Sophonus managed to convince Leagueheim's leading families to give it the money necessary to hire the best of the many refugees coming to the planet, and it put them to work teaching these families' children.

As the corporations collapsed and the guilds grew, Sophonus found itself going through numerous periods of contraction and growth. Sometimes the school was reduced to allowing in any student who offered payment. Other times it could be extremely selective as to whom it let in. It was during one of these upswings that Quentin Siegel began uniting the guilds. Siegel, a former student at Sophonus (though not a graduate) saw the value of a center of learning funded by and benefiting all the guilds. As a result, he put pressure on the guilds to contribute money to Sophonus and had it renamed the Academy Interatta to reflect its League-wide appeal.

In the centuries after his death, the Academy began gaining the reputation that it has today. Donating money

to the Academy has given many guilds a chance to show off their prosperity as well as ensure a future supply of talented apprentices. Thus the Muster established the Jarod Amad College of War and the Engineers funded much of the famed St. Albertus Research Center.

Indeed, the Academy is now one of the wealthiest institutions on Leagueheim, as well as one of its largest employers. Additionally, both its students and workers come from all walks of life, making it one of the most diverse organizations on the planet. Aliens, freemen, nobles, priests and even some commoners all have a place within its walls.

## The Campuses

While most people think of the main campus when they speak of the Academy Interatta, the Academy really has buildings all over the planet, as well as a number of off-world locations. Some of these locations are owned in conjunction with one of the guilds, like the Supremus Space Station in orbit around Darkside, the third planet in the Leagueheim system. Supremus is owned by the Academy and the Engineers, and provides an invaluable opportunity to study space ship and space station design and redemption.

Still, the most famous location is the main campus at what was once Sophonus College. Many League leaders spent at least some time here during their youth, and educated people throughout the Known Worlds have come here to study, listen and teach. Centered around Siegel Amphitheater, where priests and Reeves have debated, Engineers have revealed technological wonders and Muster martial artists demonstrated their talents, it covers only 20 acres.

Despite its relatively small size, it manages to educate thousands of students each day. Its giant School of Human Disciplines and the St. Albertus Research Center alone have more than 3000 students pass through their doors on any given day. More than a thousand live in the Wilson and Erati dorms (the Erati dorm being the only one where aliens can live), and hundreds more live in Top Housing, where the most promising (or wealthiest) students stay. Instructor Row provides offices and homes for young professors, most of whom eat their meals with the students in Nalarik Dining Hall and Student Center. Finally, Academy Hospital is one of the foremost places of healing on the planet, attracting even Amaltheans to study its ways.

Some of the most notable campuses off of Leagueheim include the College of Governing on

Byzantium Secundus, the Center for Symbiot Studies on Stigmata, and the Vau Field Station on Manitou. These locations rarely have more than a few dozen students and teachers, but these are often the most promising of the Academy's people.

## Leading Departments

At one point or another almost every guild has funded at least one professor, and most have managed to create entire departments devoted to furthering their goals. The Jarod Amad College of War is an excellent example of this. Muster apprentices who have proven their mettle on the field of battle get sent here, and most of its students are part of the guild. They learn not only the practice of war but also the business of it. Other students include Charioteers likely to work with the League Fleet or fight pirates, Reeves working on collections, and visiting students from the Stigmata Garrison or a noble house.

Other departments get their funding from the League or from the Academy. For instance, the entire Merchant League pays for the Reclamation Department, which seeks out lost technology wherever it might be. This department deals more with the actual ideas behind an object than it does with artifacts themselves, but that does not stop its representatives from trying to acquire high tech items. On the other hand, the Cryptoxenology Department (see **The Dark Between the Stars**) draws its funding from the Academy, as no guild directly profits from its work. Instead, the Academy feels its work in studying mythological creatures benefits all sentients, and funds the department itself.

The College of Human Disciplines is a catch all for these sorts of studies. This used to be Sophonus College's main building, but it has been torn down and rebuilt a number of times as the student body has grown. Everyone from the Charioteers to the Courtesans teach here, passing on the hard-earned knowledge of generations of humans. Despite its name, it also teaches alien languages and cultures, as well as animal studies. What it lacks, however, are classes in theology and philosophy. These are strictly forbidden, and students seeking instruction in these areas find themselves sent to the St. Jacob I Chapel to consult with a priest. This does not mean that these lores are not discussed on campus. It just means that such discussions happen quietly or at Mag's Bar.

## Student Life

For most of the Academy's students, their time here is the first away from their families' controlling hands. Most are young, generally between 15 and 25, but exceptions are not uncommon. Despite their status as some of the most talented and promising young guilds members, nearby residents consider them the League's most promising degenerates. Stories of student pranks, parties and failed experiments concern even the more open-minded of Leagueheim's residents.

The average student has little time for many shenanigans, however. Most students are expected to help with chores at the Academy, including cooking, cleaning and more. Class attendance is voluntary, but parents and sponsors receive regular reports of student progress and tend to frown upon those who waste their money. Classes begin before dawn and run late into the night. After class, students can attend innumerable debates, discussions and guild meetings.

Academic progress is judged by the professors, and students only graduate when all their instructors feel they are ready. Most students get out in two to three years, but a fair number stay for more than a decade, studying more obscure disciplines like cybernetics or golem construction.

