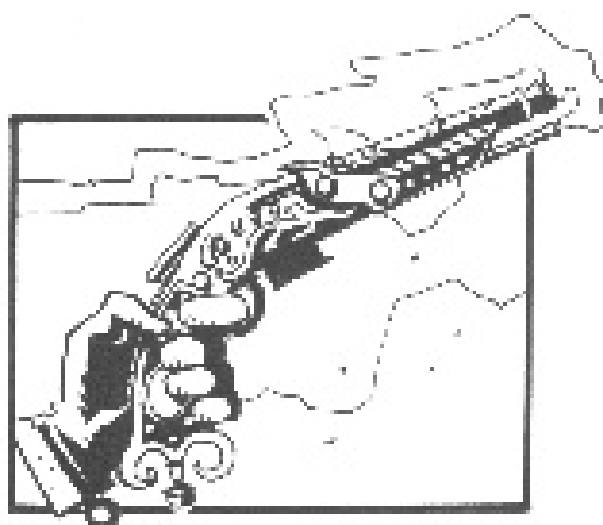


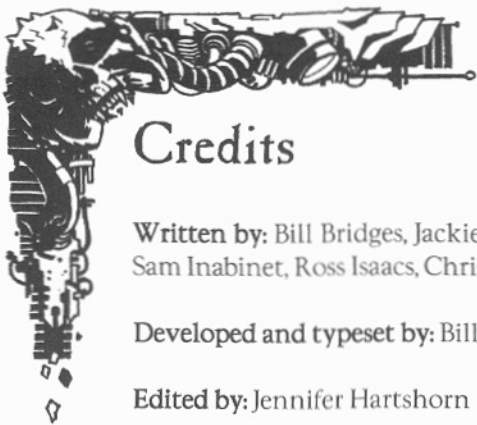
FADING SUNS PLAYERS COMPANION



FADING SUNS™

FADING SUNS PLAYERS COMPANION





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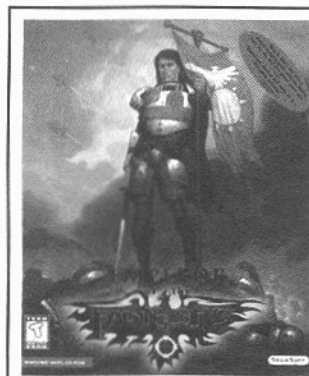
The emblems on the front and back covers represent some of the new character roles presented in this book. They are: (Front cover) Questing Knights, Swords of Lextius, Choral, Gjarti, Manja; (back cover) the Masque, Carnivalers, Slayers Guild, Apothecaries, Courtesans

Pilgrims:

Oh, how the stars beckon your wayward souls. But go not alone to the distant lights; take friends. Companions on the roads of night are ever a boon and a light to kindle the heart's flame. No matter the soils from which they came, the careers they follow or their strange visages; they are connected to you in common cause and faith. Did not the Prophet gather companions about him? If He saw the wisdom in such company, how can you spurn it? Heed his example and make many friends.



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Printed in the US of A



FADING SUNS

PLAYERS

COMPANION

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Alustro's Journal: Melting Pot

August 8th, 4997, 9:00 am
(Holy Terra calendar)

I am in awe at the immensity of this spacestation.

Its engineers are powerful indeed to keep it operating so many years after the Fall and under extreme pressure from the Church to abandon it. Cumulus, a city in space.

We arrived here to meet with Erian's al-Malik patron. Our highly expensive berthing fees are being paid by this wealthy noble, whose name I had best not record here. We disembarked to discover a melting pot of people from planets all over the Known Worlds. The bustle was almost as maddening as that in the Istakhr Market. People hurried to and fro, desperate to conduct their business and be off before rivals could find them — or before their berthing fees grow too high.

Safe from monetary worry, we took our time reaching the domed city. We wandered the hydroponic gardens open to the vast night of space, lit only by rows of artificial sunlight. Here, in this chill void, humankind has erected a safe haven of light and life where even the flowers of Urth can find rich soil.

Our patron resides in a rather lavish apartment building fronted by the main avenue of the domed city. There, we enjoyed a rich repast and comfortable rest. Such a relaxed atmosphere has grown foreign to us after too many months spent on rough worlds. But here we can let down our guard and enjoy life.

I have just arisen from a good night's rest (although day and night are governed here by the League's clock, not by the rising or setting of the sun). Today, I will visit the agora, rumored to host items unavailable on many worlds. I hope to find an Obun meditation bowl, an item which has so far eluded me in many markets.

9:00 pm

What an adventure! I am lucky to be whole and with a full pouch of firebirds. Villainy walks freely on Cumulus.

After finishing my journal entry of the morning, I left for the agora. Since my comrades had not yet arisen, I decided to spend the day exploring on my own. A mistake.

The first portion of the day was as wonderful as I had hoped. I wandered many stalls, all makeshift structures cuddled together in a network of hallways vast and small. Some — the more expensive — hosted permanent structures or staterooms, where the air is more pleasant and elbow room more abundant.

But it was the smaller ones which interested me, for they carried the most exotic goods. Of course, some of these I avoided, such as those promising a taste of the dreaded *zhrii'ka'a* lotus or even the addictive *selchakah*.

After a time of careful looking, I finally found a merchant who sold Ur-Obun goods. He had two of the bowls I was looking for! While I only purchased one, it seems that when one finally finds what one seeks, it comes in abundance. Much like the Pancreator's grace.

My purchase perhaps lulled my wariness. With a smile on my face — too broad and idiotic — I turned into a tighter passage, hoping for a shortcut back to the main thoroughfare. It was here the ruffians waylaid me.

A rather large man stepped from an alcove and blocked my way, glaring down at me evilly. From behind me, others gathered, chuckling low to themselves.

"What's in the bag, priest?" the large one grunted.

I hesitated, revealing my fear. "It... it is simply a meditation device used by the Ven Lohji sect of the Church, my son."

He obviously did not like the appellation I had used to address him, and showed his displeasure with a swing of his thick arm, knocking me forcefully into the wall. I clutched my Obun bowl, desperate not to break it. How foolish! I would have suffered broken bones before a broken bowl!

"Hand it over! Along with that pouch!"

My mind raced, trying to figure what stratagem I could use against them. I knew no theurgy which could

help me so quickly as I needed, and my skill in arms is rather pitiful.

The large one reached his arm back to strike again when he grunted in pain and toppled backwards, pulled by his own arm. As his girth sank to the floor, his face a mask of pain and rage, I saw Cardanzo behind him, clutching the giant's wrist with his hand, twisting it enough to cause pain and force the brute to follow Cardanzo's whim lest his arm be dislocated in its socket.

I envied him his martial skill then, embarrassed at my need for his aid. But this envy passed quickly, replaced by my more rational relief at his arrival.

He pointed his heavy slug gun at the giant's compatriots, who I now saw to be but striplings. Instead of heeding his words to remain unmoving, they fled, quickly disappearing into the crowd.

Cardanzo backed out of the alley, forcing the brute to follow him, although not his without expelling some nasty words. I followed quickly, thankful to be in an open arena again.

Cardanzo bent down to whisper in the brute's ear. I could not hear what was said, but the fellow nodded quickly. Cardanzo released him and the man picked himself up from the ground and walked away at a fast pace.

I was astonished. "Why did you let him go? He'll only rob from another!"

"Of course he will, Alustro," Cardanzo replied,

holstering his weapon, "He is a member of the local thieves' guild. Arresting him will only bring retribution on us from his fellows. Releasing him will allow us a degree of freedom from their kind."

"I don't understand. How is such crime allowed to run so rampant?"

"Cumulus follows different rules than most worlds, Alustro. The League has its hands full just keeping it in one piece. It cannot police it in addition."

"Then where are the priests? Cannot the Church lend some moral enforcement?"

"Ah, would you allow this? That bowl you so proudly bought is not exactly legal on Holy Terra."

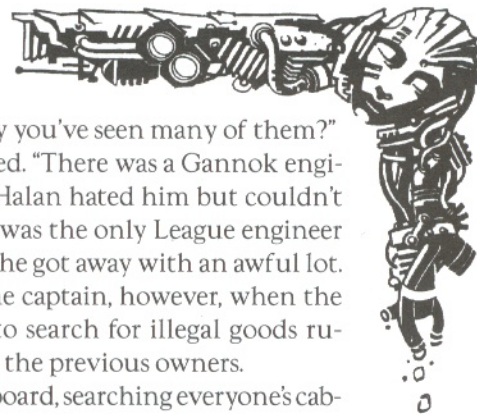
I flushed with embarrassment. "How long have you followed me?"

"Not long. When I realized where you had gone, I knew you would need some help. But do not take that as an insult. Even I am wary walking these halls alone. Now that you are here, we are both better off for it."

I smiled at his transparent attempt to ease my ego. Cardanzo was a good friend, and loyal to all of his lady's chosen entourage. As we walked back through the agora, I asked: "How did you know about those ruffian's guild allegiances? Have you been here before?"

"Not to Cumulus, no," he replied. "But I've seen it's like. Before I took service with Erian's family, I was a legionnaire in the Li Halan forces. I was stationed for a while on the





Hagia, a spacestation in the Rampart system. Even on a Li Halan-controlled station, I saw the corruption that finds its way into any long-term gathering of people. Of course, the station's previous owners had been the League."

"I didn't know you were in the military. I assumed you had been trained at birth to be a house guard."

Cardanzo smiled. "I am not so well born to serve so close to the lords and ladies from such an early age. I had to earn my way up. My father was a captain in the fleet, and that's how I attained my officer's status. It was my deeds in the Emperor Wars which gained me my service after mustering out. I received an offer from Count Gijan Li Halan, Erian's uncle. So, I entered the house forces and trained to guard nobles. It's very different, you know. Guarding a person rather than a ship. So many more things can go wrong. Assassins could be anywhere. You've got to assume the worst of others."

I saw no remorse on his face as he said this, although I cannot imagine living with such distrust. "How do you keep from getting bitter? You always seem of such good spirit, no matter what we go through."

"I've been through worse. The only thing I can imagine that could really embitter me is if I ever failed to protect my lady. Other than that, what else is there? Injury? I've got scars everywhere. Loss of friends? I've lost more friends during the war than most people can claim throughout their lives. Loss of property? Not even an issue. No, there's little left that I haven't lost. Best to count what one has and be glad for it."

"What about love? Is there no one who has ever won your heart?"

I said too much, for now a darkness entered his eyes.

"More than one. All unfaithful or dead. The dead ones hurt less."

I decided to change the subject and pretended to become absorbed in a craft store we passed. He saw through my attempt but played along anyway. As we walked on, I asked him about some of the things he had seen, the places he had been. I had hardly ever talked so deeply with him before; we never really had the time together. His travels were far but he rarely left the ships on which he served. What he saw of these places he only knew by the visitors who came aboard.

"What of aliens? Surely you've seen many of them?"

He smiled and chuckled. "There was a Gannok engineer on the Hagia. The Li Halan hated him but couldn't risk getting rid of him. He was the only League engineer left who knew the ship, so he got away with an awful lot. He did win the heart of the captain, however, when the Inquisition came aboard to search for illegal goods rumored to have been left by the previous owners."

"They spent weeks on board, searching everyone's cabins. But before they got to the officer's quarters, they were finally driven off. This Gannok — Kang Kang, I believe his name was — he began playing pranks on the Avestites. They started out small — rocks under the mattresses — but got worse and worse as time went on. Things like filling their ka-oil cannisters with perfume or replacing their wax candles with Brute fat."

"Then there were the cigars! The head Inquisitors had found a box of proscribed Vorox cigars. Do you know the kind? Grown from a tobacco-like plant on Vorox and heavily intoxicating. Well, this priest confiscated the cigars and no one knew what had become of them until the Gannok struck again. Two friends of mine were on routine patrol when they heard a small explosion from down a little-used corridor. Running to investigate, they came across the Inquisitor, his face blackened and burned, the butt of an exploding cigar still in his mouth!

"Well, he dropped the cigar quick and tried to claim that his flameweb had misfired, but everyone soon knew the full story. The next day, the ship was declared clean and the Inquisition left. A party was held in Kang Kang's honor, although he swore he had no idea what everybody was so happy with him for."

"So the Gannok prankster trait is not just a stereotype? They really do these things?"

"Well, you could never catch Kang Kang at it, but yes, I'm sure it was him."

I looked ahead at the stall selling alien crafts, the one with the sign showing mechanisms manufactured by Gannok. "I had considered buying one of their toys, to give to Ong. He likes wind-ups. But now I'm not so sure."

We eventually arrived back at our host's apartments in time for dinner. When offered a fine Delphian pipe after the meal, Cardanzo and I both declined.



Introduction

Welcome to the **Fading Suns Players Companion**, the culmination of a full year of publishing for **Fading Suns**. It also ushers in a new year of sourcebooks. If this is your first **Fading Suns** book — enjoy! We hope you'll like what you see (and then go buy all the existing sourcebooks!). If you've been with us before, then you'll notice a new design and look for the book. Gone are the often too-dark borders; introduced instead are images both creepy and numinous from the mysterious and ancient jumpgates of the Anunnaki.

Players Companions (or handbooks, guides, codexes, etc.) are perennial favorites and musts for die-hard gamers. Such a book represents a sort-of second volume for the main rules and is the best source in which to greatly expand the setting of the game. Following in this tradition, the **Fading Suns Players Companion** expands and elaborates on the basic rules of the game and introduces some major new elements to the setting. While much of the material herein is useful for the gamemaster, this book is mainly for the players. To this end, the range of player character roles and possibilities is greatly extended, as are the potential conflicts each role must face. Whether the character is a highly decorated commando or a naive Gannok, she's made enemies just by being who she is. Hopefully, she's made friends too.

Many secrets are revealed here, lore which most Known Worlders don't know. Part of the challenge of playing a roleplaying character is to keep separate the knowledge available to the character and knowledge available to the player. Just because you've read the section on the Oro'ym does not mean that your character knows such privileged info — in fact, almost no single person knows ALL the information presented in that section.

This book provides a mosaic view of the setting; each character only has pieces of it. Part of the fun and meaning of the quest to the stars is the gathering — or rediscovery

— of such lore. Eventually, secrets will be unveiled and it will be up to the player characters to forge a new universe from them.

Contents

Here's a brief run-down of what you'll find in this book:

Alustro's Journal

Alustro visits spacestation Cumulus and gets a glimpse of the varied lives within the Known Worlds.

Introduction

What you're reading now.

Chapter One: A Day in the Life

Just what does someone in the year 4997 do with his days? What sort of conflicts or problems arise in a typical day? This chapter answers these questions by showing a day in the life of a member of each of the major character factions in **Fading Suns**, from a Hawkwood noble to a Vuldrok Raider.

Chapter Two: Knightly Orders

Nobles don't just sit in their fiefs and manage their holdings — at least, not all of them. Many yearn for adventure or duty. These intrepid, well-bred scions often join a knightly order with which to go a-questing or to better serve the Pancreator — and the political needs of one's own house. Many options are available, from Emperor Alexius's elite Questing Knights to the obscure Adamantine Order of the Eskatonics.

Chapter Three: Religious Orders

Despite its best efforts, the Universal Church has been unable to wipe out all alternative religions. The simple folk of the woods pray to their own gods, even while giving lip-service to the Church on weekly chapel days. Sometimes, these folk are not so simple; there are more than a

few magicians among them. This chapter details the widespread religion of Gjarti, popular among modern barbarians, and the more-illicit ancestor cult of Manja, banned for centuries yet still practiced by some nobles. Also examined is the Church sect of the Choral, those who raise their voices in song to the Pancreator.

Chapter Four: Independent Guilds

The Merchant League is one of the major movers and shakers in the Known Worlds, and it is bigger than most people think. Each planet has its own slew of guilds and a few of these have spread to the stars. Many new professions are revealed here, from the competitive entertainment guilds to the secretive Slayers Guild or the incognito Vagabonds.

Chapter Five: The Military

One sure way off-world for many aspirants to the stars is through the military. The plethora of combat branches and units throughout the Known Worlds is detailed here, with emphasis on player characters newly mustered out and ready for adventure.

Chapter Six: Aliens

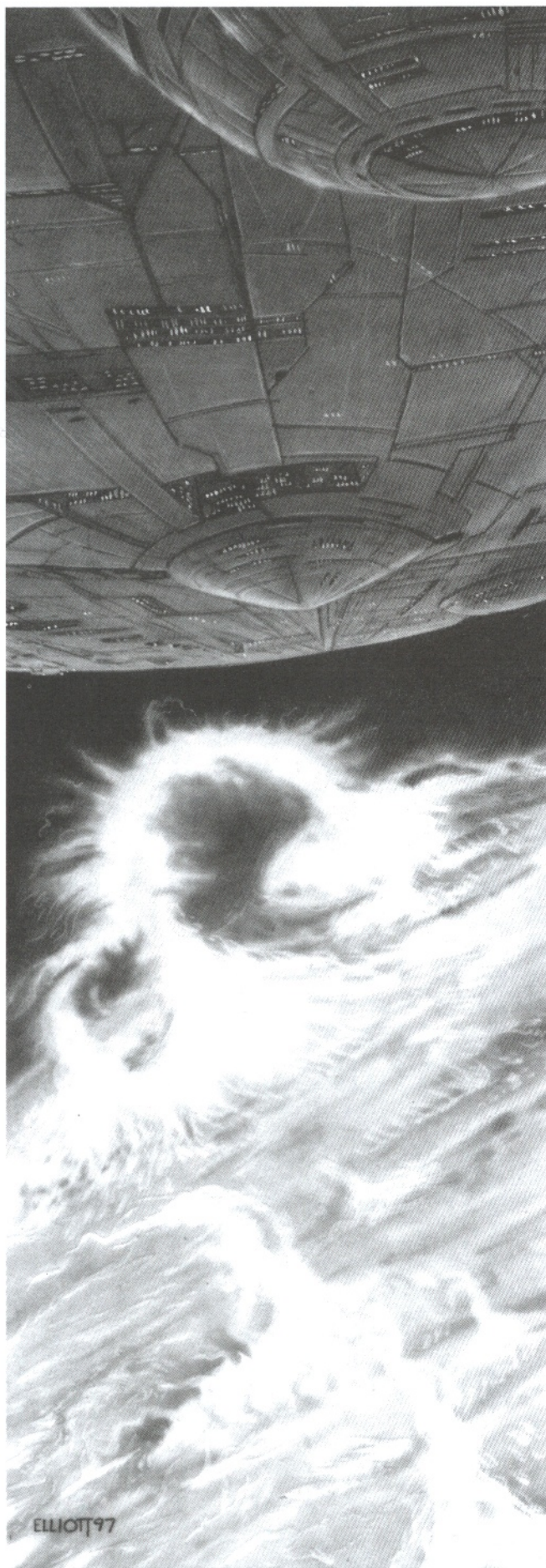
Humans are not the only sentients among the stars. Besides the well-known Children of the Ur, the Vorox and the enemy races (Symbiots and Vau), there are others: ostracized and forgotten in reservations set up for them during the Second Republic. The few aliens who make it off their homeworlds to enter interstellar society have a hard path ahead of them, regardless of whether they be the ungulate Shantor, simian Gannok, avian Etyri or some even stranger.

Chapter Seven: The Changed

A fate worse than being born alien is to be Changed, one of the genetically engineered, regardless of whether such alteration was done directly or to a distant ancestor. The Church is especially wary of these abominations, fearful that their twisted forms mirror twisted souls. However, being Changed does have its benefits: an extra limb or claw comes in handy now and then, and that ability to change one's form can be a lifesaver.

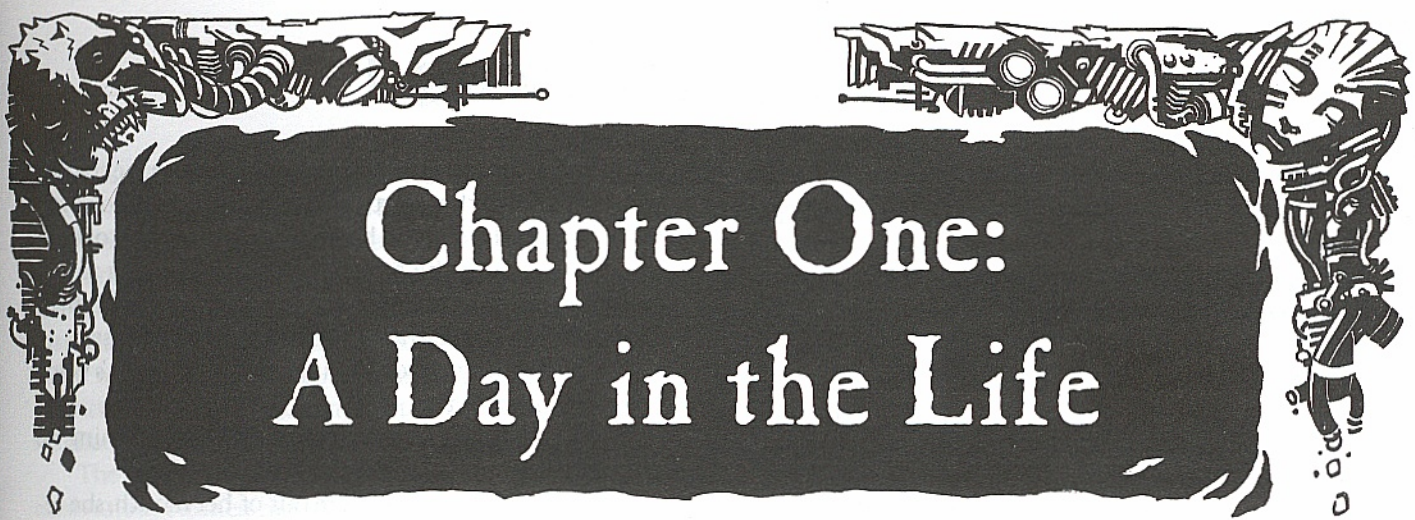
Chapter Eight: Rules

This chapter is chock-full of rules variants and options available to gamemasters and players, allowing them to alter gameplay to their liking. Also included are new melee, fencing and firearm actions, psychic paths and powers, weapons and equipment, details on money and even a starship.