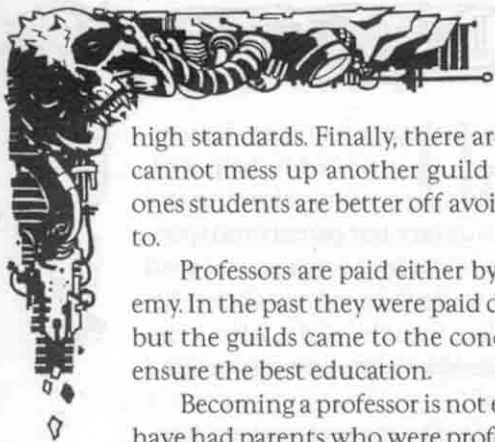
Students still seem to find plenty of time for a social life, however. The Academy accepts people from all walks of life, and is the first place for students to meet humans and aliens whose lives they otherwise could never have comprehended. Guild leaders like to laugh that it gives their next generation a chance to become friends before screwing each other on business deals.

## Teaching at the Academy

Most of the Academy's professors are professionals, people for whom teaching and research are a way of life. More than a few are the children of professors, continuing their parents' occupations and are often members of one pedagogue guild or another. Others are leading guild members, sent here as a reward and to train others to their







high standards. Finally, there are those sent here so they cannot mess up another guild operation. These are the ones students are better off avoiding but never seem able to.

Professors are paid either by their guild or the Academy. In the past they were paid directly by their students, but the guilds came to the conclusion that this did not ensure the best education.

Becoming a professor is not easy. The surest route is to have had parents who were professors but even this is not a guarantee. Most begin as assistants to some distinguished professor, start teaching the students he would rather avoid, and work their way up from there. Department heads decide who will become professors and who will not, but they report to guild leaders who watch to make sure their favorites are not forced out.

Staying a professor is relatively easy but not guaranteed. Tenure does not exist, but anyone who becomes a professor generally has the skills necessary to remain one. Their new fight becomes the acquisition of larger and larger budgets. The best way to get assigned lots of money is through field work, but getting approval for an archeological dig on Istakhr is not easy. Other forms of research are also valuable, but most professors prove their value in the halls of academic politics, not in the classroom.

## Academy Politics

Why are Academy politics so vicious? Because the stakes are so small, or so crack campus wits. For most professors, this is very true. Their salaries are set and little that they say or do will change that. Other professors, however, have massive budgets to play with. The leading members of the Reclamation Department travel throughout the Known Worlds, staying at the best lodgings and eating the best foods in their quests for lost technology. The stars of the St. Albertus Research Center have budgets of thousands upon thousands of firebirds, and spend it on whatever they please. Doctors at the Academy Hospital battle to get the best equipment, so that their own reputations grow.

At the top of this bitter, writhing mass is the dean, currently Consul Elissa Tryor of the Lecturers Guild. She is advised by a council of department heads, ostensibly consisting of the leading professors in each department but really limited to a dozen of the most influential. The department heads are elected by the professors within their own departments, though the dean has a great deal to say about this. After all, she sets the budget and can threaten to cut it if someone she dislikes gets elected. Traditionally, each of the five major guilds and the head of the Reclamation Department are on the council, but this is not always the case.

## Noteworthy Figures

### Consul Germaine Eisenberry

Consul Eisenberry may be a Scraver, but he has all the trappings of a dignified professor. Well-groomed, with

white hair firmly in place and a look of knowledge in his eyes, he appears to belong in the most scholarly of pursuits. That makes it even more surprising when he leads a tech reclamation against some unwilling soul. As head of the Reclamation Department, he prefers to use diplomacy, tact and bribery to acquire lost blueprints and ideas. Still, despite the fact that he grew up at the Academy and has spent most of his time here, he has no fear of taking them by force. After all, he still attends classes at the College of War.

### Consul Erwin Gerhardt

Consul Gerhardt first attended the Academy when he was 16, and the College of War made a great impression on him. The first of his family to attend the school, he hoped to bring honor to its place in the Muster, and he succeeded. He used the knowledge he gained here to earn a commission with an armored legion, and rapidly rose through its ranks. His Desert Tigers became one of the leading units of the Emperor Wars, fighting for all of the Royal Houses at one point or another. When the war ended (with him fighting for the Emperor), Gerhardt decided to return to the Academy to spread the knowledge he had fought so hard to gain. He is the premier instructor at the War College, and greatly enjoys taking students on field trips to active battlefields.

### Dr. Keri Forsyth

The Courtesans Guild did not have to work especially hard to get one of its own placed within the Academy, but that does not mean their professors do not carry a full workload. Dr. Forsyth teaches more classes than any other professor on campus, and seems to enjoy every single one. Behavioral Sciences, Finances, Interpersonal Relationships, Noble Habits, and Advanced Clothing Design are just the classes she teaches during the day. Her evening classes are the most popular on campus. She recently got elected to the council of department heads and becomes more and more influential with every passing day — and night. That she has her eye on the dean's position is unquestioned. Whether she can get it in the face of opposition from the pedagogical guilds is something else.

## Dramas

Gamemasters can use the Academy to set up individual dramas or as the focus of an entire campaign. The Academy may well be the only place where research gets carried out freely and openly (well, mostly free and open). As a result, the stories of unauthorized experiments are legion, as are the tales of the rewards from such studies. Players can be students newly arrived at the Academy, professors seeking prominence or administrators trying to keep things from going haywire.

• **The Fraternity of Teachers:** Due to their exploits among the stars, the characters have earned an appointment to the Academy to share their hard-earned knowledge. Unfortunately, this has offended those professors who spent long years toiling away to get their own posi-



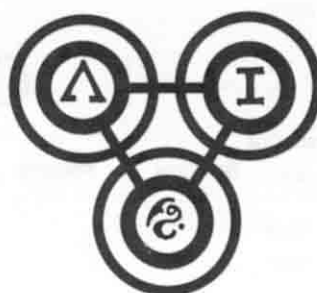
tions. As a result, the characters immediately find themselves facing strong hostility from their colleagues. Just wait until they find out that the professors whose positions they took were Antinomists, on the verge of a major breakthrough, or better connected than everyone thought.

• **Teacher's Pet:** Genetic research is just one of the secret disciplines studied at the university. Because it has to be carried out quietly, away from the Church's prying eyes, professors in these fields often feel like they must answer to no one. Thus when a truly freakish monstrosity begins haunting the Academy, the characters will find themselves hard pressed to even discover what it is, much less stop it. Can they do so before the Church hears about it? Could it really have once been a student? How will this affect its GPA?

• **Mag's Bar:** While Siegel Amphitheater may well be the most famous of the Academy's buildings, Mag's Bar may have been more important to its sustained prominence. That is because professors watch what they teach at the Amphitheater with care, but find such inhibitions out of place at the bar. No one can count the number of breakthroughs in science, philosophy and combat techniques which began at Mag's. Additionally, no one can count the

number of careers that have been ruined here. If the characters hope for any kind of success at the Academy, they had better start here. Holding one's own in the debates that spring up within its walls is a prerequisite for academic success. Holding one's liquor is a prerequisite for that.

• **Too Much Knowledge:** The Church has long frowned on the Academy as a place of unrestrained learning, where even the most vile studies are allowed. The guilds usually laugh off these accusations, but there is more than a hint of truth to them. Characters can try to stop such researches before they get out of hand, act as spies for the Church, or carry out these studies on their own. Who knows what ancient parchments lie buried in the deepest basements of the Library of Horace?



## Main Campus

**Siegel Amphitheater:** This amphitheater, done in the style of Urth's ancient Greece, hosts the Academy's most scholarly and prestigious demonstrations. It sits in the center of the campus.

**St. Albertus Research Center:** This heavily fortified building sits north of the amphitheater and boasts a main instructional building, laboratory wings, and a bunker for experiments, as well as several underground labs.

**Basye Think Machine Center:** West of the Research Center, this odd building is protected from dust and debris by a giant glass dome.

**Library of Horace:** Built like a square wedding cake, the Library of Horace stores ancient parchments in its basements, books on its main floors, and think machine viewers on the top floors.

**Cybernetics Alcove:** This unassuming building houses some of the Known Worlds most respected cybernetic scientists.

**Academy Hospital:** South of the Siegel Amphitheater is the Academy Hospital, a tall edifice run by the Apothecary guild.

**School of Human Disciplines:** The largest building on campus, the School of Human Disciplines teaches almost every imaginable subject.

**Vigour Arena:** While primarily an enclosed area for sports and exercise, it also hosts the War College's military exercises.

**Jarod Amad College of War:** This stately white-column building, constructed in the style of Urth's most famous ancient military schools, houses some of the greatest military minds in the Known Worlds.

**Power Plant:** Its towering smokestacks are only one part of its energy production facilities.

**Storage/Motor Pool/Garage:** This large, functional building serves a variety of purposes.

**Erati Dormitory:** The only dorm where aliens can live, it also houses the poorer students.

**Wilson Dormitory:** This is the campus's most famous dorm, and most of its students have lived here for at least a year.

**Top Housing:** A collection of bungalow-style homes for leading students.

**Nalarik Dining Hall and Student Center:** A long building with room for a thousand (or more) students to eat at a time. It also has innumerable small rooms for student meetings.

**Mag's Bar:** One of the most important structures on campus, it is also one of the smallest.

**Instructor Row:** A variety of two-story houses provides office and living quarters for new professors.

**Dean's House:** This intimidatingly elegant structure has housed the Academy's leaders for centuries, and is the only remaining building from Sophonus College.

**Administrative Center:** A towering glass edifice reaching 42 stories into the air.



# Appendix: Costs of Goods & Laws

## Costs of Goods

Talons: cheap/moderate/fine

Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
<b>Clothing</b>			
Belt			5/10/15
Boots			8/16/24
Cloak			6/12/18
Hat			5/10/15
Robe			6/12/18
Cape			6/12/18
Dress			6/12/18
Shirt/Blouse			4/8/12
Trousers/Skirt			4/8/12
Coat			6/12/18
Gloves			3/6/12
Pouch			1/3/6

### Beasts & Tackle

Ass	1		
Brute	15		
Chicken	crest		
Cow	10		
Dog	1-2		
Hawk		5-10	
Ox	12		
Pig	4		
Sheep		6	
Saddle	crest or 1		
Bit and Bridle	wing or 1		
Saddlebags	wing or 1		

### Warbeasts

Warhorse	5000
Pheriza (Spitter)	7000

### Human Labor

Prostitute	1-100
Serfs: Cost of buying off servitude	
Skilled	125
Unskilled	50

### Slave: Cost to buy

Skilled	75
Unskilled	25

### Justice

Assumes trial within 3 months; add 50 firebirds per month trial is extended. Costs for court employees are for noble cases.