ELLIOTT 97





Chapter One: A Day in the Life

Everybody in the Known Worlds has a unique position, whether it be as a serf, freeman or royal heir. They all have their daily travails and triumphs. In the case of player characters, the travails usually outnumber the triumphs. But this is often by choice, for they are the crazy ones who go digging in ancient ruins, plot vendettas against rivals, hire on for risky and illegal missions or attempt to convert hostile natives.

This chapter provides an idea of what a typical Known Worlder does in between such insane expeditions and adventures. It's usually not much more peaceful. Noble

lords have fiefs to govern, enemies to crush and tithes to pay. Priests have crises of faith to soothe, religious services to organize or famines to relieve. Merchants have fierce competition — even from their own fellow guildmembers — and pirates to worry about. Aliens have their own troubles, and even barbarians suffer daily turmoil.

The intent of all this is to provide example for players and gamemasters of what the “other guy” is up to — and what their own characters (PCs and NPCs alike) usually have to put up with.

House Hawkwood

Morning

Valerie Hawkwood bit her lip in frustration as Pardrik Trusnikron's urroc soared past her, its great wings pushing against the wind. She hated to lose, but her young, newly trained beast was clearly overmatched. No, it's not that, she thought. I'm at fault. I lost this race, not my mount. Sighing, she eased her grip on the urroc's neck and let the creature coast to a landing in front of the training field. Pardrik awaited her, an expression of aloof and casual disinterest on his face.

"Good race," she said to Pardrik, trying to disguise her disappointment at losing.

Pardrik frowned. "You called the race too soon," he replied brusquely. "Kron was tiring. You and Jiri should have overtaken me. I thought you Hawkwoods never gave up."

Afternoon

Seated at a large table in the Bardonai town hall, Valerie studied the neat columns of figures that enumer-

ated the Ravennan village's prosperity. Usually, her father would attend to the quarterly assessment; of late, however, Baron Aldan Hawkwood had encouraged Valerie to share in administering the family holdings. Standing across from her, Leron, the tax collector, watched her intently. Carefully, she closed the ledger and rose from her seat.

"Is everything to your liking, my lady?" Leron's voice betrayed his anxiety.

"Yes, of course," Valerie replied. "Should anything be out of order?"

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted them. Her father would never have implied that anything was amiss unless it were so. Now she would have to spend another hour — if not more — assuaging the tax collector's fears. The delay meant that a late afternoon riding lesson with Pardrik was out of the question.

Evening

The reception for the Imperial representative, a distant cousin of her mother's, was going well. The guest of honor stood chatting amiably with the Orthodox bishop, while the rest of the Imperial retinue mingled among the other visiting nobles from nearby Hawkwood and Trusnikron estates. Valerie withdrew into a room adjoining the ballroom to catch her breath.

"Tired?"

Valerie turned, startled, at the sound of the familiar voice.

"Pardrik," she said. "I didn't expect to see you tonight."

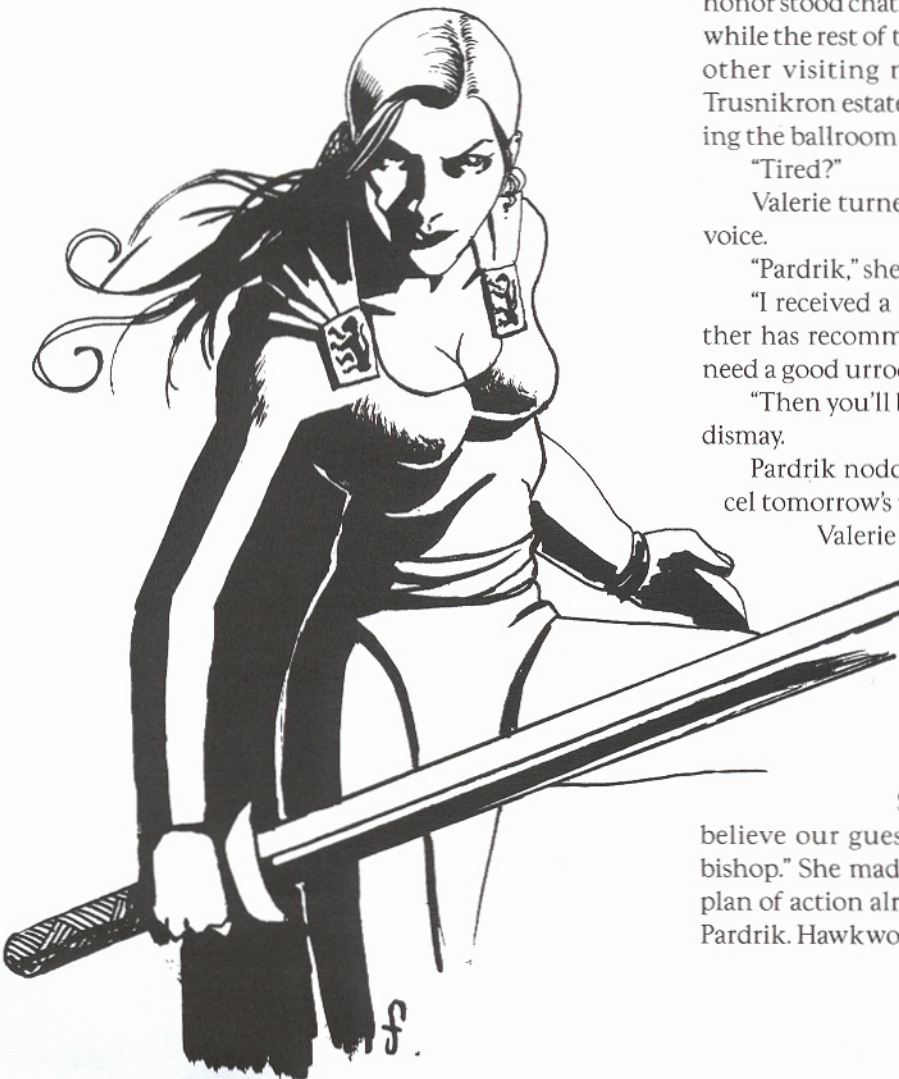
"I received a special invitation," he replied. "Your father has recommended me to his cousin. It seems they need a good urroc trainer on Byzantium Secundus."

"Then you'll be leaving?" Valerie didn't try to hide her dismay.

Pardrik nodded grimly. "I'm afraid we'll have to cancel tomorrow's riding lesson."

Valerie nodded, blinking back the moisture in her eyes. Of course, my family wants to see me paired with someone more important than a minor lordling. "How fortunate for you," she said. "I'll miss your expertise." But only until I figure out a way to join you in the Imperial capital.

She forced herself to smile. "Excuse me, I believe our guest of honor needs rescuing from the bishop." She made her way toward the Imperial party, a plan of action already forming in her mind. You're right, Pardrik. Hawkwoods never give up.



House Decados

Observations on Baron Ivan Decados, submitted to the Jakovian Agency by Boyar Rimsky Decados

If anything, I would submit that Ivan is a lazy man, unworthy of his title. This past morning he remained in his quarters until almost noon, dallying through breakfast with his latest courtesan. His absence at the breakfast table was disheartening to the visiting Lord Winthrop Hawkwood. I took it upon myself to fill the gap caused by our baron's absence and entertained our noble guest.

The afternoon was equally misspent. We met to discuss various business matters. After a brief chat, he retired again to his chamber for a few hours in a selchakah-induced haze. Once more was I forced to oversee matters.

More significant than our lord's apparent laziness was his afternoon visitor. As I surveyed shipping records, a household servant loyal to me approached and indicated that he had spied upon the visiting Hawkwood entering the baron's chambers.

Such private meetings worry me: my uncle too often meets in private with foreigners, and does not divulge the details of these meetings to even his most trusted associates.

I entered the apparently unused hidden staircase I had discovered months ago and made my way to the hidden panel behind the baron's bed. I had spied on him thus many times, and seen many vile sights. Unfortunately, I reached the panel too late, and from my spy-hole could see that Winthrop Hawkwood had departed. My uncle simply sat there, puffing contentedly on a selchakah pipe.

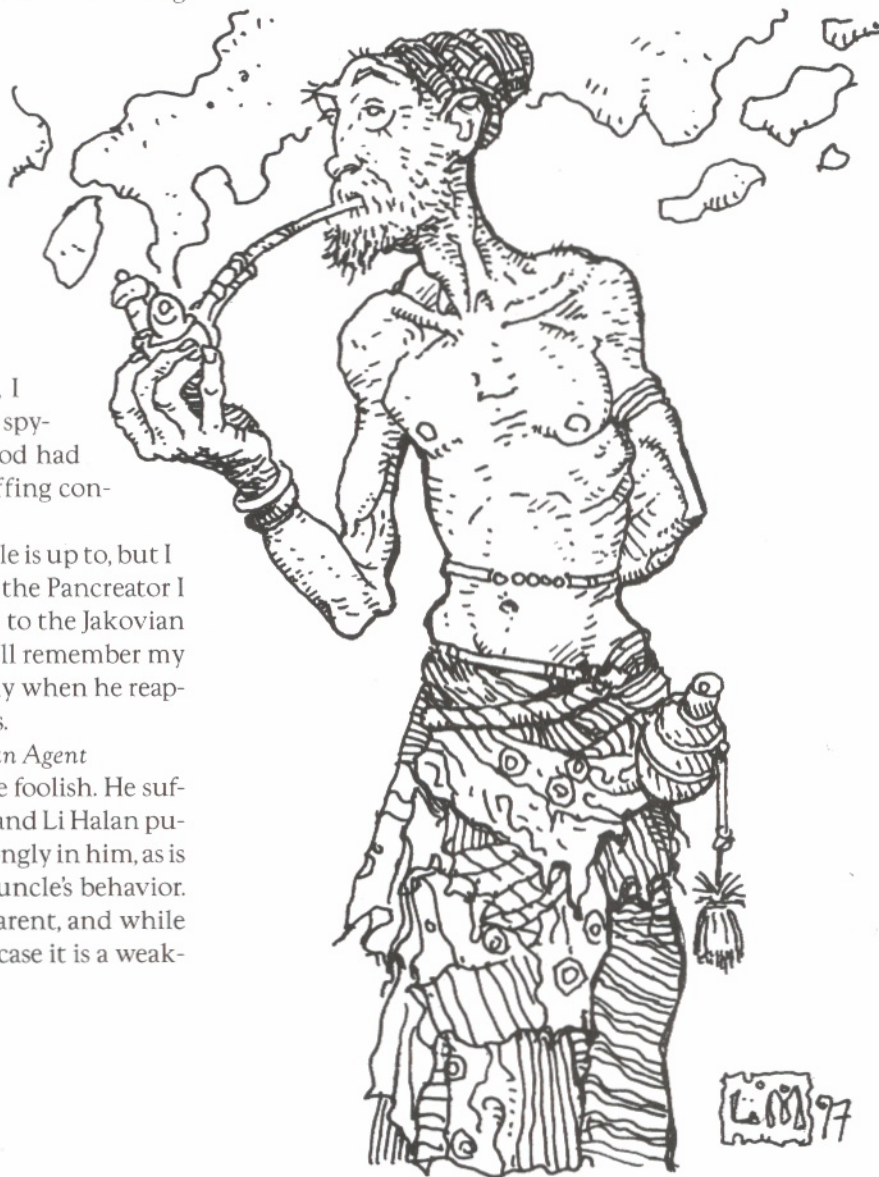
I cannot say for certain what my uncle is up to, but I fear he is selling house secrets. I swear by the Pancreator I shall uncover his deeds and report them to the Jakovian Agency. I am hopeful that the Prince shall remember my humble efforts and consider me favorably when he reapportions my traitorous uncle's properties.

Observations by Dasha Decados, Jakovian Agent

Young Rimsky's deeds and words are foolish. He suffers from a marriage of Decados intrigue and Li Halan puritanism: his mother's blood runs too strongly in him, as is evident by his moralism in judging his uncle's behavior. His eagerness for advancement is transparent, and while such zeal can be an effective tool, in his case it is a weakness.

It is obvious that Rimsky is unaware of his own uncle's role in the Jakovian Agency, and the ties that Ivan has maintained throughout the Known Worlds with his supply of selchakah to addicts of other houses. Perhaps Rimsky will mature and learn from his own folly.

Note: Be sure to cross-check Ivan's last report of his meeting with Winthrop Hawkwood. I do not recall reading of any private visit.



The Hazat

Baron Raphael Miguel Rolas de Selonia carefully closed the lid of the ancient crate and leaned on it, feeling both more relaxed and more confused. He had hoped that looking on its contents one more time would show him a clear course of action, but that had not happened. Instead, he was even more troubled than when the letter first arrived at breakfast.

Raphael had just sat down at the oaken dining table, fresh from his morning exercises, when a page hurried into the room. He bore a envelope with the seal of Baronet Ludmila Tina Castenda, and Raphael felt uncomfortable as soon as he saw it. As he expected, the envelope contained an invitation for Raphael to join with the Baronet in bringing suit against Don Pedro Seste for crimes committed by Pedro's father.

The chance for additional vengeance against the Seste family should have warmed Raphael's heart. After all, Pedro's father, Baron Vaustus Ricardo Seste, had killed Raphael's father and usurped his land. Some say the legendary Domino had brought Vaustus to justice, exposing his schemes and finally driving his rapier into the older man's heart after Vaustus tried to shoot him.

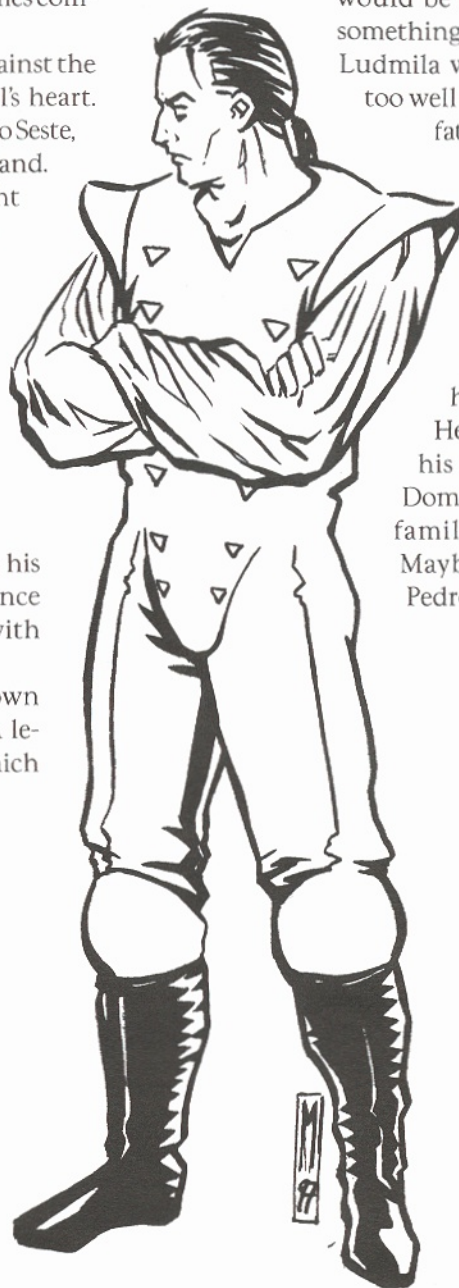
Raphael had recovered his ancestral lands following that fight, and the Seste branch had fallen into disgrace. Don Pedro had inherited a small mansion, and now Baronet Ludmila was proposing a way to take that from him. If Raphael would support her claims that Pedro was continuing his father's schemes when she went before Prince Juan, she would split that last mansion with him.

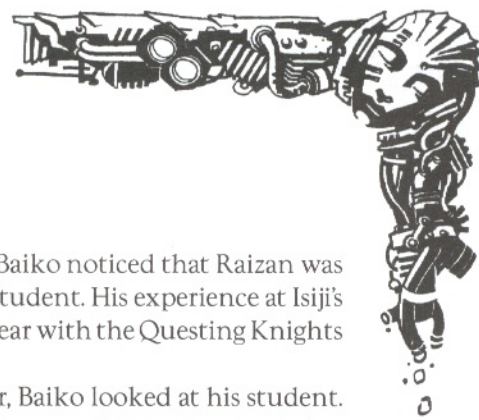
Raphael sighed and thought about his own property. Hundreds of acres of farmland. A legion of troops who trained in barracks which

Raphael knew better than his own bedroom. The town of Simulata, a growing trade spot which his great-grandfather had founded. Ancient ruins where Scravers even now looked for treasure. Today he should be touring them, ensuring that the troops' training went well and Simulata's new enterprises were well run. He had hoped to spend most of the day drilling his legions on hand-to-hand combat, as well as getting some more practice in for himself.

What made his decision even harder was that he knew Don Pedro had no involvement in Baron Vaustus' evils. He had also heard rumors that the Baronet had begun making trouble with Don Pedro's people as an excuse to move against him. Raphael sighed again. Don Pedro's land would be a fine addition to his own. Still, something nagged at him. The way Baronet Ludmila was proceeding reminded him far too well of what happened to him after his father died.

Again Raphael looked at the contents of the ancient crate. The mask, cape and rapier looked normal, but Raphael knew how donning them had changed his life. The strength of purpose and drive for honor they had imparted could not be shaken. He pulled the bell pull, summoning his most trusted servant. Being the Domino had allowed him to regain his family's honor and see justice done. Maybe it would do the same if Don Pedro was wearing it.





House Li Halan

"Holy Pancreator, who revealed to Zebulon Thy servant the Spirit, the Path and the Eightfold Vision, bless Thou your servant, and make of me a weapon of light in the darkness, to pierce the shadows, discern the truth and fulfill Thy will on Raizan Li Halan."

Bowing his head toward the cold east, Raizan said his morning prayer, then slipped out of his sparsely furnished room (bed, night table, one antique chest of clothes inscribed with the ancient rose insignia of the Li Halan). Dressed in a black, loose fitting robe, he appeared outside his father's estate before Baiko, the captain of the guard and his personal trainer.

"A mist rises over the moon's reflection," Baiko said, upon seeing Raizan. "The flower petals move in the water, angel's wings." He held out a wooden, curved sword. Raizan, twenty three years old and recently returned to his father's estates, took the wooden weapon.

"Springtime lotus, eternal sun seeker, covered by late snow," Raizan responded.

"Good, Master Raizan, good," Baiko said. "A good *renga* poem, but somewhat fatalistic. Snow covering a lotus. If the mind is not still, or if you are nervous toward future duties, we should not practice."

"My mind is still," Raizan said, feeling the cool breeze upon his cheek.

For an hour Raizan parried, attacked and defended with his sword, while Baiko straightened his arm, commented on his form (unusually good, more bold than usual), and then took out the slug guns. They performed

quick reflex firing. Again, Baiko noticed that Raizan was more bold. He was a good student. His experience at Isiji's military academy and his year with the Questing Knights had helped.

After practice was over, Baiko looked at his student. "Raizan Li Halan, you are nervous about your upcoming marriage to Juliara Barache." It was an arranged marriage. The Baraches were gentry nobility but possessed great wealth.

"How do you know?"

"I saw you two days ago when you lead the men against the husk attack on Sarat village. You performed well, bringing down seven of the undead."

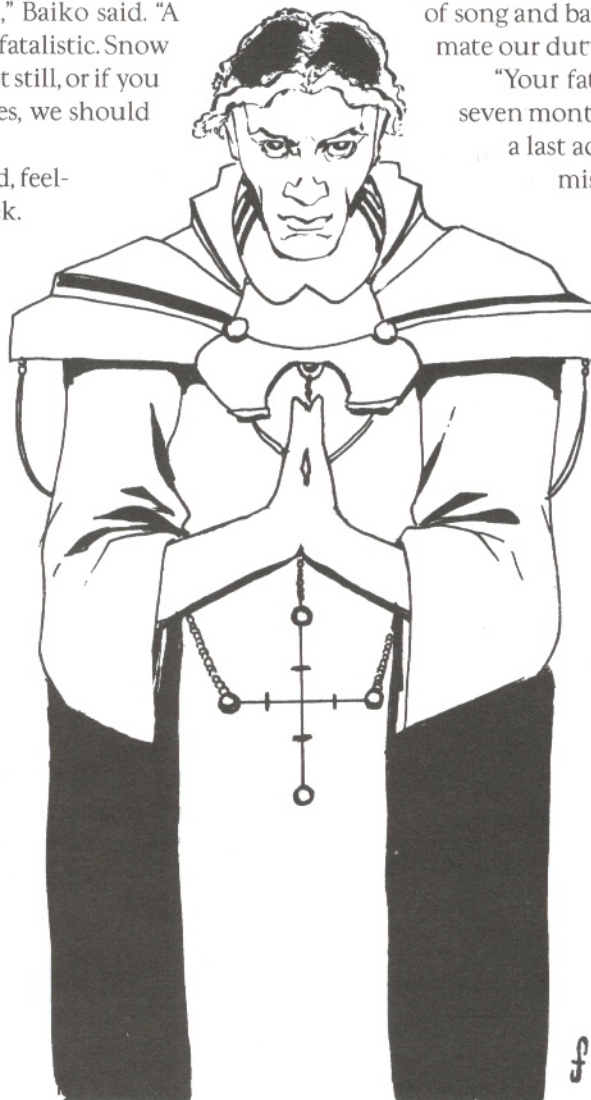
"I did well enough."