Plaintiff's Advocate	
Poor	100+10%

Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
Competant		200+20%	
Good		300+30%	
Excellent		500+30%	
Defendant's Advocate			
Poor		150	
Competant		300	
Good		500	
Excellent		1000	
Court employees			
Judge		500	
Bailliff		100	
Scribe		50	

### Entertainment

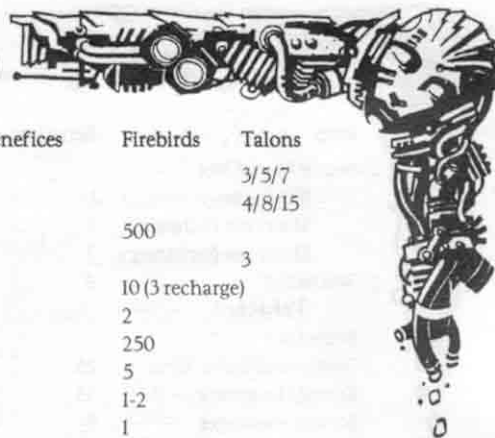
Book			
Paperback		1-10	
Hardback		3-20	
Rare		30+	
Stage Performance/ Concert			5/10/15
Folk			
Cultured		1-50	
Magic Lantern Show			
Popular		1-10	
Cultured		3-15	
Magic Lantern Projector			
Palm		200	
Tabletop		100	
Auditorium		300	
Music Recording		1-10	
Music Players			
Earplug		75	
Palm		25	
Shelf unit		50	
Auditorium		200	

### Musical Instruments

Drum			
Flute		1	
Horn			5/10/15
Lute		1	
Lyre		2	
Mandolin		4	
Oboe		1	
Saxophone		5	



# APPENDIX: COSTS OF GOODS & LAWS



Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
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## Alien Arts & Crafts

Ur-Obun Prayer Shawl		20 (10 on Obun)	
Ur-Obun Prayer Bowl		30 (15 on Obun)	
Ukari spear		10 (1 on Ukari)	
Oro'ym Shell Robe		50 (5 on Madoc)	
Etyri Flute		20 (7 on Grail)	
Hironem Kanasu aids		5-25 (half on Severus)	

## Novelty Items

Rubber Hull Rat	2		
Fake Brute Droppings	1		
Fake Vorox Vomit	2		
with fake bones		+crest	

## Lodging

Table in main room			2
Shared bedroom			5
Private room			10
Suite		1-5	
Add meals			3/6/10
Stable one small beast			4
Stable one large beast			8
Care for beast			2
Park small craft			2
Park large craft			4
Maintenance for craft			10

## Beverages/Food

Ale			1
Beer			1/2/3
Hard Liquor			2/4/6
Wine			3/6/12
Soda			2
Ice			1
Snack			1/2/3
Breakfast			1/3/6
Lunch			2/4/8
Dinner			2/6/12

## Drugs

Hashish		1	
Obun yogurt		5	
Vorox Grog		20 (pint poison), 1 (1/2 pint drink)	
Klaj	1	300	
Needle Rack	3 (1 refill)	500 (100 refill)	
Selchakah	3	30-100	
Siv (water-retainer)	1	300 (6 pills)	
Zhrii-ka'a			
tincture	7 (supply)	1	
extract	12 (supply)	1	
lotus	20	100	
Zipper	3	300 (50 refill)	

## Medicine

Elixer Injector	1 (1 per 5 doses)	25 (5 per dose)	
Expedition MedPac	2	100	
MedPac	1 (2 w/Elixer)	25	
NanoTech MedPac	75	1000	
Physick's Kit		10	
Surgery Kit	3	200	

## Communications

Squawker	1 (2 wrist)	50 (80 wrist)	
Starlight LRCD	3	300	
Whisper Pin	2	100	

## Gear/Tools

Backpack			5/10/15
Blanket			3/6/12
Candle			1/2/3
Chain			2/4/8

Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
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Chest			3/5/7
Dice			4/8/15

Eyes of Tarif	2	500	
Flint and Steel			3
Fusion Cel	1	10 (3 recharge)	
Grappling Hook		2	
Fusion Pack	3	250	
Fusion Torch	1	5	
Hacksaw		1-2	
Hammer		1	
High-Tech Tools	1-2 per piece	5-10 per piece	
Jug			5

## Jumpkey (black market)

Single route		3000+	
Two routes		5,000+	
Each additional route		+3,000	

## Keg

Lantern			5
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Low-Light Goggles	2	50	
Mag Boots and Pads	1	100	
Makeup Kit	1	5	
Mech Tools	1	5	
Morana's Hands	3	2500	
Pipe			4/8/16
Powerglove	5	1000	
Quiver		crest	
Rope			5/8/12
Sewing Kit			3

Spacesuit	1	100	
Armored	4	800	
Space Propulsion Pack		30 (3 refill)	
Hand Thruster		5 (1 refill)	

Synthface			
TL7	3	3000	
TL8	7 (2/face)	10,000 (3000/face)	
Colloid-12 solvent	1	10	