"Yes, but you threw yourself in the front of battle recklessly. You revealed an unconscious wish."

Raizan sighed. "Yes, you are right. I love Juliara. She has a good aesthetic eye and we both have an interest in old poetry and history. But I am afraid that the days of song and battle will be over once we consummate our duty."

"Your father knows this. Your wedding is seven months away. Next month, he gives you a last adventure, to accompany him on a mission to Madoc."

Raizan nodded, but inside he wanted to sing. He whispered a prayer of thanks for the respite from duty. "Blessed be Thou, Pancreator, in the seasons of righteousness, world without end."



House al-Malik

When Mazan the Thief's gang broke into the warehouse of Adakam the Merchant, only a blind *bakhshi* performer witnessed the raid in the Gund neighborhood of the Istakhr Market. Ordered to steal Adakam's secret supply of synthetic brains, Mazan found himself confronted by the ancient robed merchant and the mercenaries in his employ.

Shots rang out. Two of Mazan's men fell dead in seconds. Mazan dropped to the floor, rolling behind some containers. His man, Mahmet, shot one of the guards, but it was only a matter of time before they were finished.



Suddenly, the blind *bakhshi* performer appeared, followed by Ja'far the animal tamer, a local vendor. "Everyone is under arrest," the *bakhshi* said calmly.

"On whose authority?" screamed Adakam, poking his head out from behind a crate.

"By authority of the al-Malik," Ja'far said. "We have followed you for weeks, Adakam, wondering why synthetic brains were being transported. The *bakhshi* here is the duke's niece, Atiya al-Malik, whose beauty is the reflection of the dawn moon over a still pond."

The thieves and mercenaries stopped, uncertain. Atiya peeled off her synthflesh mask, the adhesive plastic which gave her the appearance of an old woman. Her young, beautiful features were revealed. "I did not know," she said, "that the *da-ya*, the road to the First Mountain, would be so full of rich experiences."

"I hate that damn Ven Twa of yours," Adakam whispered. "That smug Graceful Tongue you use to intimidate outsiders. If I ever hear that damned tongue again I'll scream!"

"Noble merchant, the combined knowledge in these sealed containers does not equal the smallest thought on your much troubled brow," Sharzad replied.

Adakam growled and aimed his Mitchau .40 Thunderer at Atiya. She flung her *dotar* at Adakam's feet. It exploded, blowing Adakam across the room and into the wall. He slid to the floor and spat up blood. Mazan pointed his gun at the mercenaries, who dropped their guns and raised their arms in surrender.

"What were you attempting here?" Atiya said, standing over Adakam.

"Manipulation of the postcentral gyrus," the merchant said, grinning as blood tricked from his mouth. "Create unlimited desire for a product by manipulation of the frontal lobe via the subliminal broadcasting of images. We would create the perfect consumer."

"We?" Atiya asked.

"We. Others." A rasping sound escaped from Adakam's throat as he died.

Atiya looked over at Mazan. "Thief, tell your boss to cooperate, or we'll shut his operation down, too. Leave us now."

Ja'far looked at Atiya. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, exhilarated. The road to the First Mountain produces unexpected results. Now I must buy another musical instrument to celebrate our victory."

Householder

From the journal of Melissa Hauptford, Seneschal to Count Finegan of House Hawkwood, Leminkainen, Fenwick Marches

Morning Notes

Rose early to kick stableboys awake. Lazy, rotten boys. None of them shall make squire. The lord's hunt must not begin late.

The kitchen staff was presented. They must be ready to prepare the catch immediately upon the hunt's return. From the reports delivered by the rangers, they can expect one of three feasts: Urth boar, Fenix or — if the hunt is lucky — Grambol. (Note: Make sure physickers have proper anti-toxins available if the latter. And set the tables with *shalpo* scent candles, to hide the stench.)

Noon Notes

Curses! The stores are lower than expected. How could this have passed unnoticed until now? That blowhard, Baron Richter, is to blame. His visit two nights ago saw entirely too much consumption. Why was I not notified? See who is to blame and deliver a harsh thrashing.

Send Jacques into Feldsmere City to replenish the stores, along with a sizable guard to deter bandits (except for Sergeant Morgan). Maintenance the secondary hauling skimmer — the lord has demanded the primary skimmer for the hunt, in case a Grambol is brought down.

Summon Sergeant Morgan for a... briefing. He must assign his soldiers to duty tonight, but post himself in the outer hall. His strong arms are best put to use here.

Evening Notes

I warned the lord as respectfully as possible not to invite that Decados brat along for the hunt. My warnings were unheeded, and he has caused trouble. An incident of honor! Gloves have been thrown down and the hunt is cut short, with only one Urth boar to bring in. Before the entourage returns, prepare the fresh stores of cattle meat Jacques was wise enough to purchase with his own cognizance. He must be rewarded for this.

Send the stewards to prepare the field and gather the chiurgeons.

Midnight Notes

There will be hell to pay tomorrow. I pray the chiurgeons can properly prepare the body for delivery. The Decados will nonetheless seek a blood debt for their loss. I must await the lord's decision in such matters.

To bed, then. But first, I must "speak" with Sergeant Morgan here in my chambers. Promises of a captaincy go so far and lend the promisor beauty otherwise lacked...



Urth Orthodox

Your Grace,

As you requested, I am writing to inform you about our progress in rebuilding the cathedral after the fire, and about our new priest, Father Bentley. The fire razed the church to its foundations, burning into the late hours of the night; Brother Biggs is still investigating its cause. Despite the fire's intensity, however, Sister Marcel managed to rescue the Shroud of Saint Verda. I can only recount her escape through the inferno as a blessed miracle. Unfortunately, the continuing arrival of refugees from the Vuldrok raids has sorely hampered our rebuilding efforts. Eight more refugees arrived today, interrupting our morning prayer. This angered Father Bentley, who berated their leader before allowing them shelter in the vestry building. I fear our parish's hospitality has suffered greatly in recent weeks.



We have contracted enough stone to rebuild the cathedral's foundation, but the granite alone has severely depleted our coffers. The wood for the upper structure has come at a lesser price, thanks to Baron Anthony Hawkwood's generosity. Unfortunately, Father Bentley offset these savings when he emptied our treasury to buy the cathedral's new Orb. The old Orb was a brass oil-lantern, more than adequate for the lighting of a humble parish church. Even before the fire, however, Father Bentley "hated" that light. Every Restday he preached before the congregation, extolling the virtues of an everlight, "like they have in Transverse City." I have heard some in the congregation say that his desire for the Orb bordered on the sin of technosophy. Despite the congregation's wishes, he bought the light, angering most in the parish.

Since that time, Canon O'Blay and many of the novitiates have avoided vespers when they knew he would be in attendance, preferring to hold their prayers in a local farmhouse. Many in the congregation have gone to our sister parish in Nardwood. I hear some have even sought out services with a local sect of Incarnates. Clearly this is a deplorable situation; I believe our congregation cannot survive much longer under Father Bentley's care. He has often spoken of how he misses Transverse City. I believe he would be happier, and do less harm, if he had the opportunity to return there. I fear this letter is less than charitable, but you urged me to be honest. I pray that your wisdom will right all wrongs in this matter by allowing the father's expeditious departure.

Yours,

Sister Chota Dorch

Brother Battle

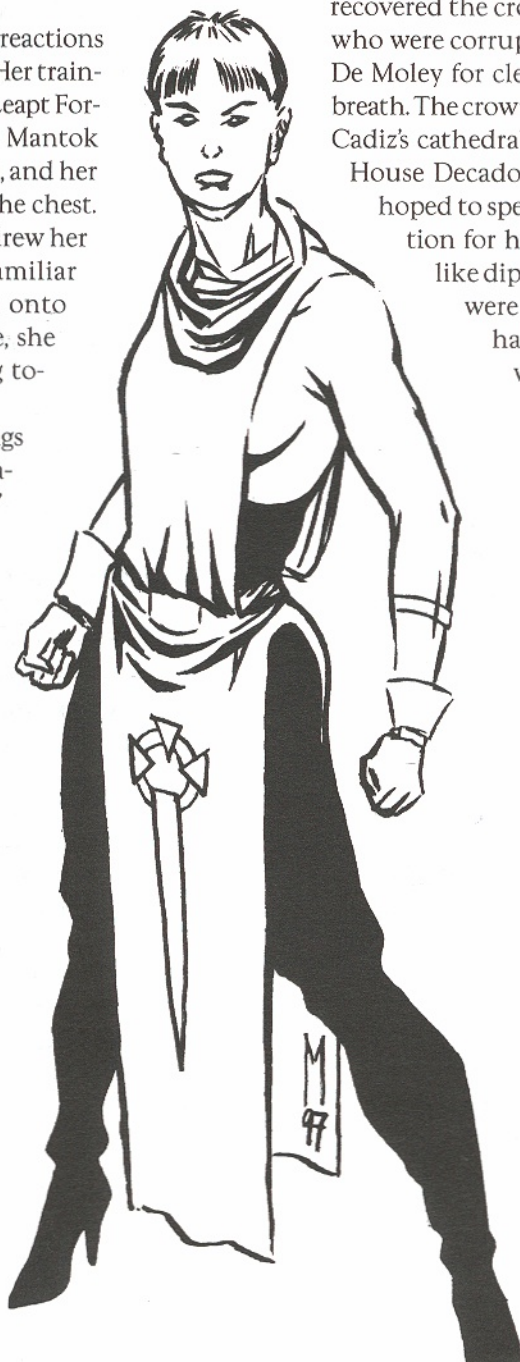
Adept Diana slowly knelt down in prayer, beseeching the Pancreator more for a cure to her hangover than for the safety of her soul. By the Prophet, a Symbiot hive does far less damage than does one of Baronet Alesia Decados's parties, she thought. Still, as the primary Brother Battle representative on Cadiz, she had certain responsibilities, and attending the planet's main social functions was one of these. She would have preferred to spend last night preparing for her upcoming trip to Vrill-Ya, but relations with the Decados were strained. She had to smooth over hurt feelings as much as she had to study the weaknesses of potential enemies.

Diana's hangover did not slow her reactions as the door to her chapel crashed open. Her training kicked in and without a word she Leapt Forward, Embracing the Sun. The ancient Mantok maneuver carried her across the chapel, and her armored foot hit the intruder full in the chest. He fell down, and as Diana landed she drew her flux sword. Then she noticed the familiar sword-in-the-jumpgate symbol sewn onto the stranger's cloak. At the same time, she noticed the Decados soldiers running toward the chapel.

"Stop," she yelled. "This land belongs to Brother Battle as given to us by the Patriarch. You have no authority here." The soldiers stopped, their assault stilled more by the threat of her flux sword than the truth of her words. They milled around uncertainly but snapped to attention as a skimmer came to rest near them. Out stepped Baronet Alesia.

"Hello Diana," she said, immediately reminding Diana of a snake ready to strike. "I see that the criminal has sought haven here." Diana turned to look at the cloaked intruder. He had risen to his feet, and his cloak had opened to reveal a suit of battered ceramsteel armor with numerous religious symbols painted on it. He held no weapon but Diana recognized his stance as Raised Palm, Points of Star. From that position he could reach more than a dozen concealed weapons in less time than it would take the soldiers to pull their triggers.

"I am Calimanda, oblate of our order," he said. "I have recovered the crown of St. Iman from the heretics who were corrupting it. I now intend to take it to De Moley for cleansing." Diana cursed under her breath. The crown of St. Iman had disappeared from Cadiz's cathedral generations ago — shortly after House Decados claimed the planet. Diana had hoped to spend her day in prayer and preparation for her upcoming trip. Now it looked like diplomacy and perhaps a fight or two were the order of the day. At least the hangover was no longer her main worry.



Eskatonic Order

Pentateuch's agora was particularly boisterous today, Brother Lathan thought as he wound his way through the gathered throngs milling about from stall to stall. The transition from the serenity of his morning's reflections contrasted starkly with the frenetic hustle of the crowded masses. Still, he was glad to be back on Pentateuch, and this past month was a necessary balm.

He was away from Pentateuch for a few years, and he had missed the world badly: the aroma of fresh-roasted joloba beans, witnessing sunset atop Mount Tabor, trekking through the Shulel Forest in search of rare jhixi herbs.

He came to Pentateuch as a frightened tertiary, and the world welcomed him. Its vast sprawling wilderness embraced him; its mountains hovered protectively over him; its waters cleansed him. Only the soulless could not love this world's spirit, and it was his personal romance with Pentateuch that opened his eyes to the spirits that resided in all things.

Ultimately he left Pentateuch, a newly-ordained novitiate, eager to join the entourage of a childhood friend — a noble of House al-Malik desperate to win his spurs. This was the beginning of a grand adventure across the Known Worlds, concluded with an unexpected treachery that left half their number dead on Nowhere. In remorse he returned to Pentateuch, to grieve the loss of his friends.

Ahead he spied a group of somber Orthodox priests at his favorite book stall, idly flipping through the pages of random tomes. He knew the bookseller, and recognized what circumspect works the Orthodox might discover. The bookseller's nervousness was apparent, at least to Lathan.

He sidled up to them, humming an Obun tune learned from a now-deceased ally. The Orthodox priests surreptitiously glanced at the unshaven mystic. "Greetings, Brothers!" he proclaimed. "The End is near! Are you ready? It shall be glorious!"

They tried to ignore him.

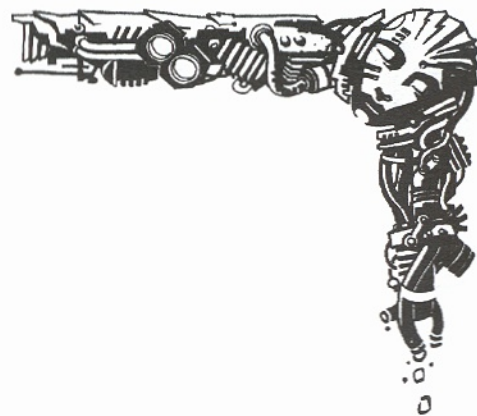
He whirled to face the crowd. "Let us recount the story of Saint Mythior, whose visions tell us of the imminent Eskaton!" he exulted. "My brothers and I shall share the good news of the End Times!"

A few passersby stopped to listen, and he launched into a wildly rambling sermon that detailed the Eskaton in exquisite detail, punctuated by the occasional Obun hymn.

The Orthodox were aghast. They backed away, extricating themselves from an apparently humiliating episode. Within moments they were gone, the bookseller safely ignored.

Lathan ended with a few admonitions to the gathering. He turned to the relieved bookseller, and they traded winks. "You owe me one," Lathan whispered as he strolled by his rescued friend. He already had a few books in mind, far more expensive than a humble priest could otherwise afford.





Avestite

five of thee klok: sunnrize. I awakin.

five and a halv: morning prayers and ablewshons.

siks of the cklock: morning meel. got thear erly so I got thee best porshin frum the top of the pott. must wakin erlyer so I kan finish prayers and get heer erlyer.

six and a qwarter: groop prayr and miditayshon. bruther amantildo mayd us do mor of that chanting tудay. I do not lyke chantig, becauz it maiks me lyte heddit, but bruther ammontidlo sayz it mayks my insides cleen so my sole woant haf to livve in filf.

sevvin off the clock: sirmun by deekun arkibaldus. verry interestible.

nine of thee klok: groop ecsersizes. bruther pugnatus tuk us thru minny diferint subduwal drills tудay and shoad us wut kinde of dorz shud be rammd wif the scholdur or kikt in with thee bute.

levvin of the clock: sylint metatayshin. thank thee Pankriater.

levin and a haf: ottoflajilashin. after a yeer of thee plane lether my back is sow scard ovar that it dusint byte inny mor. must request the abbit for permishun to yooz sum irun studs or a barb.

noone: nune meel.

noon and a half: benny dikshon and abyourashin.

wone off the klok: patrol. menny innerestible akshuns uccuring on patrol tудay, butt nun mor sow then thee riport of a speading rikshaw. wee braut it to hault, and uppon lukiing inside hu du we see but thee cownt's senishall with a yung wuman in stait of undrest. he is ettemping to push a parsel intoo her lap, but she calls him a unclean part of the anatummy and clocks him with it (thee parsell), cuvvaring halv his hed in pyure graid sill-chawkuh! as we draged him off to the mission he told us a vary inderrestible story abowt how he wus infestigaiting the ikstent of orginized cryme in thee feefdum.

aite of the klock: daze riport and dibreefing. mutch lafter over thee senishal.

nine of thee clock: eevining meel. got thear lait. scraft birnt bits from bottum of pot.

nyne and three qwarders: prayur.

ten off the clock: surmon by canun paulifemis. hily interestible but ispeshillly wen I awoak to heer bruther amantilda argewing doctrin with thee cannon hu wuz not hapey abowt it. bruther pugnashius had to lift the alter and drop it LOWD for or fyve tymes befor we got qwyet again. a hiley interistible surmin.

twelf midnigt: confeshin.

twelf and a qwarter: pennints.

too off thee cklocks: to sleap.

— from the personal diary of Novitiate Clement, of the Avestite monastery on Cadavus



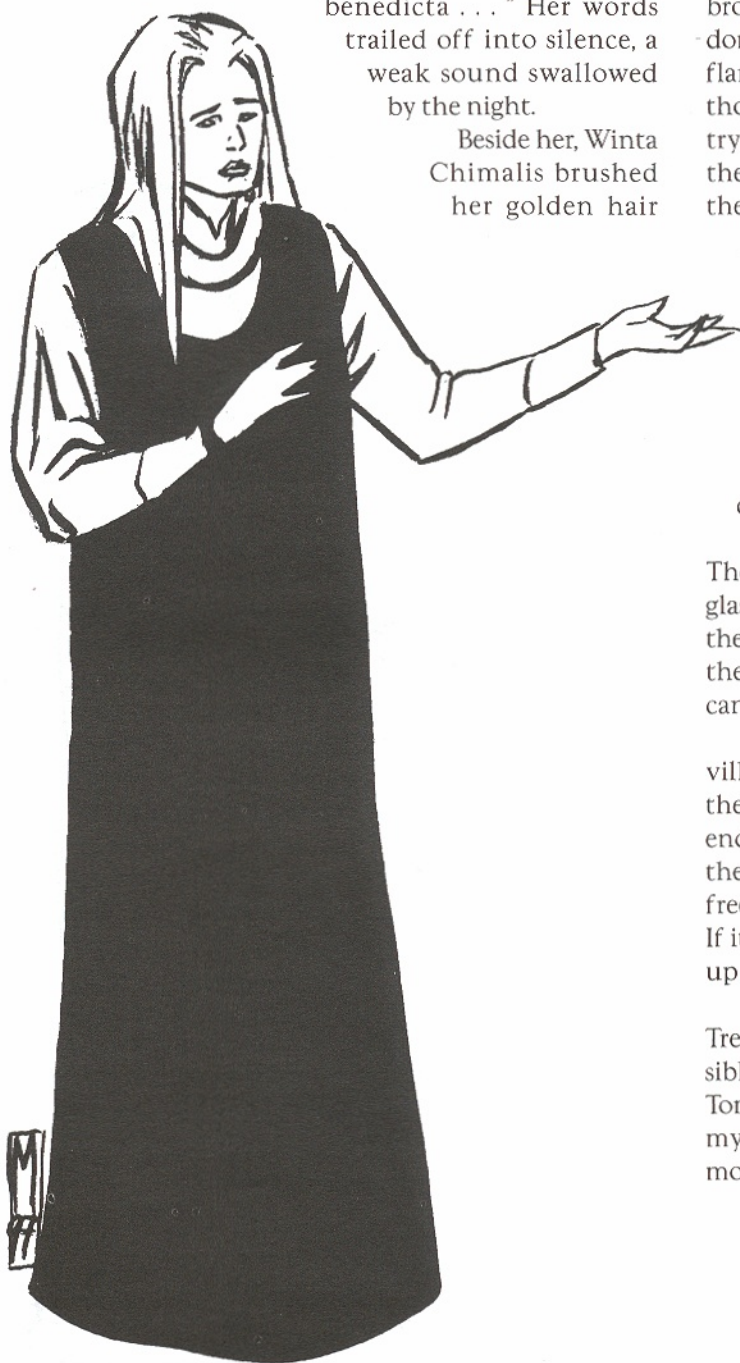
Amalthean

"Winta, Winta, Winta," came the cry, a ghost cry from a hundred dying throats, rustling like old leaves in the wind. Behind the two Amaltheans, shadows moved in the dying town, figures shuffling out of doorways, blistering and festering, suffering from the Violet Corpse, a disease with no cure. "Winta, Winta, Winta."