Tobacco			5/10/15
Torch			5/8/12

Volt Tools	1	7	
Watch			

Mechanical		2	
Electronic		5	
Waterproof		+2	

Whistle		wing	
Wineskin		wing	

WET Suit	2	200	
10' Pole		wing	

## Think Machines

Advisor	5	3000	
Accountant	2	600	
Auto-Pilot	4	1000	
Electronic Abacus	1 (lap)	400 (desk), 500 (lap)	
Facial Scanner	3	700	
Hierarchy	4	1500	
Journal	3	1000	
Library	4	2000	
Mapper	2	700	
Tracker	4	700	

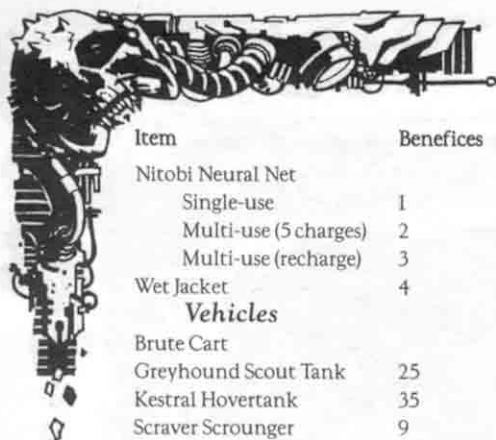
## Security Systems

Gen Lock		1000+	
Magna Lock		50+	
Scrambler Pad	3	100	
Thieves' Keys	1	5	

## Restraints

Muster Chains	2	300	
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## Item Benefices Firebirds Talons

Nitobi Neural Net			
Single-use	1	300	
Multi-use (5 charges)	2	600	
Multi-use (recharge)	3	1500	
Wet Jacket	4	600	

### Vehicles

Brute Cart		10	
Greyhound Scout Tank	25	10,000	
Kestral Hovortank	35	40,000	
Scraver Scrounger	9	3000	
Skimmers			
Hoverbike	10	9000	
Hoverpack	8	7000	
Flitters			
Air Yacht	20	25,000	
Hoppers			
Wagon of Paulus	17	15,000	

### Weapons

Note: Costs for energy weapons do not include fusion cels (see Gear/Tools, above).

Ammunition costs given in parentheses are for 3 clips, unless otherwise noted.

#### Melee Weapons

Aqua Ignata Ballista	2 (2 per vial)	20 (10 per vial)	
Arbat'a (Ascorbite Sword)	9	1000	
Axe		5	
Boarding Gun	1	10+gun	
Broadsword		15	
Club			1/3/5
Dirk		4	
Flail		4	
Garrote		5+	
Glanke'sh Sword (Vorox)	1	15 (25)	
Knife			2
Kurgan Side Sword	1	400	
Mace		10	
Rapier			10
Scimitar		20	
Spear			1
Splinter Sword	6	+50	
Spring Knife	1	5	
Staff			1/3/5
Suresnake Whip		100	
Two-handed Sword		30	
Whip			3+

#### Energy Melee Weapons

Frap Stick	1	15	
Shocker	1	+30	

#### Artifact Melee Weapons

Flux Sword	11	15,000+	
Mist Sword	13	30,000+	
Vibrating Blade	+5	+100	
Wireblade	12	10,000	

#### Ranged Weapons

Bows			
Hunting		5	
Long		10	
Target		7	
Arrows		wing	
Crossbows			
Hand		7 (3 wings per bolt)	
Medium		10	
Heavy		15	
Bolts		crest	
Dart		2	

## Item Benefices Firebirds Talons

Knife		2	
Slingshot			1 crest for sling
			1 wing per 5 stones)
Spear Gun	2		25 (1 wing/canister)
Standard head			1 crest per 4
Injector			1 per 4
Backbarbed			1 per 4
Concussion			2 per 4
Throwing Star			2

### Slug Guns

Assault Rifle	3 (1)	500	
Autofeed Pistol			
Light	1 (1)	150	
Medium	2 (1)	250	
Heavy	3 (1)	300	
Capek .40 Aquatic Rifle	4 (1)	800	
Decados Groin Gun	2 (1)	30	
Derringer	1 (1)	50	
Drexler Gatling Shotgun	3 (1)	50	
Imperial Rifle	2 (1)	200	
Mitchau Quarry Gun	3 (1)	50	
Revolver			
Light	1 (1)	100	
Medium	2 (1)	200	
Heavy	3 (1)	250	
Shotgun	3 (1)	300	
Silencer	1	5	
Sniper Rifle	3 (1)	700	
Submachine Gun	3 (1)	350	

### Bullets

Blast Capsules	+1	+6	
Calibers			
Light (.32)			wing (1 per 5)
Medium (.40)			crest (1 per 3)
Heavy (.47)			1
10mm			2
13mm			3
10 gauge shotgun			crest (1 per 2)
Needler			+3
Slappers			+3
Sunder Slugs			+3
Vorox Claws			+2