Treszcka turned and saw them, a hellish multitude smelling of decay. Purple blotches covered their skin and huge boils oozed yellow pus. Treszcka swallowed, fighting a momentary urge to vomit, and said her prayer to

Amalthea: "Santa Amalthea, benedicta . . ." Her words trailed off into silence, a weak sound swallowed by the night.

Beside her, Winta Chimalis brushed her golden hair



from her eyes, and motioned the crowd to silence. They obeyed, falling on their knees before the greatest healer of the Known Worlds. Winta approached them, hands upraised in healing prayer, appearing, thought Treszcka, like an unearthly spirit, a beautiful icon gliding on invisible feet. Her hands brushed the head of a man, and he fell back, healed. Others rose, swarming about her, touching the hem of her robe or raising their hands to let her long hair flow through them like a waterfall.

The two healers had come to Sierra Rojo, on Sutek, a mission of mercy to heal the strange disease which had broken out there a week before. The pestilence struck randomly, causing purple discoloration of the skin, then inflammation and swelling and finally death. The Hazat authorities quarantined the village and surrounding countryside, allowing food drops but no visitors — except for the two healers, who could not leave once they entered the village. Yet the mission was urgent, for already, two cases were discovered outside the quarantine area.

Winta was one of the greatest healers in the Known Worlds, manipulating light and healing injuries with a touch, while Treszcka, a year out of her schooling in Merciful Technals on Artemis, had never seen anything like her. A touch and a peasant was cured, a word and people fell unconscious, waking healed. Treszcka did not know what good she could do here.

They set up headquarters in the abandoned Church. The priest had fled, leaving his flock to die. Old stained glass windows revealed scenes from the Prophet's life; to the left of the altar, in bright glass, Amalthea forever healed the Prophet. The adobe walls kept them cool, and they lit candles and prayed before deep night came.

Deep in meditation, Treszcka recalled that only the village fishermen seemed immune to the disease. Was not the lake near to the ruins of the Old Fortress, where legend claimed that the First Republic overlords had stored their fires of destruction? What if such stores had broken free of their prisons, leaking their poisons into the lake? If it was a gradual escape, the fishermen could have built up an immunity to it. Of course! That must be it!

Thanking Saint Amalthea with tears in her eyes, Treszcka realized that she, a year out of training, had possibly found the cure in the blood of the simple fishermen. Tomorrow she would begin applying medical science, as mysterious to the peasants as Winta's healing ability. Tomorrow the vaccinations would begin.

Hesychast

The Journal of Brother Aris

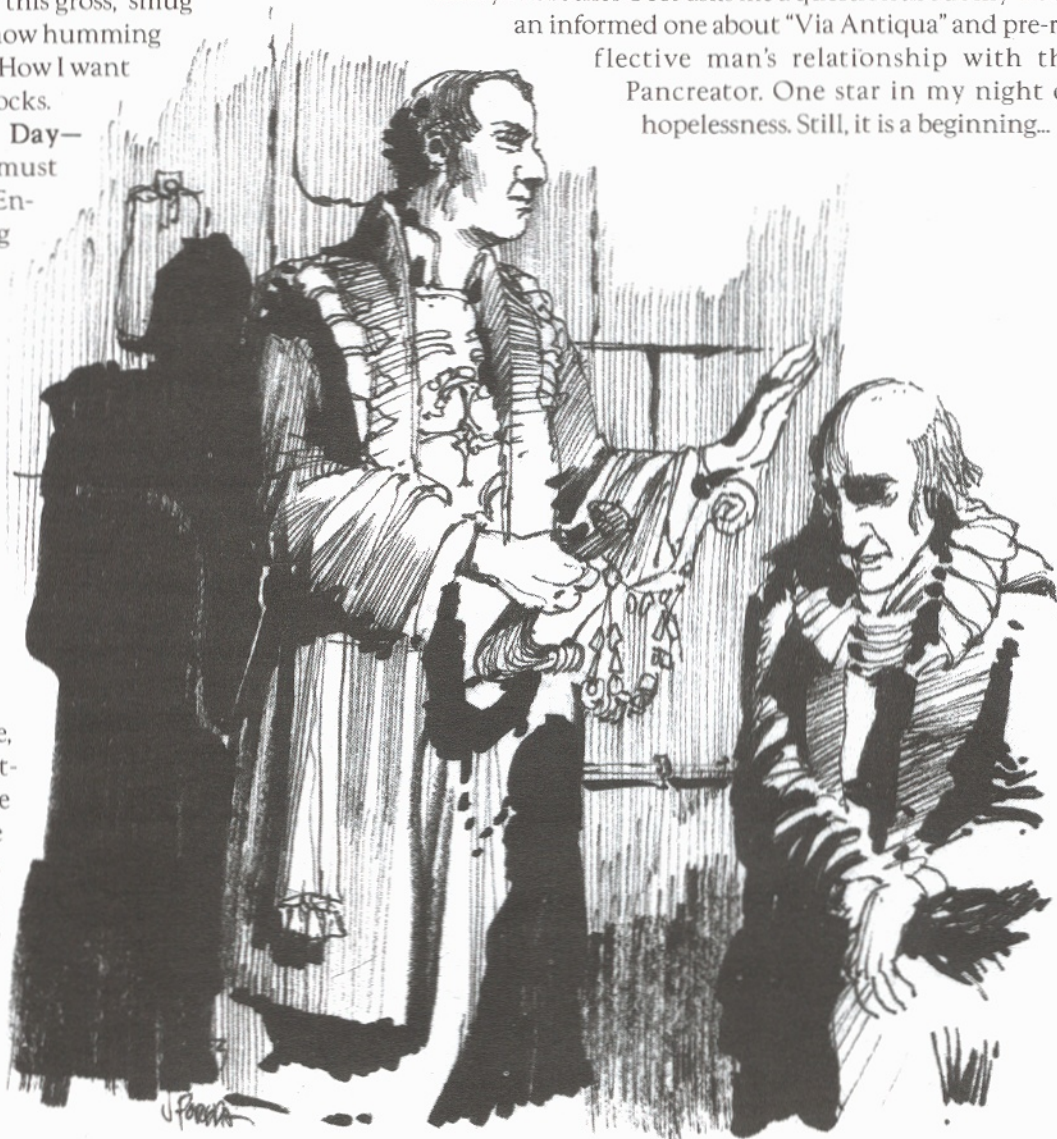
St. Palamedes Day— I arrived on Nowhere via a Church ship, rundown and reeking (the captain informed me that she used to make illegal hauls of synthoholic beverages until captured and given new life in our holy fleet). A small, frantic man, Brother Giles, greets me, and accompanies me to my new home, the Malestron Monastery. He is the silent, nervous type. Informs me that he has heard of my work, *Gift of the Pancreator*, but not read it. "No, Brother Aris, reading is an indulgence I do not allow myself." Nor, apparently, is stimulating conversation.

If my superiors (and by this I mean Bishop Xenos) sought to exile me due to my writings, they could have given me no worse hell (or test of faith) than the company of this squalid bore. Still, I meditate on St. Akahito amidst the Vorox, and the Miracle of the Gong. St. Akahito's faith, at least, was tested by killer sentients with the strength of giants. Mine is tested by this gross, smug little repentant, who is now humming a poor litany to himself. How I want to smash his face with rocks.

St. Hombor's Day— Malestron Monastery must be seen to be believed. Entering the maddening stone mansion, I am informed by a monk sitting naked on hot coals that Brother Calais awaits me in one of the garden mazes. Another monk, meditating in the air, suspended by one arm, announces my arrival. "A fairly conventional place," Brother Calais informs me, after I spend two hours looking for him through the garden maze, coming across lewd statues placed there by the Decados long before. The 380-room mansion was built in Chaos Revival style and is a tribute to

Li Halan decadence combined with the comparatively "healthy" mental outlook of the Decados. Twisting rooms, screaming statues and wind chimes that sound like dying Ravennan Dragon Whales greet me at every turn. My room possesses a stairway which leads into the wall and abruptly ends. I fear I am in a holding cell for drunks. But no, I am assured that this is one of the better rooms.

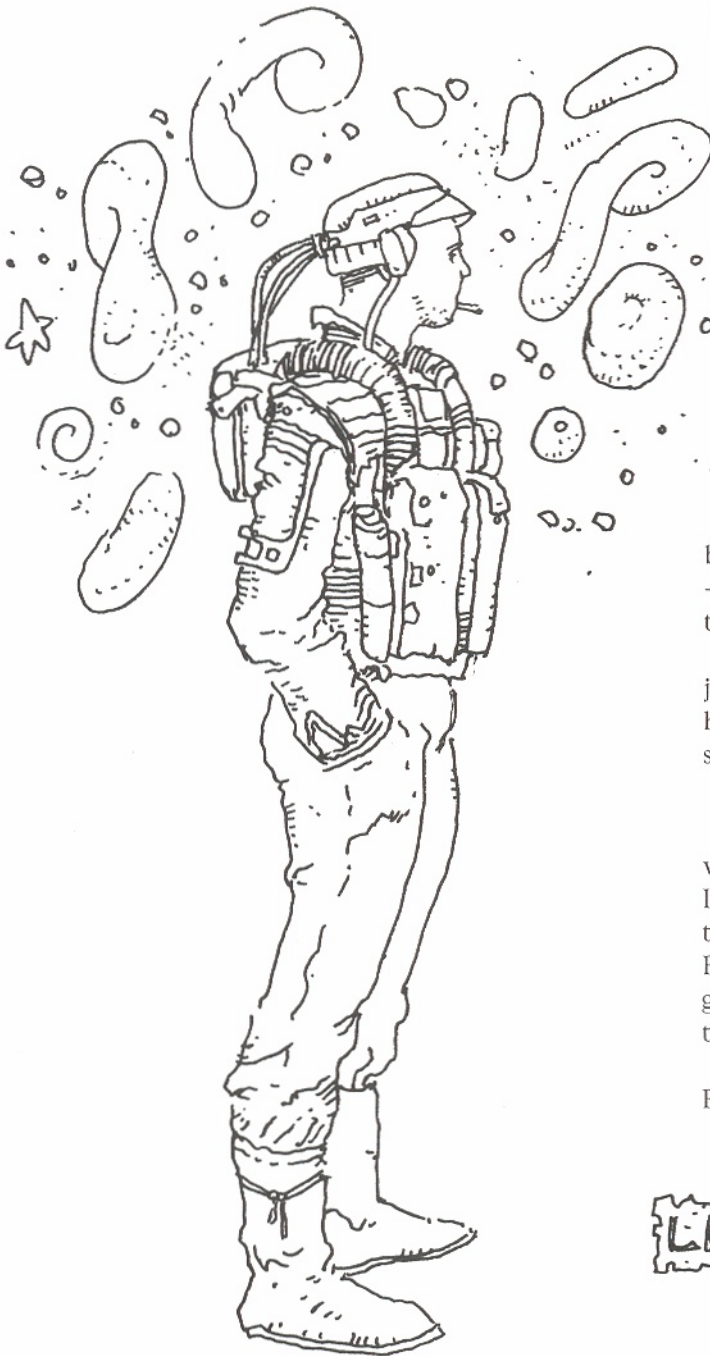
Reflection Night Eve— The study of Via Corporeus was never my gift. Monks who practice martial arts or chant Zebulon's Mercies while sticking hot pins in themselves are not representative of the holy solitude I write about. Apparently, the weavers among this monastery lead a more normal, if not equally boring, existence. I have devoted my life to Via Devotio, to strengthening our relationship with the Pancreator. My works reflect this. I fall into bleak despair as I see how my stodgy enemies have reduced me to impotence in this bizarre circus of a monastery. A Brother Geof asks me a question about my work, an informed one about "Via Antiqua" and pre-reflective man's relationship with the Pancreator. One star in my night of hopelessness. Still, it is a beginning...



Charioteer

Captain's Log, 4997.7.29.0445 League Standard

Problems with the *Aeon Sling*. Something about a bad Greenberg flux cache; it won't cascade, according to the spaceport's Engineers. Whatever that means. I really should learn more about how this tub works. A day or two and they'll have me ready to go. Nothing else to do but make a little money.



Supplemental

Put on my tri-vee suit and went out to the marketplace. When I wear that baby I'm my own electric light parade. Starbursts, swirls and geometric shapes orbit 'round my head, my body glows with multi-colored lights, and music envelops me. It never fails to attract the rubes — they come to see a show and end up buying something.

Turns out attracting attention to myself was a bad idea. I was having a good day — folks were buying a lot — but then I saw guards wearing the livery of House Hazat pushing their way through the marketplace. Seems I angered the local landmeister. I guess I shouldn't have sold Duke Rian that fake lightsplinter, but I'd planned to be off-world by the time it stopped glowing. I ran. The huge crowds kept the soldiers from following too closely.

Made it to the *Sling* and fired her up before the militia could stop me. Good thing I can get the local guild to pay my docking fees. I calculated my course to the gate and heaved a sigh of relief. I'm in free space.

4997.8.02.1204LS

Duke Rian forgot who he's dealing with. EMS sensors picked up one of his ships following me almost immediately. That didn't worry me, 'cause my ship's faster. I just sat back and watched it for three days, dropping further and further behind. It's the ship in front of me — a Kylantra frigate — that's worrying me. It's angled to try and cut me off from the gate.

If it's a fight they want, the *Sling* can handle herself. I just hope I don't have to deploy the light meson cannon hidden in the hold; it's always better to keep your secrets secret.

4997.8.04.0445LS

Got to jumpgate and the frigate was waiting, along with a dozen other ships waiting to out-jump. Good thing I'd contacted the other captains and explained my situation; they let me jump the queue. I outmaneuvered Duke Rian's ship, pushing the engines as much as I dared and got to the gate. Luck was with me; the *Aeon Sling* made the jump without the Greenberg thingamajig.

Note to myself: Contact Leagueheim; blackball Duke Rian.

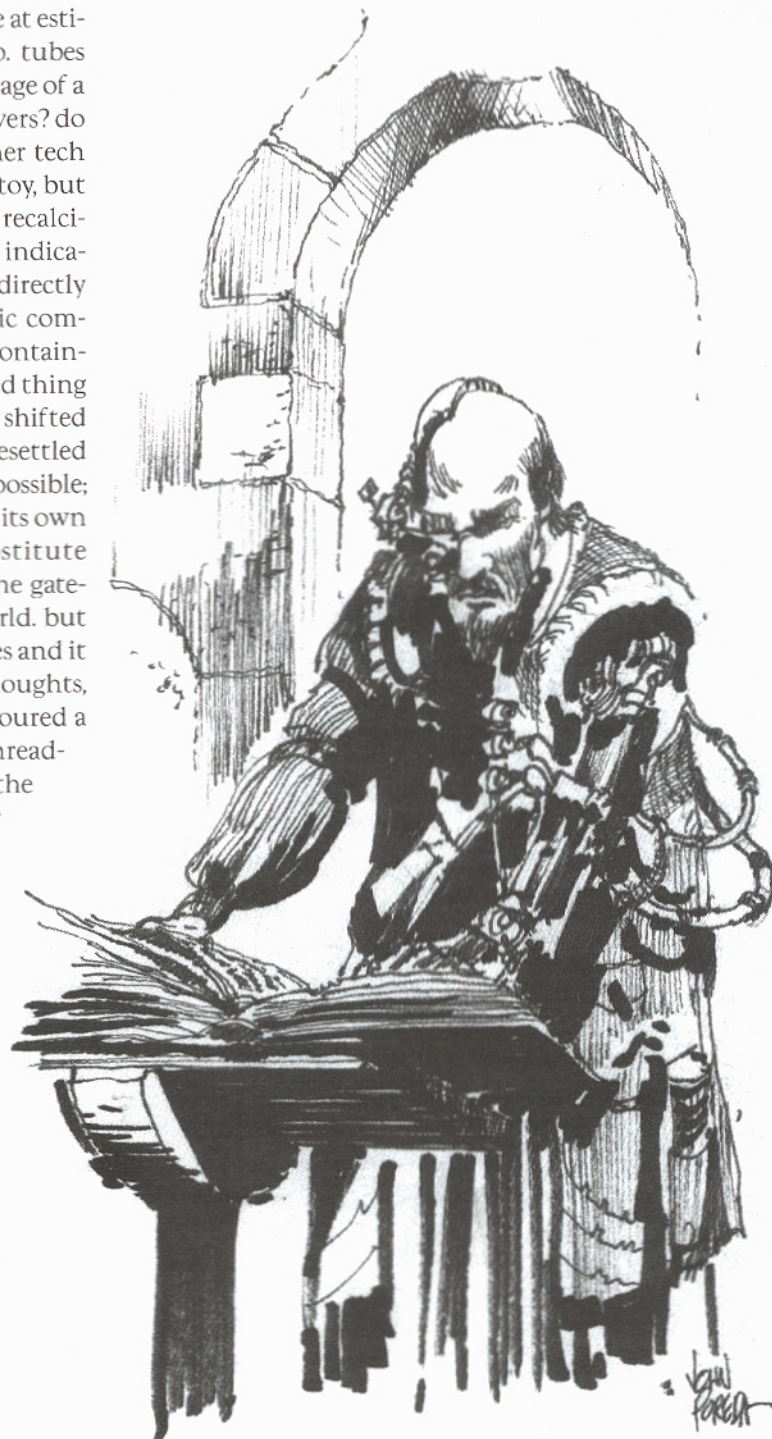
LM 7

Engineer

ENTRY 473956292:7483 :: DAILY LOG
 APPRENTICE RESTECH: CHENG, MAHOMET E
 Subject: Item 77Q, Lot R49 Bannockburn 4819.07C
 Procedures: Spectroanalysis phase IV <5000-17000mghz>; Introsound 9/9000; ZETScan Infraprofile
 {START} microstructural analysis indicates hypercooled high-viscosity semifluid sediments in. (a coolant? articulated chambers suggest a peristaltic pulse. loops of standing electromagnetic waveform at these nodes may confirm.) cesium dating places leakage at estimated seven thousand to four thousand years ago. tubes 13a through 17c are all hollow, scored to allow passage of a delicate cable long since eroded away. impacted levers? do they torque the sacs in the interstices? any other tech would open up with its secrets like a clockwork toy, but this {autodeleted} contraption is as reticent and recalcitrant as any living subject! {::*ATTENTION*:: all indications of organic biomechanism must be reported directly to Z Division ::} only the absence of any organic compounds prevents me from hitting the symbiosis containment hotbutton here and now. {LUNCH} damned thing must be moving on its own — returned to find it shifted to one side in its holding palette, articulations resettled into clamps, markers all slid askew. patently impossible; the thing is simply not fashioned to move under its own power. the laws of the {autodelete:: substitute "Pancreator"} are not easily grasped, but even the gate-builders were constrained by the phenomenal world. but the feeling cannot be shaken. it watches. it gauges and it registers and it calculates. you understand my thoughts, don't you? last night I saw you, whole, as you scoured a gate's surface, clearing debris from crevices and unreadable inscriptions. but I saw it from without, above the plane of space, where the starlanes are but silver filaments webbing the night sky. like pursestrings are they, drawing worlds close, folding away the hungry cold void, pulling life in to protect and secure it. but do we pull too hard? the eyelets tear, the drawstring frays, the light and warmth of our suns trickle away, swallowed by night. whence such visions, if not from you? is this a revelation, a glimpse of the Great {autodelete:: substitute "Pancreator" or "Empyrean"}::<::override:: =of the Great Matrix, the think machine that computes the specifics of Creation? no. the Matrix is vast but subtle, beyond mere mental artifice, for all of space is

modeled by it, and its memory is all of time. may the Matrix grant me==> the wisdom to penetrate your cloak of inscrutability. {::* ATTENTION *:: cheng mahomet e:: report directly to Personnel, Division H, Brother Confessor Josephus, for immediate ideological counseling::} a slapped wrist for uttering illicit truth? no matter. you shall open up your secrets to me. {END}

Recommended procedure: prep for psi-scan.