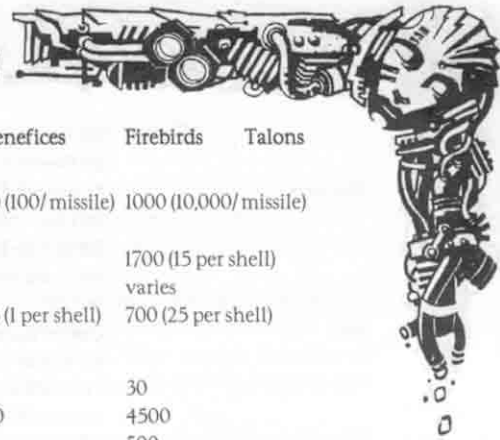
### Flechette Guns

Splinter Pistol	5 (1)	70	
Splinter Rifle	7 (1)	100	
Ammunition	1	wing	
Thorns		2/shot	
Fangs		7/shot	
Sabot Gun	9	2000	

### Energy Guns

Blasters			
Blaster Pistol	7	700	
Blaster Rifle	9	1000	
Blaster Shotgun	10	1200	
Eruptor Blast Pistol	9	700	
Nitobi Blaster Axe	10	3000	
Cluster Gun	7	100	
Flamegun	7 (2 refill)	150 (5 per canister)	
Lasers			
Palm Laser	3	200	
Laser Pistol	5	300	
Laser Rifle	7	500	
Assault Laser	8	700	
Jet Pistol	7	100	
Rocketeer	9 (1 per 2)	400 (10 per 1)	

## APPENDIX: COSTS OF GOODS & LAWS



Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
Screecher (sonic)	5	300	
Stunner	4	300	
<b>Explosives</b>			
Demolition Rig	5	200	
Dreskel Grenade Launcher	5	500	
<b>Grenades</b>			
Blast Grenade	3	150	
Blast Pellet	1-2 per 2	5-10 each	
Flash	1	70	
Frag	1	20	
Mist	1	70	
Plasma	2	30	
Red-Baffler	2	200	
Shock	1	90	
<b>Restraint Weapons</b>			
Grappler	3	70	
Stun Net	2	200	
Taffy Gun	5 (1 per clip)	70 (5 per clip)	
<b>Artifact Guns</b>			
Fusion Gun	20	5000	
Neural Disruptor	10	3000	
Symbiot Element Gun			
Lightning	12	5000	
Hail	10	5000	
Wind	9	5000	
<b>Gun Accessories</b>			
Shantor Gun Mounts (costs applied to mounted weapon)			
Fixed	+1	x1.5	
Remote fixed	+2	x2	
Swivel mount	+3	x3	
Targeting helmet	2	200	
<b>Heavy Weapons</b>			
<b>Rapid-Fire Guns</b>			
Furystorm Chaingun	10 (1 per 2)	1500	
Jahnisak Light Machinegun	5 (1)	750	
<b>Energy Support Weapons</b>			
Blaster Cannon	20 (2 per cel)	5000	
Gatling Laser	15	2500	
Mass Disrupter	15	25,000	

Item	Benefices	Firebirds	Talons
<b>Missiles</b>			
Web Missile Launcher	10 (100/ missile)	1000 (10,000/ missile)	
<b>Artillery</b>			
15mm Gun (vehicle mount)		1700 (15 per shell)	
Catapult	5	varies	
Li Halan Light Mortar	15 (1 per shell)	700 (25 per shell)	
<b>Armor</b>			
Abar Leaf	1	30	
Adept Robes	20	4500	
Blur Suit	8	500	
Ceramsteel	12	700+	
Chain Mail	2	20	
Chameleon Suit	7	300	
<b>Energy Shields</b>			
Standard	5	500	
Dueling	7	700-1000	
Assault	15	3000+	
Battle	25	5000+	
Frictionless Gel	10	500	
<b>Leather</b>			
Jerkin		5	
Studded		8	
Morph Suit	10	10,000	
NAS Suit	5	200	
<b>Plate (metal)</b>			
Half	2	30	
Full	3	40	
<b>Plate (plastic)</b>			
Half	3	40	
Full	4	60	
Polymer Knit	6	200	
Psi Cloak	10	3000	
Scale Mail	1	10	
<b>Shields</b>			
Buckler		7	
Large		15	
Spikes	+1	20	
Stiffsynth	7	500	
Synthsilk	7	300	

## Laws

Unless otherwise noted, the court of trial depends on the defendant's station (regency court for nobles, free court for freemen, etc.).

**Income:** Equal to yearly income (see *Players Companion*).

**Wergild:** A fee paid to the victim's family by the murderer.

**Penance:** There are various forms of penance, from private meditation, flagellation, branding, public humiliation (peasantry throws eggs and tomatoes at shackled penitent) or dangerous quests. Three levels: Simple (meditation, mild labor), severe (flagellation, hard labor) and extreme (branding, painful torture, dangerous quests down unreflective jumproads, etc.).

**Indenture:** The person becomes a serf to the winning party for a set term. Terms vary with the crime and planet of trial (traditionally 7 years).

### Theft

Crime	Punishment
Petty	Imprisonment (term varies per planet)
Grand	Loss of limb (usually a hand)
Tech	Either of above or possible lobotomy or invitation of guild membership
Land	Loss of disputed land plus income gained during false ownership

### Smuggling

Anyone caught smuggling must relinquish the banned goods.