Scraver

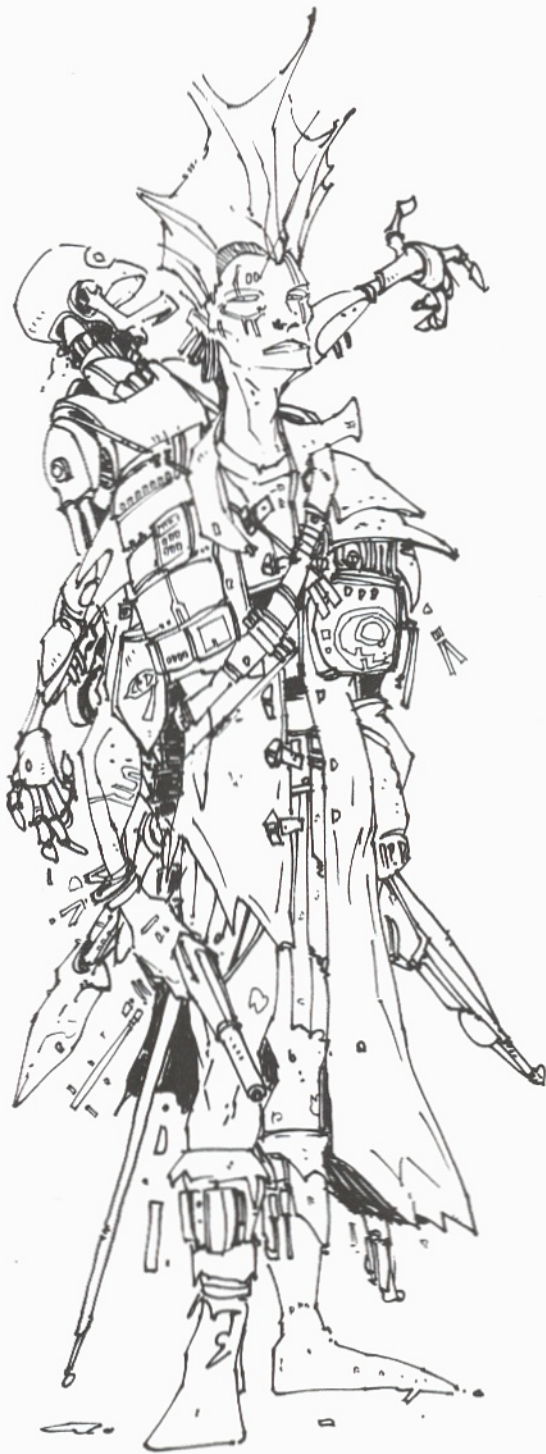
Marco growled as he kicked one of his apprentices out of the way. Damn Consul Coto! Marco should have spent a normal morning at the Velvet Mask, a pleasure house he ran for the guild, counting the previous night's profits, instead of traipsing into Vera Cruz's outback, visiting a dirt-encrusted reclamation site. Now his workers were unloading five crates of Second Republic gambling boxes into a barn he used to smuggle goods on planet.

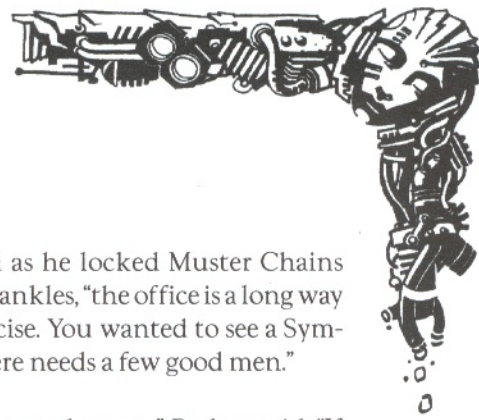
The afternoon was usually when Marco met with his underlings and associates, discussing ways to increase the take on their various operations, as well as sharing news and information. Marco had looked forward to a pleasant lunch at the Milan Grotto, eating, drinking and gossiping. Instead he was out here in the boonies, overseeing the disposal of these crates and waiting for a lander to get them off planet.

He probably would not be able to leave here until well into the evening, meaning that he would miss the new singer he had hired for Marco's Lounge, the small nightclub he owned and from which he ran his insurance operations. Local merchants paid him a monthly fee and Marco did his best to ensure that nothing untoward happened at their establishments.

The apprentice Marco had kicked started tugging on his sleeve. "Hey boss, it looks like we have visitors," he said. Marco smiled. Well, maybe he wouldn't have to wait as long as he thought he would. "Well boy, don't just stand there, get my cloak and let's go greet them." He strode happily to the door, smiling for the first time that day.

The smile disappeared as soon as he stepped outside. The visitors were not coming by lander. They were driving up in an old scrounger, the type Scravers used at reclamation sites. As they came closer, Marco saw the Hazat customs markings on their robes. He swore and yelled for his assistants. "Get those damn crates covered. Bring me my purse... and my shotgun." If the meddling officials wouldn't listen to money, they would listen to bullets.





The Muster

Barlow looked at his longtime friend, Antony, and sighed. Their argument was an old one. Antony always implied that Barlow was little more than a hoodlum, all the while pretending he meant no insult.

"Why do you give me grief just because I work for the Muster?" Barlow shook his head angrily. "Do I call you an extortionist, because you're a Gray Face?"

"That's Reeve," thank you. I don't call you a slaver, you don't call me a Gray Face," Antony replied, his voice whiny and nasal, just enough to set Barlow's teeth on edge. The two walked through the agora, brushing off beggars and ignoring merchants; they weren't here to shop. They had a business deal to work out.

Antony changed tactics, "Prove me wrong. What do you do with your days?"

"You mean, what do I do while I'm at work?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I find the right people for the right jobs. Sometimes, it's accountants for a guild's new venture, sometimes serfs for a noble. Even soldiers for a battle against the Symbiots."

Antony sniffed disdainfully.

"Oh, I forgot," Barlow said. "You don't believe in Symbiots."

"If they existed, I'd have seen one by now."

"I've seen them. Spawn from Hell." He rounded a corner, entering a side street, away from the crowds.

"I think the Symbiots are just a political weapon," Antony said, following behind. "They help keep the masses in line."

"You're from Byzantium Secundus," Barlow said. "That planet's defenses are virtually impregnable. You can afford to believe they don't exist. It's not so easy on worlds closer to Symbiot space."

Antony looked around the small street, suddenly realizing that he had no idea where he was. "Where are we? Is your office close by?"

Barlow drew a leather sap from his belt and rapped it across his "friend's" temple. Antony fell to the ground without a whimper, conscious but stunned.

"Actually," Barlow said as he locked Muster Chains around Antony's arms and ankles, "the office is a long way off. On Stigmata, to be precise. You wanted to see a Symbiot? Well, the garrison there needs a few good men."

Antony whimpered.

"Mira told me about your advances," Barlow said. "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times: Mira is my wife. She tires of your attempts to seduce her, and so do I." As Barlow dragged his new acquisition toward the waiting Muster ship, he allowed himself a smile. One down, fifty to go. The work was hard, but it had its own special rewards.



Reeve

Pieter Hardig threw the ancient tome across his office, startling Franklin, his faithful guard dog. Pieter had to be in court in a matter of hours, and he had still found no laws to help his client and friend, Sabitha Cole. Ever since Baroness Hasima al-Malik had accused Sabitha of attempting to broadcast illegal transmissions from Shaprut's main communication installation, things had gone from bad to worse.

Of course Pieter had leaped to her defense. Then Graksby, Hasima's oily little security advisor, had begun to appear everywhere. First Pieter had problems with those

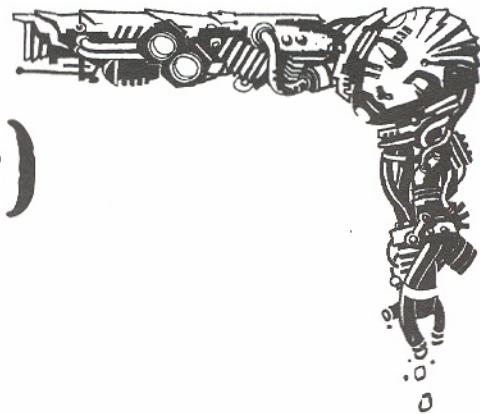
who owed him money, refusing or unable to pay debts. Attempts to get the city authorities to help collect these firebirds were met with indifference or outright hostility. Two trading expeditions Pieter helped fund suffered mysterious setbacks. Rumors had begun to spread that Pieter was involved in a pro-Republic underground movement. Now, to top it all off, a friend on Criticorum had sent him a message saying two higher-ranking Reeves were coming to Shaprut to investigate the situation.

Well, if the regular channels had failed him, then it was time to find an alternate solution. He reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a laser pistol, a tiny camera and a bag filled with firebirds. He would have to begin his day at the court, paying the clerk a hefty bribe to delay the trial. Then he would make his way to the Clear Mountain Inn. Rumor had it that Graksby liked to meet a certain female at that dingy establishment after lunch. Pictures of that could come in very handy.

Pieter called in his apprentice and gave him a sealed message to take to Manager Bustro. The Scraver still owed Pieter for a loan he used to bring in a shipment of illicit realities and could start paying it off by meeting Pieter at the Inn. Pieter would put him and his men to work following Graksby and his friend.

Pieter wished he could follow Graksby himself, putting to use those skills he developed years ago when he worked with the Reeves loan collectors, but he had other business to attend to. Someone was out to get him and his friends, and it probably did not stop at Graksby or Baroness Hasima. Tonight he would have to arrange for a meeting of the Third Era. Surely his friends and compatriots in the movement to reestablish democracy in the Known Worlds would be glad to help.





Yeoman (Freelancer)

Berel,

Morning! You're reading an instalink transmission straight from my mouth to your think machine! Cool, init? Don't worry about the cost, I called in some favors. Just transcribe the important stuff here and draw up a contract. Oh, and the new *xobo* distiller is for you. It's on the cabinet by my desk. Fix yourself a hot cup and go to work, babe!

Let's see... it's about midnight by my watch. Not much action yet. Been sitting here watching the house for about three hours now. Our unfaithful baron hasn't left yet, but he's in there with the dame. When the lights go out, I'll creep up and take some realities of the lovebirds sleeping it off. They'll go over real well with the baroness.

I'm going to make some calls while I'm waiting, so I'm shutting down the link for a minute.

* * *

Shit! The guns are no good and Fat Jack's pissed! Find out who set me up with the bad irons! Damn Scravers. Gotta be them. Call Jack in the morning and offer him another job gratis.

Oh, I got some messages I forgot about. Lemme check them.

* * *

Hmm... Bodyguard job from that Hazat seneschal. Too risky. Call him and turn it down for me.

* * *

This one pays well: A wagon train through the Badlands needs a skimmer pilot. Discreet. I'd have to brush up on flying a bit. But it takes me out of commission too long. Call them back and say no.

Whoah! Baron's on the move! I'm following.

What the — ? Who're these bully boys?!

[gunshots. energy discharge. collision?]

* * *

Okay, I'm back. Take that Badlands job and have my bags packed. I'll meet you in the alley around noon. Shut down the office for three months.

Oh, and garage the flitter with Grax. Get him to hide the blaster marks.

When I devise an alibi for the bodies, I'll send it instalink to the encrypted account.



Serf

Milord, I thank you much for this gracious audience. I hope that I might distill some of the rage on your brow with news of the actions our — your — village have taken against the criminals who so wrongfully disrupted your hunt with their villainy.

If I might explain from the beginning... What? Oh, yes, I do admit to some booklearning and art to my words in greater measure than my upbringing or that of my fellows. It was the good Friar Mackles who taught me, milord. So sweet was his tongue that it honeyed mine just by listening to his sermons. Oh... Certainly, milord. I'll refrain from such vanity and continue my tale.

The two who accosted your property are indeed from the village, but they have ever been unliked, I assure you. We have long believed them to be no good, for they rarely join in the common work of the fields or even the festivities that we are allowed. Loners, they are. They live in a hovel on the edge of the town, tanning and sewing leathers. Smelly work for foul-stenched hearts, milord!

Why, yes, milord, my tunic is of their make. But I assure you, it is because they are the only leatherworkers available to us! I do not support them any more than need be. The same is true for all of us. I assure you of this.

When they killed your boar, it was not simply for the meat, but for

commerce. They sought to steal from your plate to provide hides for their livelihood. Once your call had gone out, we quickly rallied to find them. The butcher and the innkeep cornered them, milord, in their own den — in the very act of skinning your fine boar with a laser. Yes, a laser! How they acquired such a tool I do not know, but surely your torturers will draw the knowledge from them!

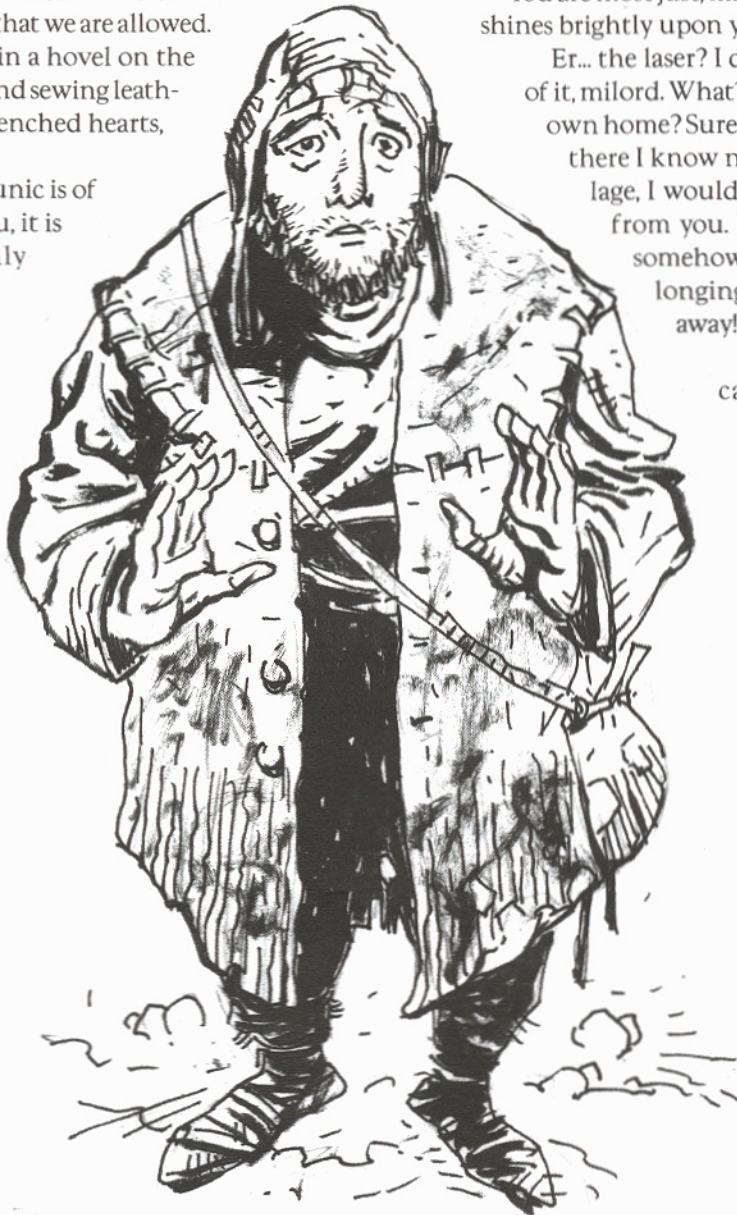
We hauled them from their hovel and tied them to the central hitching post in the square, immediately summoning your soldiers. The criminals are even now in your custody, in the dungeons below.

We have done all possible to deliver them to your justice. Thus, I beg of you, milord, release our wives from the dungeon and allow them to return home, where they may better serve you in the fields.

You are most just, milord! The Pancreator surely shines brightly upon you!

Er... the laser? I do not know what became of it, milord. What? Oh, that laser there. In my own home? Surely not, milord. How it came there I know not! As headman of the village, I would never hide such property from you. It is a trick! The criminals somehow transferred it into my belongings before they were taken away!

No! Please! Not the moat! I can't swim! Any punishment besides, milord — I beg you! NOooo —



Ur-Obun

I am... ready, my count.

As you requested, I observed your *zhrii-ka'a* reverie in... intimate detail. As you suspected before taking the drug, your mind did indeed block much of your experience from your memory once its effect wore out. I, however, suffered no such repression, as I was simply as observer and am... skilled in navigating such spaces.

Let us begin the account from the time the first effects set in. No, my count, I am no longer connected with your mind, as requested. That would be a violation of your orders and your trust.

As your vision became luminous and the mundane objects of the room came to life, awakening their latent life-selves to your perception, you felt a deep longing — for what, I am unsure. It made you rise from your bed and enter the garden, where the already gigantic plants took on even larger proportions. For a while, you were content in a fantasy that you were a bee stealing pollen from these flowers. In reality, you were... spreading your royal essence upon them.

From there, you wandered to the lake, where you saw your reflection. This is a memory you do not now share because it was too terrifying. Your reflection yielded an image of a butcher, a filthy, common man in leathern apron with blood splattered the length of his arms and upon his face. For a moment, you thought it was a clown that stared back at you, but then you saw the knife, dripping with blood.

Calm yourself, my count. I can see that the memory floods back into the open chambers of your mind. But it is only a figment of the drug, although a true figment. By this I mean that the *zhrii-ka'a* shows us our deepest unconscious feelings and reveals our own image to us. On a certain level unknown to your waking consciousness, you perceive that you are a butcher, not a noble.

Yes, my count, you may cry. There are no others to witness it. It is good to release such pent grief.

How may you alter this image? My count, it is the most simple of things. So simple that many men through many ages overlook it. It is

but this: Open your heart. If you do this, you cannot be a butcher, but only a protector of others. The deaths you decree, the armies you unleash, will work only toward virtue and defense, not self-aggrandizement or petty wealth.

If you do not do this thing, then your vision will haunt you. A threat? Of course not, my count. I only recount the vision. I am but the voice of the *zhrii-ka'a* in this. If you would be whole, heed its wisdom, hidden from yourself by your self but revealed in my mental scrying.

Would you be whole, my count?



Ur-Ukar

(Translated into Urthish and entered into court record by Feyd Shimbun by order of Count Shayid al-Malik, witnessed by Reeve Consul Mulanti)

Dearest Parents,

I am surely off-world by the time you read this, cocooned in a starship floating towards the gate which will deliver me to another world. I can stay on Istakhr no longer. I am not guilty of the murder of which I have been accused. I am, like so many of our kind, a pawn in a greater game played by human powers.

Let me explain: I was approached by the priest Ulib Wylan to craft for him an orb for his new chapel, placed so ignorantly in the Fonduq district of the Market. I agreed, for one job is no different from another for me, as long as the pay is proper.

I began work that evening, using the downpayment he had provided to purchase the everlight core. It was expensive, but he had paid well. Some will surely try to claim that I bought the cheapest available and pocketed the rest, but you know me better than that. My work is everything. I bought the best, and even paid two extra crests from my own pocket. I would have bought an even more expensive one had it been available.

I returned to begin the lattice which would encase the orb and was absorbed in the drawing when there was a knock at my door. It was the priest. He had come to bless the everlight before it was placed within its cradle. I was angered, anxious to get back to work, but I gave the priest his privacy with the everlight, and paced outside as he prayed over it.

Once he had left, I began work again. Two days later, as promised, I had finished the ornate cradle, carved with images from the Omega Gospels so dear to these priests' hearts. I had been careful to ensure that the saints appeared only as depicted in the Orthodox edition of the Gospels, although such details concern me not. But it was as commissioned.

Flush with pride over my achievement, I delivered the orb to the chapel personally rather than wait for the priest to come himself. He was strangely disturbed to see me and his precious commission, and tried to send me away while he took the confessions of some local thieves. I recognized his penitents — Scraver smugglers.

They were curious about the orb and pushed the priest aside, bidding me to hang it in its place. I followed their wishes, even though the priest told me the time was not right. He even tried to knock me from the ladder the Scravers had brought from the closet!

But the orb hung beautifully, and caught the noon-day sun just as I had planned, according to the priest's careful instructions. I walked to the doors to see it from afar, as one would when entering the Church. The priest tried to join me — frantic to do so, in fact. But a Scraver grabbed

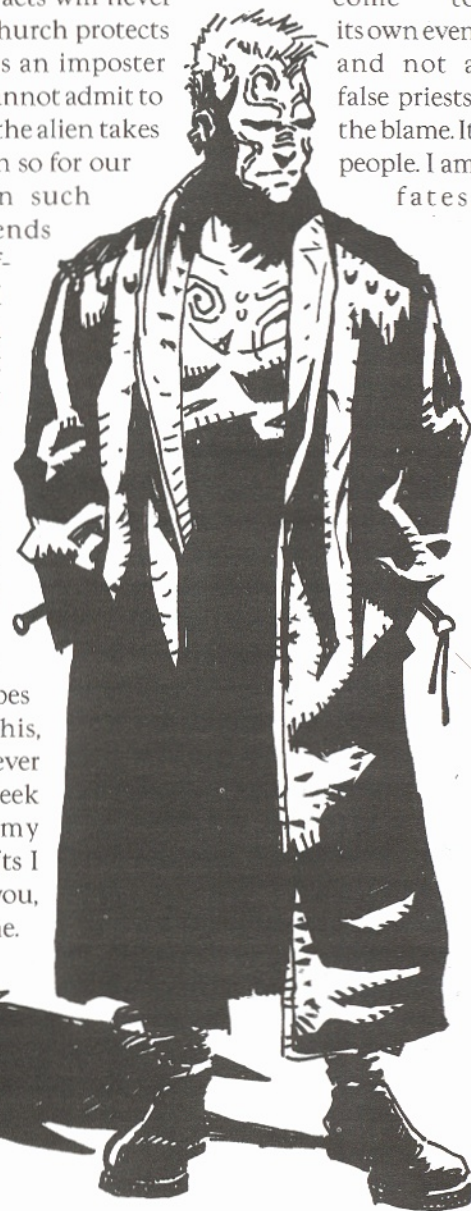
him by the arm and pointed to one of the saints carved above, asking him which one it was.

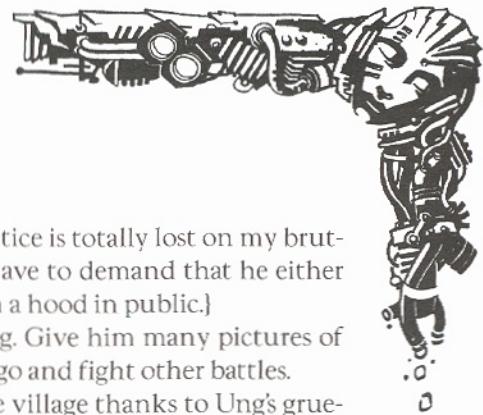
He did not have time to reply before the orb exploded. When I came to consciousness, the priest and the Scravers were scattered about the shattered pews, dead. Passersby tentatively came in and saw what had happened. Since many people knew that I was the one crafting the orb, I was instantly accused of causing the explosion. I fled.

While arranging passage off-world, I heard many interesting things. Such as how Count Shayid al-Malik himself was scheduled to visit the cathedral the next day, during noon worship, and how the priest, whose real name is Jerrod Helgott, a known psychic covenmember, had booked passage into the mountains for that time. I assume he had planned to feign sickness and let one of his acolytes lead the noon prayer.

But these facts will never come to light, for the Church protects its own even if that one was an imposter priest at all. It cannot admit to a false priests. So, once again, the alien takes the blame. It has always been so for our people. I am well-versed in such fates, and have friends who have suffered similarly. I go to join them now. I cannot say where, for surely this letter will be apprehended by the human authorities and burned before it can be seen.

Nonetheless, in the hopes that you get this, farewell. I am never far from you. Seek the work of my hands, the crafts I have gifted to you, and you find me.





Vorox

{Captain Vaq Ketiman's shipboard journal. Transcription of Ungangulak's exploits, as requested by Ensign Ungangulak, with commentary by Captain Ketiman.}

I Ungangulak. I no write good. You write for me. I tell of great battle with feral king. Make me hero among Vorox. Maybe hero among humans. Yes?

Feral run loose in woods, scare many peoples. Break many bones, chew many flesh. Take eyes of his prey and hang them from ears. First cover them with shanto beast blood, so they get hard and not melt. This old Vorox trick for trophy making. Works for human eyes like grackle eyes. This is what feral do.

{A disgusting habit of the Vorox is to collect trophies from valuable victories. In this case, the feral Vorox collected the eyes of the humans it killed and preserved them with the blood of a beast once native to the Vorox homeworld but now spread to Ram-part.}

Peoples scared, for many eyes watch them from woods. Eyes of the dead. Eyes of the feral.

Li Halan lords cannot find feral, for he is tricky. They come to Ungangulak and his friends for help. Ung gladly serve noble lords. Proud to get honor. Friends worry, for feral are mighty. But Ung knows ferals are weak in head, and can be tricked. He says yes and lords are happy.

{Ung refers to his acceptance of the Li Halan hunting commission without his first coming to an agreement with his comrades, namely me and Sir Beltrane Justinian.}

It take many days to sniff out feral. He hide tracks well, and much rain covers smells. But Ung smart and know where feral hunt next. He hunt in circles near human villages. Ung know next village and wait for feral.

It is night with half moons when feral sneak into village. But Ung is on roof and leaps on feral. Fight is mighty! Feral try to claw Ung with poison, but Ung is strong now. Li Halan give him needle with power against poison. Feral can only cut. Cannot cause sick. When he know this, he run, but Ung shoot him down with sunbright gun. Feral fall screaming. Ung is victor! Carve feral eyes out while it scream. It run blind but die before it go far.

Ung now wear feral eyes on ears for all to see that he is true Vorox.

{The irony of this practice is totally lost on my brutish companion. We now have to demand that he either remove the earrings or don a hood in public.}

Li Halan proud of Ung. Give him many pictures of Emperor. They ask him to go and fight other battles.

{We got run out of the village thanks to Ung's gruesome trophies. Oh, sure, they put it politely, but they weren't about to let another Vorox wander around there. Oh, well, as Ung said, there were a lot of firebirds in the affair.}



Kurgan Barbarian

IN THE NAME OF THE ONE TRUE ONE, FASHIONER OF STARS AND CRAFTER OF WORLDS, FROM WHENCE THE FIRST LIGHT RADIATES AND WHOSE BREATH YET BILLOWS IN THE NETHER VOIDS,

I beseech thee, O Worshipful Juhangiz XXIV, Caliph of the Star-States of Kurga, Khan of khans, Vice-Regent of the Star-Maker and Pure Reflector of the First Light, to hearken, should it be found pleasing, to this humble servant's epistle. Your orders were delivered into my hand at StarPort Xanadu, and from thence I did embark for Hira, there to observe and relate in my own hand what transpires. At the Xanadu voidgate, our starchariot whispered the necessary incantations, and the firmaments parted to

allow us passage. Arriving at the Hira system, we came upon a pitched battle wherein a Kurgan troop vessel was battered mercilessly by an Iron Claw frigate. Fortunately, our own Kazakh-class carrier, the Rustum Ghilzai, boasted a squadron of Mujahidin torpedo bombers which made short work of the attackers, crippling their frigate and leaving it to Those That Lurk in the Void. We made our way to the planet Hira without further incident.

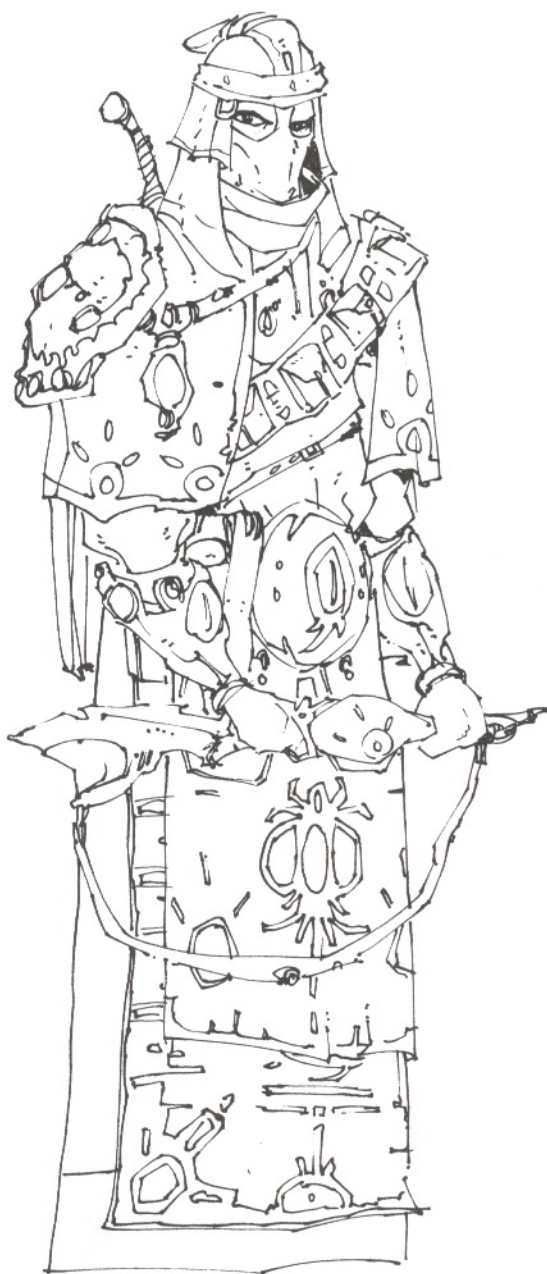
Our landing site bordered a territory held by Hiran Independence Nationalists. Though they had little welcome for the emissary of their rightful Kurgan ruler, we parleyed and a temporary truce was forged when they learned how we dispatched the Iron Claw ship. These they name the Hazat, who are but part of a vast empire spanning more worlds than even you can lay claim to. We surmised that these Hazat mongrels did not enjoy the full backing of their so-called emperor, or else they would easily overrun the planet. Your glorious hordes may hold them off until their resources are depleted, but their fellow imperialists may aid them if they feel their own borders are threatened.

Please urge the Astromancers haste in calculating the incantation which will seal off the voidgate of Hira. In the meanwhile, we should make the ground war more costly for the Iron Claws by arming these nationalists against them. (Perhaps that questionable surplus of Yataghan artillery could be put to use here?) They will fight the hardest, for this is their home, and at a minimal cost to us. With an endorsement from the Caliphate, a Hiran nationalist regime could bring peace to this world while it rebuilds itself, until such time as it outlives its necessity.

But forgive this humble one for I digress. Upon the morrow I shall travel incognito to the great cities of Hira, there to see the bloody work of the Hazat up close. I remain, as ever, your Magnificence's most humble and obedient servant,

Yar Afzul-Tajiq

Advisor-Potentate of the Kurgan Caliphate



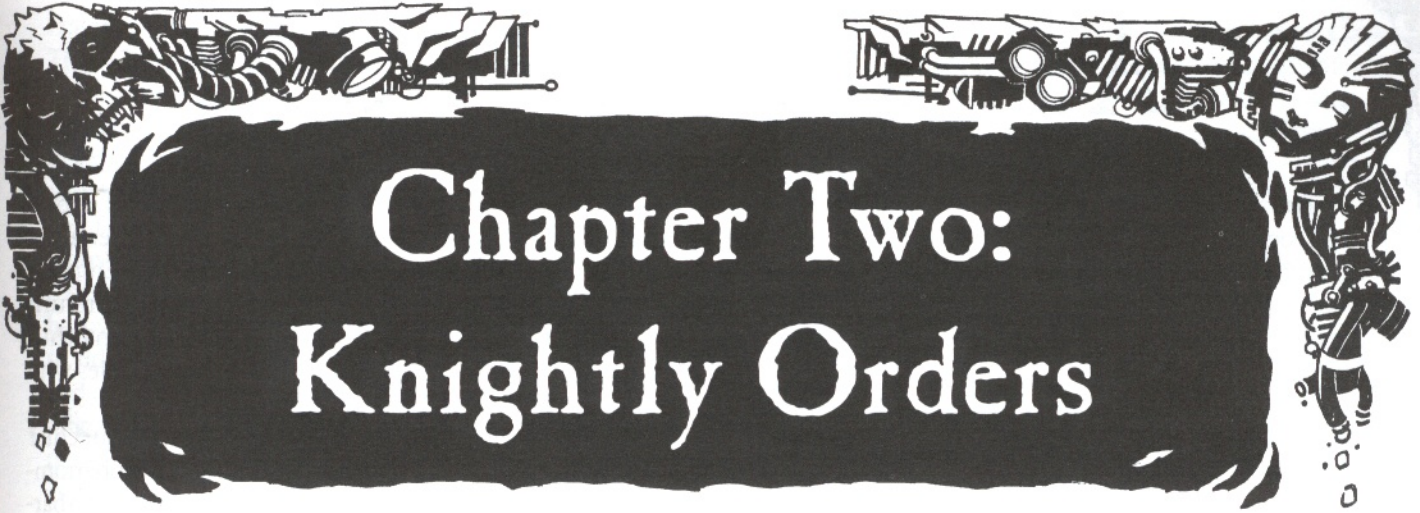


Vuldrok Barbarian

Well do I remember that day; listen well, then, for I remember.
 Our ships arrayed at the gate; gargoyle-prowed, stardrives aflame;
 The pride of half a dozen star-nations, full of beard and bright of blade,
 Stood on deck, anxious and eager, chewing their shield-straps in flesh-hunger.
 Men of the Vuldrok worlds, lean with the hunger of centuries.
 Men of the Vuldrok worlds, heeding the call of booty.
 Stout Aesgrimm and slight Pyotr, hands oft-stained in blood of foemen;
 Haraq of toothed bronze axe, worked about with dragon-coils;
 High-leaping bright-eyed Rodgul, ears hung with wife-rings of rapine;
 Entox, he of spilling coffers; dark-eyed Orald of quick spear and bright buckler;
 And standing to the fore, scanning the void with slitted gaze,
 Ghorav, prince of Hemvald, broad of girth, broader of heart,
 Breast cloaked in dragonskin, tusk-ringed helm notched from battle;
 At the fore he stood alone, for there were none who could stand with him.
 At the gate did we stand, champing at the bit,
 As vitki-pilots, wise in craft, sang our petition to the gate's hoary lords.
 Deeming our journey aright, they twisted space into naught,
 Opening our path to destiny. Greenbright emerald-
 world Valdalla,
 Wide of ocean, thick of bush; land apound with fleet-
 footed game.
 But, now denting telemeter's horizon, now looming
 upon sensor's screen,
 Cowering in the shadow of a ringed world, exohull
 scabbed with cargo,
 The Endora Swan, leaving Valdalla, laden with freight
 and bound for our purses.
 "Bring us hard by her, now, pilot, and gunner turn all tur-
 rets to bear!
 "Heave to with tractor-grapples! Torch your way through her hull!
 "Her belly's all swollen with loot, boys, and pity the miser's dogs stand-
 ing guard!"
 Lasers struck plumes from her aft; lamed, she spun on her side;
 They howled as we stormed through their hull, and sparks showered where
 blades kissed.
 Her crew was a score of serf-lads, trembling where they gripped their
 weapons.
 Her captain a jiggle-fat peddler, who shed gold and jewels at knifepoint.
 Smiling with a broken sweating face, his clumsy fingers unlocked his holds.
 Pistols and squawkers and blown-glass lanterns; pretty, but they do not feed
 small hungry mouths.
 Into the pantry-stores now, noses and stomachs standing ready;
 Cornstaves, megawheat and hardy mountain leeks; sweet millirice aplenty
 to repay ancient debt.
 Now pillage and plunder and haul it all out! Joyful the picking of trophies!
 The gutted Swan, blind and crippled, spinning into the rings of Valdalla's
 orange cousin.
 Back through the gate, the ovens kept busy at full fire,
 The young danced and sang, the old drank and laughed,
 And the feast lasted a month on six worlds. You remember.
 — from "The Saga of Njarl of Hemvald"







Chapter Two: Knightly Orders

The hall was still full of feast-goers, stuffed with the evening's repast. All but the young ones were nearly asleep in their chairs when the troubadour sat down on a stool before a small troop of noble progeny. Taking out cards which showed magical pictures of gallant, brave-looking men and women, she passed them around the group, smiling all the while. The images revealed a depth which made them seem as though they floated in air. Each picture depicted a different knight, some already known to the children.

"This is Galadir, isn't it?" a young girl said.

"And this is Malgrim! I know him by his crossbow and wire-blade," a young hawk-nosed boy said in awe.

The troubadour smiled at the children. "Oh, yes. Questing Knights all. Special knights, who pay fealty to Emperor Alexius alone!"

"Please, may we keep them? Please may we?" the children begged. The troubadour was bribed by way of a glass of wine, and the children began to coyly negotiate among themselves for those cards which represented their favorites.

The troubadour stood and made her way over to the brooding, older Hazat lad who stood staring into the fire. "You know, you look an awful lot like Sir Harakal, the Questing Knight. Are you related?"

The young man started at the storyteller's voice, but turned and regarded her with quiet, tired eyes. "Yes, Harakal is my cousin. We grew up together. I'm shamed that he has put aside honor for glory, but I respect that he made his own way."

The troubadour nodded. "So you will not be joining him at the Emperor's side?"

The young Hazat squire turned back toward the fire. "I would disgrace my father. I would disgrace the Hazat."

Smiling, the troubadour pressed a card into the squire's hand. "If you ever change your mind, speak with me. I can put you in touch with your cousin." With that, she turned with a swirl of her cloak, stepping back over to the children.

The squire turned the card over in his hand and stared into his cousin's steely eyes, feeling for the first time a sense that he could take his destiny into his own hands.

Knightly orders are fellowships of knights banded together to serve a cause or a liege, whether it be the Emperor or the Patriarch. Their shared bond can sever previous loyalties, redefining priorities and traditional cultural biases, uniting knights who were once rivals. Most such knights travel the Known Worlds and beyond, questing and seeking to further the goals of their orders.

Each knightly order has a sponsor who provides philosophical leadership, monetary support and special needs. This sponsor usually provides a common hall for the order, a fortress or other holding where the order meets and conducts its business.

The larger orders have charters, laws pertaining to their authority, jurisdiction and accountability which are recognized by other noble houses. These charters dictate how ruling lords must treat the knights when in their fiefs; their authority usually comes from a greater power, such as the Emperor or the Church.

Note that these orders are not necessarily chivalrous. Nobles are rarely known for their humility and the value they place on human life is not the best. Just because a knight has joined an order does not mean that she has fully accepted that order's philosophy — the order could be just another step in her ascension to power.

Adventurous Orders

The idea of a company of like-minded knights traveling together throughout the Known Worlds is romantic and exciting enough to attract many nobles who would otherwise live out their lives as "fifth wheels" in the courts of first-born heirs apparent. These nobles, uninterested in joining the Church and unwilling to take on governance of some minor fief, find meaning and excitement as adventuring knights. In a way, it is the ultimate youthful rebellion to abandon responsibility and go a-questing. Although the elders in many houses make plain their disapproval of such open flaunting of traditional values, they find it difficult to argue against. The practice is condoned by the new Emperor, who has attracted the lion's share of these knights to his side. Besides, it does allow the young lords the opportunity to meet and better understand knights from rival houses — experiences which may one day prove valuable when these houses war with one another.

Questing Knights

Formed by the new Emperor, the Questing Knights' (also called the Company of the Phoenix) chief duty is to go forth into the Known Worlds to seek out lost worlds and worlds without hope, to bring the light of the Emperor to all — to fight with their last breath against the fading of the suns. This often puts them on the side of the weak, the victimized and the unlucky, and usually means that they are frequently outnumbered by enemies who do not appreciate the central authority of the Empire.

History

When Alexius assumed the throne, he asked all the noble families to send him their best and bravest. Imperial lictors traveled throughout the Known Worlds, sponsoring challenges and contests to find the strongest of heart and of body. Only a fraction of the many young nobles who participated have been admitted to this elite company.

Since then, the Emperor has made certain that the exploits of his brave company are well known, through word of mouth and storytelling campaigns conducted by entertainment guilds. He has allowed the distribution of holographic cards which bear the likenesses of the knights, and even a few magic lantern shows detailing their adventures — all propaganda clearly aimed at young nobles. The stories are so skillfully told and so undeniably entertaining that even the strictest Li Halan find it difficult to forbid them.

Critics claim that the Emperor is using the Questing

Knights as a means of motivating a generation of nobles, hoping they will grow up with the aspiration to serve the Emperor before duty to their own houses. But Emperor Alexius allows the Questing Knights the choice to return to their fiefs after serving a year with the company, thus soothing the ruffled feathers of many older nobles who need their sons and daughters to rule at home.

The present goals of the company are many, but chief among them is to investigate the fading suns phenomenon, and to search for solutions. If this takes them to barbarian space and undiscovered worlds, so be it. All Questing Knights are also bid to defend the weak and the avenge the wronged.

Society

The Company of the Phoenix, its ruling council of knights and the founders of the order were originally recruited from House Hawkwood. This house's many sons and daughters, idle after the Emperor Wars, were becoming increasingly destructive with few opportunities to constructively spend their energies. Since its initial inception, the Company has adopted knights from all houses — even the Decados. The ruling council, made up of the most distinguished and proven knights, many of whom served with Alexius before his regency, implements the policies handed down from Alexius himself.

The Questing Knights are the cream of the crop. Applicants must pass rigorous contests before they are allowed entry. After joining, they are provided expert tutoring by the Emperor's marshals, members of the Phoenix Guard, making them some of the most highly-trained, deadly and puissant individuals.

Questing Knights are not only known for their warfare skills; many are true artists, eloquent diplomats, canny researchers and well-read scholars in their own rights. Alexius wants the best of the best, and his knights must stand out as role models for other nobles throughout the Known Worlds.

The Company is supported by the Imperial coffers and often given transport by the Imperial Navy. Even deadly Decados Kossacks and Brother Battle monks take note when a Questing Knight takes the field.

Furthermore, the Company's charter, handed down by Alexius, gives them wide-ranging jurisdiction and the capacity to speak on behalf of the Emperor (although with somewhat limited powers). Those among the Company who earn the Phoenix Seal ring may request audience with the Emperor himself — although abuse of this privilege can lead to the revocation of the ring. The charter officially allows Questing Knights to inspect any common records held by the Church or League, although in prac-

tice this right must often be purchased through bribery. They have the power to traverse feudal lines without regard to taxation, tithe or tariff; no one may impede them on their course. Their only court of responsibility is the Company's court on Byzantium Secundus; only here may they be tried for charges brought against them.

The downside to being a Questing Knight is that many of the Known Worlds powers-that-be see them as a threat to their autonomy. Although everyone claims to be loyal to Emperor Alexius, surprisingly few are willing to aid his own chosen knights; often only grudging help and compliance are given. Questing Knights are moving targets for those who seek to vent their hatred of the Emperor. Outlaws and bandits believe that Questing Knights are loaded with Imperial riches — which they sometimes are — and often waylay such lone knights errant. Fortunately, most Questing Knights are up to the task. A single, impressive public duel is usually enough to communicate the proper message to the local riffraff: "Come at your own risk."