Item	Punishment
Banned by local lord	Imprisonment
Banned by Church	Simple or severe penance (depending on nature of item), possible imprisonment
Banned by a guild	Warning, beating, slavery or death (depending on whose embargo you break and how much money you cost the guild)
Banned by Emperor	Imprisonment, possible loss of limb

### Assault

Victim	Punishment
Noble	Monetary fine for nobles (equal to 1/20th victim's income); simple penance and possible imprisonment for priests; imprisonment or serfdom for freemen; death for serfs
Priest	Severe penance and possible monetary fine for nobles (equal to 1/20th assaulter's income); severe penance and possible imprisonment for priests; imprisonment or indenture for freemen; monetary fine for serfs





Freeman

Serf

## Rape

Victim

Noble

Priest

Freeman

## Murder

Victim

Noble

Priest

Freeman

Serf

## Obstruction of Justice

Crime

Obstructing local law

Obstructing the Inquisition

Obstructing Imperial law

owner (who usually doles out severe punishment to serf)

Monetary fine for nobles (equal to 1/50th victim's income); simple or severe penance for priests; imprisonment or monetary fine for freemen; small monetary fine for serf's owner

Owner must bring grievance. Monetary fine for nobles (equal to 1/10th cost of serf; see Costs of Goods); private penance (simple) for priests; small monetary fine for freemen; slavery for serfs (proceeds go to injured serf's owner)

### Punishment

Almost never reported by victim, otherwise death

Severe penance for nobles; severe penance or possible defrocking for priests; imprisonment, severe penance or indenture for freemen; death for serfs (unless victim pleads mercy, in which case serf is indentured to victim's sect)

Monetary fine for those rare nobles who lose such cases (equal to 1/50th raper's income); severe penance for priests; imprisonment or monetary fine for freemen; torture, loss of limb or slavery for serfs

### Punishment

Wergild for nobles (equal to victim's income, paid to victim's family); imprisonment and possible defrocking for priests; imprisonment, serfdom or death for freemen; death following torture for serfs

Public penance (severe or extreme, depending on victim's rank) and monetary fine for nobles (equal to 1/3rd murderer's income, paid to victim's sect); imprisonment, public penance (extreme) or possible defrocking for priests; imprisonment, indenture or death for freemen; death for serfs (unless victim's superior pleads mercy, in which case serf is indentured to victim's sect)

Small monetary fine on major house capital worlds to wergild for nobles (equal to 1/3rd victim's income, paid to victim's family) on cosmopolitan worlds; imprisonment or severe penance for priests; possible defrocking if victim was influential; imprisonment, monetary fine or death for freemen; death for serfs

Owner must bring grievance. Monetary fine for nobles (equal to cost of serf); public penance for priests; monetary fine for freemen (paid to serf's owner); death or slavery for serfs (proceeds go to serf's owner)

### Punishment

Imprisonment, possible accusation as accomplice to whatever crime was obstructed

Severe penance, possible imprisonment, possible accusation as heretic

Imprisonment, possible accusation as accomplice to whatever crime was obstructed, possible service at Stigmata Garrison

## Loan Default

Nobles: Family will usually pay debt but with loss of face. Priests: Sect will often pay debt, but expect penance in return. Guildsmembers: Guild will usually pay debt, penalizing future promotion or in return for dangerous tasks.

### Loaner

Noble

Priest

Guildsman

### Punishment

Loss of land or property equal in value to amount of loan. If no property, indenture (term varies per planet; usually as many years as it would normally take the defaulter to pay back loan based on income)

Loss of land or property equal in value to amount of loan. If no property, extreme penance or indenture (term varies per planet; usually as many years as it would normally take the defaulter to pay back loan based on income)

Loss of land or property equal in value to amount of loan. If no property, indenture for freemen (term varies per planet; usually as many years as it would normally take the defaulter to pay back loan based on income), or collateral for nobles and priests (in form of extended political favors and immunities from Church law)

## Libel/Slander

Victim

Noble

Priest

Freeman

### Punishment

Public apology and/or monetary fine for nobles; public penance for priests; public apology and/or imprisonment or monetary fine for freemen; slavery for serfs

Penance for nobles; penance for priests; public penance and/or imprisonment or monetary fine for freemen; indenture to victim's sect for serfs or monetary fine from owner

Nobles and priests are immune from legal prosecution against freemen (but guildsmembers find other means of restitution); public apology and/or imprisonment or monetary fine for freemen; does it really matter what a serf says?

## Crimes Against Estates

Crime

Tax Evasion

Removing Land Mark

Trespass

Poaching

Freeing serfs

Inciting revolt

Treason

Republicanism

### Punishment

Monetary fine in addition to owed taxes (only for the influential), imprisonment or indenture

(Proof of ownership) Imprisonment

Warning (for influential trespassers), monetary fine or imprisonment

Recompense for owner's loss and possible banishment

Recompense for owner's loss (regardless if serf is recaptured; see Costs of Goods for serf prices) and possible indenture

Death. Potential martyrs are usually imprisoned for life instead

Death or banishment from injured party's fiefs

Imprisonment, severe penance, banishment from Known Worlds or death

## Counterfeiting

Type

Firebird

Other

### Punishment

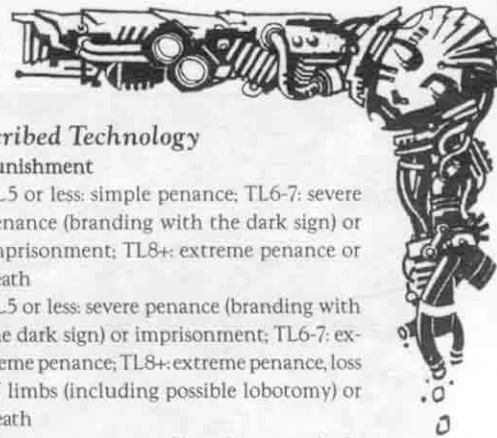
Loss of limb(s) or death

Imprisonment

## Patent Violation

The following crimes are rarely tried in court, but their typical punishments are provided here.

## APPENDIX: COSTS OF GOODS & LAWS



Crime	Punishment
High-Tech invention	Destruction of invention or possible invitation to join Engineers
Violating crime monopoly	Warning, beating or gangland murder, possible invitation to join Scravers
Scab	Beating or death, possible invitation to join the Muster
Jumpkey forging	Chauki stride (ejected from airlock)
CCG marketing	Visit from the Purger, possible monetary fine

### Miscellaneous

Crime	Punishment
Selling freeman into slavery	Restitution equal to twice freeman's lost income during enslavement (these cases rarely reach court)
Blackmail	Imprisonment and/or public apology
Forgery	Imprisonment, loss of forging limb (hand) in extreme cases
Stowaway	Chauki stride (ejected from airlock)
Suspicion of Symbiosis	Death

### Ecclesiastical Court

These charges are brought by and in a Church court regardless of the accused's stations. See also **Forbidden Lore: Technology** for more details on Church law.

#### Moral or Thought Crimes

Imprisonment for these charges may be jail, madhouse or exile to a remote monastery.

Crime	Punishment
Illicit pedagogy	Imprisonment or indenture to injured party (noble owner of now-learned serfs or priests of now-learned villagers)
Illegal book dealing	
Possession	Simple or severe penance (depending on nature of books). Repeat offences mean imprisonment
Authoring	Simple or severe penance, possible imprisonment
Printing	Severe penance, imprisonment
Dissemination	Simple or severe penance
Rumor mongering	Simple penance or imprisonment (unless member of a rumormongers guild)
Public lewdity	Simple or severe penance or possible imprisonment
Graverobbing	Public penance (severe), imprisonment, possible loss of limb (if disturbed dead have influential living family)
Tithe Evasion	Simple or severe penance in addition to owed tithes. Repeat offence means possible imprisonment or indenture
Omission	(Failure to speak out against Church crimes) Simple or severe penance, depending on nature of crime
Violation of confession	Only priests can be accused. Simple penance for first infraction, severe for second, extreme penance or possible defrocking for successive violations

#### Trafficking in Illicit Drugs

Substances are considered mild (narcotics), severe (psychedelics) or dangerous (selchakah, zhrii'ka'a lotus, etc.).

Crime	Punishment
Possession	Mild: simple penance; Severe: severe penance or imprisonment; Dangerous: extreme penance or death
Distribution	Mild: severe penance; Severe: extreme penance or imprisonment; Dangerous: Extreme penance, loss of limbs (including possible lobotomy) or death

### Trafficking in Proscribed Technology

Crime	Punishment
Possession	TL5 or less: simple penance; TL6-7: severe penance (branding with the dark sign) or imprisonment; TL8+: extreme penance or death
Distribution	TL5 or less: severe penance (branding with the dark sign) or imprisonment; TL6-7: extreme penance; TL8+: extreme penance, loss of limbs (including possible lobotomy) or death
Cloning	Extreme penance and imprisonment (only for influential) or excommunication and death. Clones are killed.

### Organ Harvesting

This only includes harvesting the organs of unwilling victims, including serfs (although it is hard to disprove a signed serf contract if the serf is dead).

Crime	Punishment
Transplantee	Must either give up organ or undergo severe penance
Surgeon	Extreme penance, branding and possible imprisonment

### Hexery

Crime	Punishment
Evil Eye, Curse	Mild: severe penance; Severe: extreme penance, branding, possible loss of property; Extreme: Death or excommunication. Punishment depends on the effect and degree of the hex: a mild curse results in a simple effect (the mayor stumbles and falls into the river during his speech), a severe curse results in injury or loss of property (a tree limb falls on someone's head at an evil word from the hexer, a neighbor's chickens lay rotten eggs or his cows give sour milk) and an extreme curse results in severe injury, death, or the loss of faith of others (a wasting disease, a plague, the casting of doubt among the flock)
Luck charms	Any boons gained by such hexery are turned over to Church (money from charms for monetary reward, etc.) in addition to simple or severe penance
Fortune telling	Simple penance for minor bone throwing, palm-reading or weather-witching; severe penance for card or think machine spreads; extreme penance, death or excommunication for entrail reading
Healing	Simple penance and possible indenture to Church healing order (if healings are effective)

### Heresy

Public recanting may reduce punishment.

Crime	Punishment
Wrongful interpretation of scripture	Simple or severe penance
Spreading false doctrine	Severe penance, possible imprisonment
Creating false sect	Extreme penance, possible imprisonment or excommunication
Worshipping pre-reflective gods (pagans)	Severe or extreme penance, possible imprisonment
Trafficking w/ Dark Powers	Extreme penance, possible execution and/or excommunication
Worshipping Dark Powers	Death and excommunication





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ISBN 1-888906-09-X

ISBN 1-888906-09-X



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