Within the order, Questing Knights are not always the best of allies. There are many headstrong egos, glory hounds and ancient vendettas between knights. As a result, there is frequent conflict amid the ranks, physical and otherwise. When disputes come up, they are usually resolved by a court of chivalry held in the open, with all the knight's peers brought to decide the result of the matter. If this fails to serve, Alexius has been known to inter-

cede, although this is only done in extreme cases. Curiously enough, whenever the Company is threatened from outside the ranks, petty rivalries fall aside for as long as the threat remains.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity, Endurance

Natural skills: Dodge, Fight, Melee, Impress, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Archery, Drive (landcraft or aircraft), Etiquette, Fencing Actions, Read Urthish, Remedy, Social (Leadership), Stoic Body, Stoic Mind, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Blessings/Curses: Just (2 pts: +2 Passion when righting a wrong)/ Prideful (+2 pts: -2 Calm when insulted)

Benefices: Imperial Charter (6 pts, see below), Well-Traveled (5 pts), blaster pistol or rifle, dueling shield or ceramsteel armor

Average salary: 700+ firebirds/year

Famous Questing Knights

Some of the more glorious (or infamous) of the Questing Knights include:

Malgrim

A knight of chivalry and strong fighting arm. His signature crossbow, a large iron affair that appears to be more liability than benefit (but somehow manages to be retrieved and retained adventure after adventure) is almost



as famous as the wireblade with which he carves the letter "M" onto many pirates, bandits or tyrants. Fiercely loyal to the Emperor, no one knows what house he is originally from, and he wears a half-mask at all times to conceal his identity. He has been known to fight on the word of a simple peasant, and is one of the most popular Questing Knights among the peasantry for his legendary common sense and good humor. Still, stories about his temper and his tendency to go on drunken binges are also part of his reputation.

Ciera Li Halan

An expert warrior and gymnast, she has — much to the chagrin of many a paramour — sworn a vow of chastity while she pursues her Quest, and is known as Ciera the Chaste. But her virtue is not her only fame; she is a renowned disguise artist, able to appear as just about anyone — male or female. She is rumored to possess a Vau artifact called a Shadow Robe to aid her. Ciera has never been a prisoner for more than 24 hours, for she always escapes. Acerbic at times, her sharp tongue has caused more duels than most nobles fight in their lifetimes. Her words pierce to the heart of the matter because they are true. She can sniff out a lie, and none dares cheat at cards with her. Her favorite heavy slug gun, "Amadon," is ever by her side.

Corleric Decados

A tall, swarthy, brutally-built walking mountain, Corleric is known for his cruelty to the Emperor's enemies.

He somehow earned Alexius's trust, although few understand how he achieved this. He is a loner, frequently traveling alone into uncharted, barbarian territories. His ship, the *Corona*, is featured in many magic lantern shows and is frequently recognized on sight. Pirates have been known to break off and flee upon recognizing the flame-red craft.

Other Adventurous Orders

Below are some other orders, many of which are made up of glory-hounds and influence-seekers, active agents in the background of history. None are as powerful or as well-known as the Questing Knights.

The Order of the Shroud

Reputed to serve a psychic coven, this mysterious order is chiefly involved in rescuing those in need. Stories tell of their nick-of-time appearances. It is said that a precognitive psychic of incredible power named Gwynfyd guides them. All knights of this order wear hoods or shrouds to conceal their identities. Rumor says that their hall is on Manitou.

The Order of the Mantis

An order of Decados nobles who claim that they are just as good as — or better than — the Questing Knights. They are, however, little more than a pathetically obvious propaganda arm of the house. Frequently, Mantis Knights seek out the Questing Knights to "teach them a lesson." Mantis Knights adopt ceramsteel helmets with twisted, unholy visages sculpted into them. The Order is funded by the Decados, and knights often serve in the house military units as elite commanders.

The Order of Vladimir

A very discreet, highly political order of nobles who are extremely anti-Republican. They maneuver behind the scenes, trying to spread their influence and bolster the power of the nobility over the League. They have no halls and no charter, but there are a number of influential nobles who donate resources to their cause.



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Church Knights

In addition to those knights who quest for glory and the furtherance of their political agenda, there are knights who serve a more spiritual vocation. By swearing to serve the Church, they devote themselves to the protection and service of the Faithful.

Swords of Lextius

Established by the Urth Orthodoxy, the Swords of Lextius make up the bulk of nobles who, in humility or penance for real or imagined crimes, swear oaths of service to the Church. Such oaths may be for a set period of time (perhaps three years or 10), or may be for life.

History

Although the Church has the Brothers Battle to protect most of its interests, there are not enough of these highly-trained warrior monks to protect every priest or pilgrim in the Known Worlds. Because of this, and because many houses attempt to curry the Church's favor by sending their youngest to serve, the practice of retaining Church-sworn knights is a valued tradition.

The Swords of Lextius was founded shortly after the death of Vladimir. The suspicions and aspersions for his death levied by nobles and priests at each other threatened to ignite a war of attrition. Patriarch Nadrim sought to ease these tensions in many ways, from the "extreme penance" granted the nobles for tech use to the founding of the Swords of Lextius. The order was intended to bring nobles and priests closer together, which it did very well, creating many friendships which later became political alliances as the knights and priests later rose in rank.

The order's chief duty is not to battle for the Church, but to perform the roles of warders, messengers, protectors and bodyguards. While intended mainly to serve the Orthodoxy, some knights have chosen to attach themselves to a sect instead — although this is frowned on by the Swords' leadership.

The Order does not have a political agenda — at least, not an open one. Their goal is to bodily protect the Faithful. House Li Halan contributes so many young nobles to the order that critics often call it the Swords of Cardano, the legendary Li Halan who converted the family.

Society

The Swords accept just about any noble not stained with scandal. Unlike the Questing Knights, there is no benchmark of quality these knights must pass, except that most are pious and all have a distinct respect for priests — especially Urth Orthodox priests.

In order to become a Sword of Lextius, one must first make the pilgrimage to Holy Terra. The knight then presents himself to the father confessor on duty at the Hall of Swords and asks to perform the Penance of Service. Under the seal of the confessional, he must give the reason for his vow. If the confessor decides to accept the knight's plea, he accepts and hears the new Sword's oath of fealty to the Order.

Swords carry a special jumpgate cross medallion with a number of rosewood beads equal to the years of service they have promised; each year, one bead is removed in a grand ceremony. When there are no beads left, the knight may leave. However, many stay for years afterward, having grown to appreciate the respect and spiritual growth the Swords foster. A knight with no beads on his medal-



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lion is accorded respect. Breaking one's oath and leaving the order prior to the end of the sworn service period is cause for excommunication or worse.

Usually a knight will be assigned a specific post or priest to watch over for period of time, usually for a season or from one Church holiday to another, whereupon the knight will be reassigned. Frequently, Swords must make their own way from assignment to assignment — the Church does not usually provide for their transportation, although they do provide the knights from poorer families with a modest stipend. The Royal Houses are expected to sponsor their own for the duration of their service.

One of the chief benefits of a stint among the Swords is the Church training in reading and meditational practice (skills such as Read Latin, Stoic Mind, etc.).

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity, Endurance, Faith

Natural skills: Observe, Melee, Vigor

Learned skills: Etiquette, Drive (landcraft or aircraft), Fencing Actions, Focus, Remedy, Read Urthish, Read Latin, Stoic Mind

Blessing/Curses: Pious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert among the sinful)/ Righteous (+2 pts: -2 Calm when judgment is questioned)

Benefices: Church Charter (3 pts, see below), heavy pistol or rifle, energy shield

Average salary: 300 firebirds/ year (poor knight), 300+ firebirds/ year (Royal House knight)

Famous Swords of Lextius

Below are some of the more famous of the Church knights.

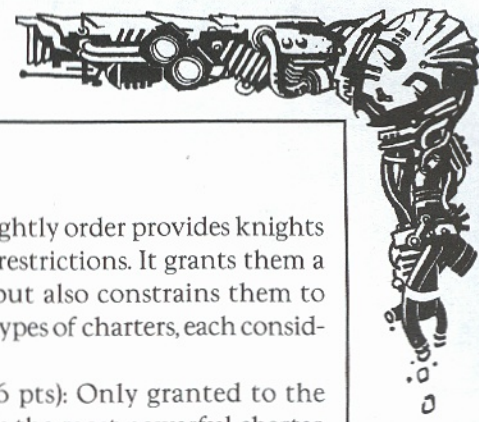
Amon Volst Van Gelder

Amon, like many of his house, walks alone. Unlike his fellow housemembers, he is a deeply pious man. He has sworn a lifetime vow to the Swords and is in his 20th year of that vow. While he is sometimes considered cold and cruel — a Van Gelder trait — he has also shown great compassion and sympathy, such as the time he single-handedly defended a peasant village from a local lord's wrath. When the daughter of the village's leader refused a tryst with the lord, troops were sent to destroy the village. Only Amon stood against them, but it is said that the Pancreator was at his back, for he suffered only a minor gash to his thigh, while the lord's troops were maimed for life. Amon travels his own path, choosing where and when to aid the Church. The leaders of the order occasionally petition his aid, but he rarely responds.

Sharina Torensen

Upright and dignified, Sharina is a shining example of what the Church admires in a knight. Devoted to aiding the Orthodoxy in whatever ways its bishops see fit, Sharina is the very soul of duty to a higher power. For this





reason, she is often criticized by her fellow nobles. She is somewhat of a scandal to them; it is one thing for the Li Halan to play the role of holy roller, another for a minor house to join them at it. She disregards such scoffing, retreating to the woods to meditate or practice her already expert skill with a powered quarterstaff.

Gawlis Erik Hawkwood

The newest star of the Order, young Gawlis has forsaken the prestigious rule of his father's county to serve the Church instead. While only newly entered into his vow, he has already displayed amazing ability with a sword when defending a bishop of Leminkainen from barbarian rebels. His fresh and somewhat naive ways have won him allies even among the stiff and humorless elder knights of the order, and he is often asked to accompany experienced knights on great missions. He is more restless than most of his fellows, however, and often follows his own star, seeking adventure in the Pancreator's name.

Other Church Orders

Many knights serve individual oaths of service to select Hesychast monasteries, but the lack of comradeship and funding prevents most from going this route. There are a few more orders open to pious knights:

Order of Saint Yara

This order is dedicated to protecting Amalthean healers as they travel into dangerous territories. These knights tend to dislike weapons, preferring unarmed combat, but they are quite proficient with dueling and firefights nonetheless. It is said that the bonds between a Yara knight and his Amalthean charge can become so great that the knight can sense when his principal is wounded or hurt in any way. Unlike many Amaltheans, these knights do not suffer under a vow of nonviolence, although they do try to avoid harming others when possible. Few knights opt for this order, preferring instead the glamour and political prestige of the more famous and well-connected orders.

The Adamantine Order

This extremely small order serves the Eskatonics. Knights usually attach themselves to a particular priest and swear to protect him in return for enlightenment. The priest will teach the knight many techniques and exercises normally reserved only for priests (including theurgy), but such learning usually takes a lifetime of service; few knights are inclined to give up their worldly matters in such wise. These knights rarely work together, although they do have a common charter put forth by the Eskatonic magus (it is not recognized by the Orthodoxy, and thus by few noble houses).

Charters

The charter of a knightly order provides knights with goals, powers and restrictions. It grants them a degree of legal power, but also constrains them to duties. There are many types of charters, each considered a Benefice:

Imperial Charter (6 pts): Only granted to the Questing Knights, this is the most powerful charter. It allows its knights broad powers of jurisdiction, monetary support and travel. It allows each knight a stipend of 700 firebirds per year and free transport on any Imperial Navy ship (a 4 pt Passage Contract). In addition, knights may inspect public Church or League records (though not private cathedral or guild records). They can also cross feudal boundaries free of taxation and are immune from prosecution (all charges are brought before the order's council instead of the ruling body bringing the charge, whether it be noble or Church).

However, they must uphold a code of behavior and duty. They can never operate against Imperial interests, and they can be called upon at any time to undergo any number of missions for the order or the Emperor (a 3 pt Oath of Fealty).

Some knights earn the right to bear a Phoenix Seal Ring, granting them audience with the Emperor; this privilege cannot be bought with points and must be gained through roleplaying.

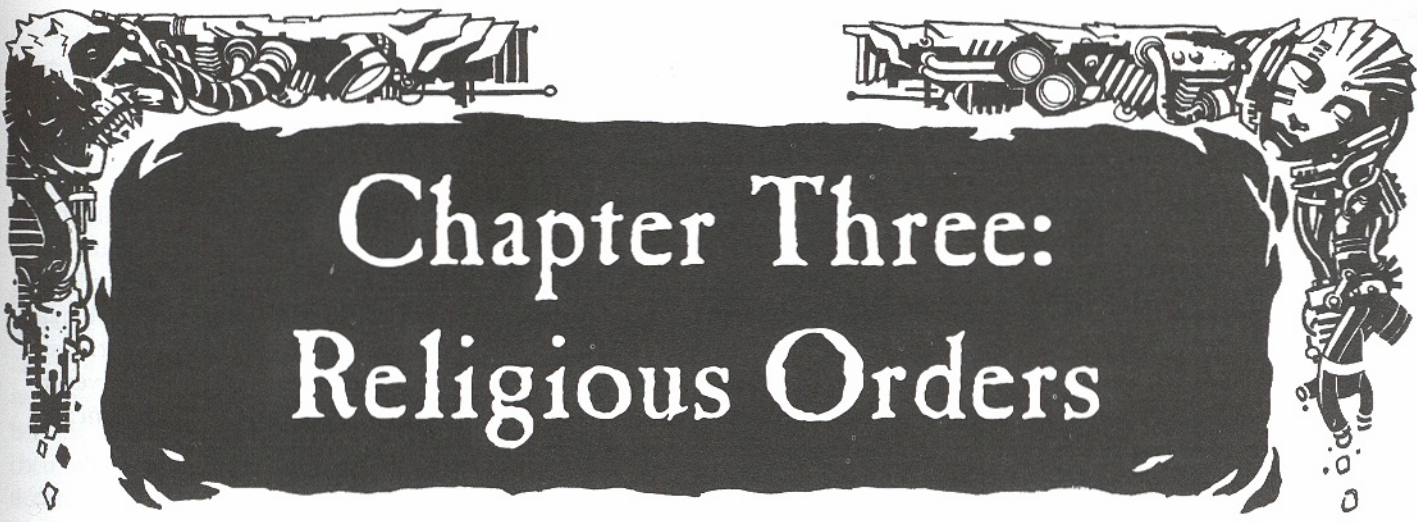
Once a knight leaves the order, he is no longer bound by the charter, but likewise does not receive its benefits.

Church Charter (3 pts): Granted to those knights who swear a vow to serve a Church sect, this charter provides certain legal and monetary powers to its mighty faithful but ties them to strict duties and behavior. Poor knights are given a small stipend while major house knights are provided a stipend from their own houses. All knights are allowed free travel aboard Church ships, regardless of sect (a 4 pt Passage Contract). In addition, knights may accuse others of crimes against Church law and they are empowered to collect overdue Church tithes, and can cross feudal borders to do so.

Each knight must answer the call to duty of the sect or priest she serves, even in situations of bodily or spiritual danger (a 3 pt Oath of Fealty).

Once a knight's vow is over, he may elect to leave Church service, in which case he is no longer bound by the charter, but likewise does not receive its benefits.





Chapter Three: Religious Orders

Spirituality is a central fact in most Known Worlders' lives. It causes many to raise their voices in song to the Pancreator. Such is the case with the Choralis, a Church sect of singers of the Omega Gospels. While they are interdenominational in membership, the Choralis are nonetheless part of the religion of the Prophet.

However, it is not just the Universal Church that attends to spiritual needs: other religions exist, labeled "pagan" by the Church but with traditions and histories of their own. While these are often little more than cults with a handful of adherents on a single world or number of worlds, at least one is widespread, with roots stretching back farther in time than the Church.

This widespread alternate religion is called Gjarti, an animistic goddess spirituality. While its origin is older than the Church, it little resembles its original form, having evolved through the centuries and benefited from the Dark Ages loss of learning, which aided worshippers in

their return to the simple values and primal consciousness that Gjarti advocates.

Of the numerous small cults spread throughout the stars, one represented here is the forbidden religion of Manja. While Gjarti worshippers suffer inquisitorial censure for their "wrongheaded" beliefs, Manja worshippers are thought to be little more than antinomists — the worst kind of traitors to the light. It is actually an austere form of ancestor worship once popular among nobles but now banned. Its members must pray in secret and keep their affiliations hidden from the Church.

Such examples provide an idea of what spiritual life is like on the fringes of Known Worlds society. Because of these religions' suspect supernatural alliances, the Church's intolerance can perhaps be understood in light of Symbiot assaults and other alien threats. Understood, perhaps. But forgiven...?

The Choral

Geneveve finally gave up on the door, surrendering any hope that it might miraculously unlock. Instead she turned toward the dark stairwell where her new friends had gone, determined to uncover the source of this building's ancient mysteries. Geneveve kicked herself yet again for following them down here, lured as she was by the promise of ancient hymns.

From the top of the stairs she could see Brother Patok's light. The Brother Battle had opened a cabinet and was examining the switches within. His friend, the odd Engineer Zular, had taken out a tool and begun fiddling with the cabinet as well. Suddenly a great flash threw Zular backward, and Geneveve heard Patok say, "Uh oh."

A harsh noise buffeted them, as though ancient gears were grinding together for the first time in centuries. Then, from dark portals which opened as if by magic, rolled forth two huge, clanking golems. Unintelligible words poured out of harsh speakers, and metallic limbs raised up giant weapons. Geneveve's friends cursed and brought their own weapons around. Explosions rocked the room and within seconds the humans were scattered about the floor.

Stunned and injured, Geneveve's compatriots lay helpless before the rolling monstrosities. From the top of the stairs she began to sing, the lyrics of *The Uplifting Word* springing like star light from her tongue. Driven by the force of her song, her friends seemed to forget their pains, raising blasters and flux swords before the oncoming threat. Soon beams of energy split the dark, though above the sounds of combat Geneveve's voice continued to ring out.

At the height of the Second Republic, music became an omnipresent force, found everywhere people went. Sociologists documented its ability to affect human emotions and behavior, and its users included businesses, politicians, store owners, the military, schools and more. While much of the technology and understanding of how music affects people has been lost, some still understand its power. The most notable of these groups is the Choral, Church members dedicated to the veneration of the Pancreator through song.

The Choral are not exactly a sect, for its members usually consider themselves Orthodox or Avestite or whatever. Even some Brother Battle Adepts consider themselves members of the Choral. Instead it is a calling, an avocation. Choral of different sects may not like each other or their beliefs, but they still come to together to raise their voices in song.

Most Choral are musically talented but little more. Truly gifted Choral, on the other hand, are said to be able to work miracles with their voices alone. Hymns reflect the power and grace of the Pancreator, and the most blessed Choral can make even the staunchest Antinomist see this.

The Choral also provides an avenue for talented musicians who have no interest in joining the League. The various entertainers' guilds have a stranglehold on both the performing and recording of music, and the Choral offers the only Church-sanctioned alternative to this arrangement. The Choral hold a respected, almost venerated position within the Church, and use their talent and voices to keep this so.

History

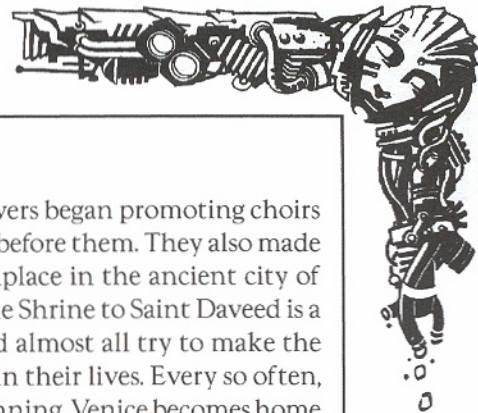
The Choral have long been the elite of Church musicians. The Avestites have their chanters, the Amaltheans their calmers, and the Orthodox have their cantors and choir directors. While every congregation, no matter how small, seems to have a choir, the Choral are few and far between. They are the singers who can reveal the flame in the darkest soul, and whose voices burn with the Pancreator's fire. Their most basic songs can inspire the faithful while their rarest, most complex hymns shake mountains.

Few Choral know of the group's origins as a Second Republic sociological experiment. At that time, scientists began studying every aspect of how sound and music affected human behavior. They saw how people would re-interpret songs until even the most nonsensical made sense. They developed methods of changing people's emotions through rhythm and melody. And, at the height of their research, they learned how music could change someone's very personality.

While corporations were among the first to take advantage of these breakthroughs, the Church was not far behind. Music, especially hymns, had a strong role in religious ceremonies already, and songwriters among the faithful embraced these methods with a passion. Their names have disappeared into the mists of time, but their works live on in the Choral.

As the Dark Ages descended on humanity, certain individuals took it on themselves to keep the flame of faith alive and stoke it to all new heights. One of these was Saint Daveed Laurenze, who traveled from world to world, trading his songs for passage and boarding. More than a few miracles have become associated with him, but perhaps the most important was his ability to establish innumerable choirs to spread the Prophet's word through music.

He also chose the most promising members of the various choirs to learn the most difficult and most powerful songs. Many of these hymns had their roots in the popular music of the Second Republic, but Daveed changed them to songs of faith and inspiration. They maintained their ability to sway listeners but found a whole new purpose.



Daveed's followers, and those who came after them, have continued this tradition. They seek out songs of power and turn them to praising the Pancreator. Modern hymns have come from old Ur-Obun songs, Second Republic marketing campaigns, political jingles and even Vorox chants. They have also composed new, even more dramatic numbers.

No one can say exactly when proper use of these hymns became recognized as a form of theurgy. At first listeners believed that what moved them was purely the talent of the singer and the strength of the song. As time went by, however, priests stressed that the Chorali had become a conduit for the Pancreator, and the impact of their hymns was a manifestation of His will. Now no one denies that the best Chorali work true theurgy.

Structure

The Church requires no formal test for the Chorali — if someone declares herself such, then no one will deny her. They just won't call her that until she proves herself. The Chorali should act as a bellows for the holy flame, causing it to flare up wherever she sings. If someone calling herself Chorali fails to accomplish that, then the faithful will look upon her with pity, not respect.

Just as there is no official designation as Chorali, so too are there no official rankings among them. Just because the Chorali does not have an official structure does

Venice

Saint Daveed's followers began promoting choirs just as their teacher had before them. They also made a shrine out of his birthplace in the ancient city of Venice on Holy Terra. The Shrine to Saint Daveed is a must-do for Chorali, and almost all try to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lives. Every so often, without schedule or planning, Venice becomes home to incredible concerts as large numbers of Chorali converge on the city at once. The last of these great concerts happened shortly before the Emperor Wars began, and many Chorali talk of scheduling a new one, one which shall out do all past concerts. This concert will bring together all the Chorali of the Known Worlds, hoping to usher in a new era through the power of their voices and their faith.

not mean it lacks a way to rank its members. Four factors generally go into just how respected a Chorali is by his peers. The least of these is age — older Chorali generally receive obeisance from younger ones as they are assumed to know more and to have accomplished much. The second factor is general fame. Some Chorali have achieved distinction across planets and even throughout the Known Worlds. The third factor is knowledge, especially





The Choralis in War

Most Choralis have little interest in using their hymns during fights. They prefer to help farmers plow their fields, smiths make tools, seamstresses sew, and preachers preach. Certain nobles (and more militant priests) feel otherwise. The Li Halan have sought out the Choralis to prepare them for battle, as have Brother Battle knights and Hazat crusaders. No group has used them for violent purposes as extensively as the Avestites, however.

The Avestites have long promoted chanters as a valuable tool for reinforcing faith. They frown on the more ostentatious hymns other sects practice, preferring simple (and hypnotic) chants and rhythms. A famous story dating back to when the Church and the Avestites almost went to war tells of the way many Avestites prepared themselves for what could have been their last stand. Chanters stood before legions of Avestites, and as they chanted, the Avestites beat their chests in rhythm, first with one hand and then with two. No few Church scholars believe this heavily influenced their desires to die rather than surrender, and Avestites still whip themselves into a battle state this way, willing to walk straight into the jaws of death.

of hymns. Those who know more hymns command a great deal of respect from those who wish to learn them. Finally, the most important factor is talent. The Choralis recognize that their most famous peers are not necessarily the best. That accolade they reserve for those whose voices soar above the rest and whose compositions reach to the very depths of their souls.

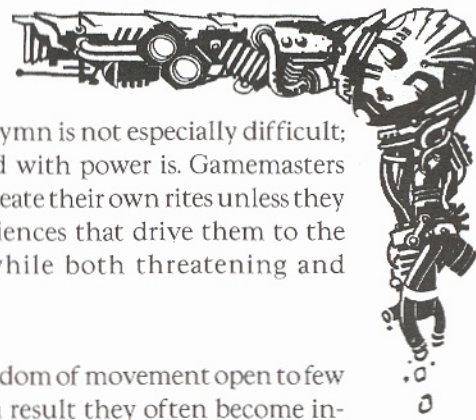
Famous Choralis

Lady Irama Li Halan

Lady Irama holds a place of distinction in the Church as perhaps the greatest living repository of hymns. This ancient lady does not have a library of these powerful songs; they all reside in her head. No one knows just how many hymns she has memorized, but all look on her with awe. Recently Lady Irama has had intimations of her own mortality, and has begun seeking an apprentice to whom she can pass these songs. So far she has yet to find anyone worthy of this honor, and she continues to look.

Antonio Steed

Perhaps the best known of modern Choralis, Antonio has become one of the most popular entertainers on Byzantium Secundus and, through his magic lantern shows, throughout surrounding space. The child of League entertainers, Antonio began performing as soon as he could walk, and by the time he hit puberty had entertained some of the leading nobles of the Known



Worlds. His parents' death in a fire changed this, however, and he sought the safety of the Church. He immediately joined the Choralist, and used his talents to make a name for himself. By the time he came to Byzantium Secundus he was already well known, and his stay has only added to his fame. Still a young man, Church leaders look forward to many more good years out of him and point to the number of young people, especially adolescent girls, who respond to his music. What these leaders do not know is that Steed has begun to seriously question his faith, and begun looking for something new in some of the most debauched parties Byzantium Secundus has to offer.

Playing the Choralist

The Choralist, while rare and treasured, have a definite role to play among the fading suns. Much as missionaries move about the heathens, so too do Choralist move among the faithful, spreading the word and inspiring devotion. While they exist outside of Church hierarchy, its leaders welcome them everywhere. No matter how tortured an artist the Choralist character may be, society will always welcome him. He may see the worst aspects of human nature, but he should always serve as a guide to right living.

Stereotypes

Hymn Seeker

The character has dedicated herself to recovering the Church's many lost hymns. Some of these may be hidden in dark alcoves of major cathedrals, but far more are hidden in distant churches or in the heads of rare singers. The character will have to visit the farthest reaches of the Known Worlds to track these down. And just what is that rumor about the power of Vau music?

Missionary

The character believes the Pancreator has blessed her, and she now has the duty of seeking out heathens and inspiring them to belief. She will bear any burden and battle any obstacle to bring her songs to those who most need it.

Doubter

The character knows he has an incredible gift, but is it really from the Pancreator? Could it just be that he is a powerful singer or, worse yet, does this gift come from science or dark powers?

Protector

The Choralist belongs to one congregation, a congregation that looks to her for support and succor. She commands even more respect than the local priest, but her duties are also more dangerous. Should anything threaten the congregation, be it demons, Symbiots or even the noble lord, she must lead it.

Inspired Composer

Not all hymns are in musty old books. Some have yet to be written, and the character is just the one to write

them. Coming up with a hymn is not especially difficult; coming up with one filled with power is. Gamemasters should not let characters create their own rites unless they have been through experiences that drive them to the edge of their abilities while both threatening and reinspiring their faith.

Church Politician

The Choralist have a freedom of movement open to few other Church leaders. As a result they often become involved in the various alliances and debates which shape the Church. The character has his own agenda, be it increasing tolerance for aliens or starting a crusade against the Kurgans, and uses his position to further that program.

Traits

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Extrovert, Faith

Natural skills: Charm, Impress

Learned skills: Arts (choose one or more), Etiquette, Focus, Performance, Read Latin, Speak Latin

Blessings: Beloved (2 pt: +2 Charm among the faithful)

Benefices: Choralist (1 pt)

Benefice

Choralist (1 pt): Other Choralist recognize the character as one of their own, and so do the faithful. They welcome the character anywhere, offering whatever hospitality and assistance they can (without putting themselves at risk). The character is expected to reciprocate with songs and news from afar.

Learned Skill

Arts (Composition)

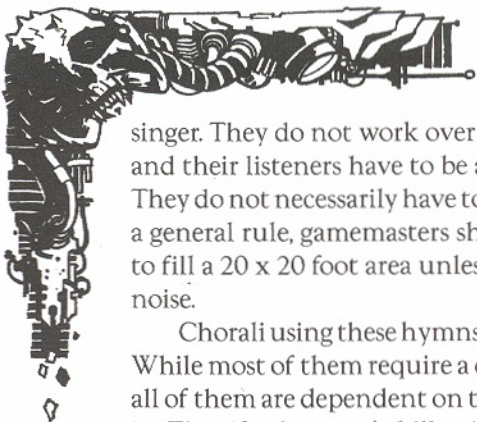
Roll: Wits + Arts (Composition)

The character can develop new songs and rewrite old ones. This is a necessary skill for any Choralist hoping to create new hymns.

Hymns

These are the theurgic rites of the Choralist, powerful songs which those blessed by the Pancreator can invoke to work His will. The Choralist do not teach these hymns to anyone they consider unready, and usually the only way to learn one of these is through someone who already knows it. By the same token, many Choralist spend their time seeking lost hymns written long ago but still filled with power. On rare occasion a Choralist will compose a new hymn, filled with power and piety, and spread it among other singers. These songs generally come out of moments of great trial and inspiration, and their composers are remembered for centuries.

Most of these rites have the "sensory" range. They usually affect anyone who can hear the pure voice of the



singer. They do not work over amplifiers and recordings, and their listeners have to be able to make out the song. They do not necessarily have to understand the words. As a general rule, gamemasters should consider these songs to fill a 20 x 20 foot area unless there is some competing noise.

Chorali using these hymns have one major limitation. While most of them require a different skill for their roll, all of them are dependent on the character's musical ability. Thus if a character's skill rating exceeds his Performance rating, then he must use the lower score. Example: Colin has begun the Song of Peace to end an ill-advised duel. Unfortunately he has more Charm (8) than he does talent (Performance 6). Thus he must use the 6 to figure his goal number.

Ave Igna

(Level 1, Passion + Impress, L, sensory, instant, 1W)

This short song, usually added to the end of other hymns, causes all fires in the immediate vicinity of the singer to flare up, consuming their fuel at a remarkable rate for one turn. If someone is already taking fire damage that turn, he will suffer an additional die for every victory point from the Passion + Impress roll. Note that this song does not create new fires.

Blessed Disciple

(Level 2, Extrovert + Charm, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

The singer takes on the role of Hombor the Beggar, one of the Prophet's disciples. The song tells how Hombor managed to humble himself to the point where a murderous crowd not only let him live but listened to what he had to say. Anyone who hears the song must make a Passion + Fight roll to attack the singer.

Bless the Faithful

(Level 3, Faith + Focus, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

Much like The Prophet's Holy Blessing, this song adds +1 for every victory point to the goal numbers of everyone who hears it. On a critical success it adds +2. It does not affect the singer.

Fear of the Prophet

(Level 4, Extrovert + Impress, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

This song has the opposite effect of Bless the Faithful. Anyone who hears it must subtract one for every victory point from all goal numbers. On a critical success the listener must subtract two. It does not affect the singer.

Song of Peace

(Level 5, Calm + Charm, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

Any characters affected by this hymn must resist it with Passion + Fight rolls if they want to hurt someone else. Otherwise any kind of aggressive action is impossible. Once someone has successfully resisted, the Song of Peace will not affect him until the next span. Otherwise the effect stops after 10 turns or whenever the Chorali stops singing (whichever comes first).

The Chorus of Many Flames

(Level 5, Passion + Vigor, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

Anyone listening to the song can act faster and more decisively than others. Listeners can take two actions with no negative modifier, while three actions are only at -4. Three is still the most normal people can take.

Shepherd's Lament

(Level 6, Calm + Focus, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

A peculiar languor overcomes characters who listen to this hymn. Anyone trying to take two actions in a turn must subtract 6 from their goal numbers. No listener can take a third action in a turn.



The Uplifting Word

(Level 6, Passion + Vigor, L, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

Anyone who hears this song ignores damage modifiers and penalties from fatigue. Even characters who would otherwise have to subtract 10 from their goal numbers suffer no ill effects, though any more damage will still kill them. Characters can still be stunned and knocked out normally.

Horn of Joshua

(Level 7, Strength + Vigor, L, sensory, instant, 1W)

This is not as much a song as it is a series of deafening shouts and screams, meant to symbolize the Prophet's victory over dangerous technology. The character can damage specific inanimate objects, causing one point of damage for every victory die on the roll. Armor and energy shields offer no protection from this damage.

The Lord's Champion

(Level 8, Faith + Oratory, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

The singer infuses a character with the full glory of the vengeful Pancreator, adding a number of points to the character's characteristics equal to the victory points rolled. The singer can divide these up among her characteristics as she pleases.

Grace of the Emyrean

(Level 9, Faith + Performance, L, sensory, instant, 2W)

For one turn the character is completely impervious to harm from outside sources. If the character could sing in a vacuum, then even that could not hurt him. Rumor has it that the Chorali have developed an extremely powerful hymn for each of the Emyrean Powers, but no one has ever confirmed this.

Masked Chorali

The Chorali aim to cross sect boundaries, using music to inspire unity instead of factionalism. Some Chorali take this to an extreme, refusing to let their listeners know who they are and obscuring their identity at every turn. These Chorali invest in fabulous masks made by some of the best designers in the Known Worlds. They only perform while wearing these masks, believing that their listeners should get inspiration from the voice and the song, not the appearance and identity of the singer.

This has become a tradition when Chorali sing together. Their masked choirs are must-see events, with some of the best singers in the Known Worlds wearing some of the most beautiful masks ever created. Wearing the mask is an excellent way to declare oneself Chorali. Those who are not Chorali will be uncovered the moment they try to sing.



Gjarti

(Gee-ART-ee, hard "g")

Baron Perceval of Glam trudged through the knee-high mud, clutching his abdomen wound, praying for it not to start bleeding again. The barbarian's great sword had cut deeply and painfully. While Perceval had afterwards felled the brute with his slug gun, it had been his last bullet. All other combatants were dead. But this was no boon, for Perceval's entire entourage lay dead with them, their skulls crushed or their limbs mangled.

Curse these Vuldrok! Perceval muttered. In their greed for treasure they had laid waste to acres of good crop fields. Now the peasants would be hungry and production would decrease, forcing him to seek a loan from his brother. He had flown out to deal with the intruders personally, but they were more numerous and better armed than his intelligence had claimed. By the Pancreator, one of them had a fusion gun! It only had one shot, but that had been enough to take down his flitter. Where did they get such weaponry? The rest of them fought with huge swords and axes.

Perceval's foot slipped on the muddy embankment and he moaned as pained lanced his abdomen. Blood began to leak down his once-clean pants. If he didn't reach help soon, he would bleed to death in the dirt.

He started forward again and froze as his hackles rose. A deep throated animal grunt came from behind and to the left of him. He slowly turned and his weakened knees nearly collapsed as he saw the Kagor boar 10 feet from him, snorting now and preparing to launch his monstrous bulk.

But it then stopped and calmed as it heard a voice from the nearby woods: "Fret not, friend boar. Your dinner lies elsewhere. This is a feast too hard won. Follow your nose to another prey." The boar grunted and ambled back over the rise it had come from.

Perceval stared in awe at the old man walking from the woods, smiling in the direction of the boar. "Who... who are you? A holy man?"

"Yes, my lord," the old man chuckled as he offered his staff to Perceval. "Blessed by Gjarti."

"A pagan!" Perceval exclaimed.

The old man helped him to limp forward with the staff. "A word I have heard before. But what good is a name if its bearer does not accept it? If he does not answer to it, it is but whispers on the wind, soon forgotten."

"You saved my life. I owe you respect at least."

"But I am one of yours, my lord. My family has long served as wardens of your forests. I do this from fealty."

Perceval looked at the old man with even more awe. "Most of my subjects would kill me in such a situation and blame it on the Vuldrok. Yet you — a pagan even — risk the poison tusks of the Kagor to rescue me."

"Hmm. Perhaps respect for life is more universal than your priests teach. Eh?" The old man helped his lord to limp to a nearby hut...

The Universal Church may claim hegemony over the souls of all Known Worlders in theory, but practice is quite different: the hosts of the faithless, antinomists and heathens abound. Many worlds have pagan holdout cults hidden deep in the wilderness and devoted to local spirits. Few in the upper classes or interstellar ranks ever witness their practices or even see a known practitioner — their very existence often seems like a fairy tale told by priests to lend credence to calls for inquisition.

But non-Church religions do indeed exist, and to the surprise of any Church goer who actually comes to understand them, most are not full of devil-orgies and demon-possession. They are, for the most part, genuine attempts to reach the Mystery of creation, whether in the guise of the Pancreator or an earth mother.

The most prevalent and universal of these pagan religions is Gjarti, the worship and experience of invisible nature through the Universal Mother.

History

Gjarti has ancient roots. It began during the Diaspora as a "back to the earth" religious movement, popular among many colonists who sought as deep a connection to their new planets as they had with their native, terran soil. The movement was founded in 2613 by Edgar Vollmak, a biologist and farmer who claimed to have visions of Sutek's native spirits, or "indigenous morphogenic forms" as he called them.

Like the Prophet, Vollmak drew wisdom and terminology from many earth philosophies and religions, using these already-known traditions to communicate his experiences to a largely secular and materialistic society. From Tibetan Buddhism, depth psychology and many aboriginal traditions, he devised a "spiritual science" by which colonists could come to know their new homes better.

In its beginnings, Vollmak's movement was not the primitivistic religion it would become by the late Dark Ages, but rather a psychologically oriented, New Age system. It offered no religious traditions of its own but encouraged practitioners to adopt its methodology into their own beliefs. For those who had no beliefs — the atheists or simply uninitiated — it served instead as a psycho-analytic method for getting to know one's environment better.

Vollmak originally called his method Gaian Gestalt Perception. He taught that each world had its own super-system which regulated the energies of the planet. Matter was seen as a form of energy, although a crude form,

ocillating at different vibrations from the more subtle, invisible energies which were the main components of these super-systems. Vollmak initially called such a system a "gaia." The goal of Gaian Gestalt Perception was to connect a practitioner with his own local system, helping him integrate his life better into his natural environment, thus avoiding bad luck and disaster, or at least allowing him to better weather misfortune.

As Vollmak traveled to other worlds to teach his method to other colonists, he began to feel that inhabited, life-bearing worlds were connected by a universal system, a "super-gaia." He received a vision from this system, which he perceived as a being he later called Gjarti, the Universal Mother, the World of Worlds, the Source of Life.

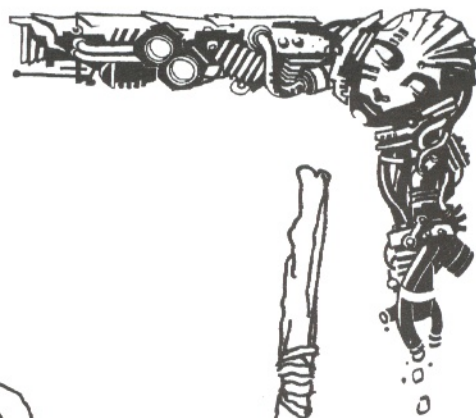
He renamed his system after this deity and began to teach it as a religion. Skeptics claimed that his religious conversion was brought upon more by witnessing the success of contemporary zealots and the money they brought in than any supernatural conversion. Vollmak ignored his critics and continued to teach his new revelations.

Dreams became a major focus of his new work. He received new insights in dreams and encouraged others to carefully watch and record their dreams, seeking the deep wisdom which Gjarti usually hid there. It is in dreams that people can perceive and connect with Gjarti, who exists on the incredibly subtle and fine vibratory level of the gestalt system — who is, in fact, the personification in human minds of this system. Energy of this high spiritual level is invisible to the naked eye and to even the finest scientific equipment — nothing made of matter (a crude form of energy), can perceive energy so subtle. Only the spirit can perceive Gjarti, and all beings speak with their own spirits in dreams.

Gjarti appears in slightly different forms on each world, and there eventually arose a whole pantheon of Gjartis, each with a voluminous list of symbology and each with a host of spirits. One of Vollmak's granddaughters discovered the male aspect to the religion, residing in the solar regions. The sun was seen as male energy, fertilizing each Gjarti and, like each Gjarti, was personified differently in each solar system. In addition, other planets and moons in a system were seen as more distant spirits, sometime male, sometimes female, sometimes neither.

Vollmak died in 2685 but his religion outlived him. Gjarti spread over many worlds but was never as popular as Zebulon's later religion. Too few people could identify with its homesteading attitude or its esoteric and almost psychedelic dream focus (psychedelic drugs were actually heavily encouraged by Vollmak, who said they allowed for waking dreams).

In addition, after Vollmak's death, the religion lacked central authority or universally acknowledged clergy. Anybody who wanted to be a Gjarti shaman could claim the title, as long as he was convincing in the role, which usually required little more than imaginative dream in-



terpretation skills and charisma. A somewhat accepted lineage was formed by Vollmak's granddaughter, the most widely accepted shaman. But even Regina Vollmak could not unite the disparate faith, purposefully engineered by Edgar to be unique on each world.

Gjarti is mainly practiced by those who follow a charismatic shaman or guru, someone who can convince the leity of his or her power and wisdom. Often, reluctant gurus become popular over a number of worlds due to some supernatural powers they exhibit, but for the most part, simple charismatics hold the most sway.

The religion almost died out during the Second Republic, with society's new wave of analytical examination of Diasporan superstitions. It remained strong only among a small back-to-basics movement of farmers disenchanted with the materialistic and high-tech culture that was rising. It had a few brief urban revivals among kooks and poets, but these were never enough to lend it much credibility. The Church even ignored it for the most part, contemptuous of its fantasies.

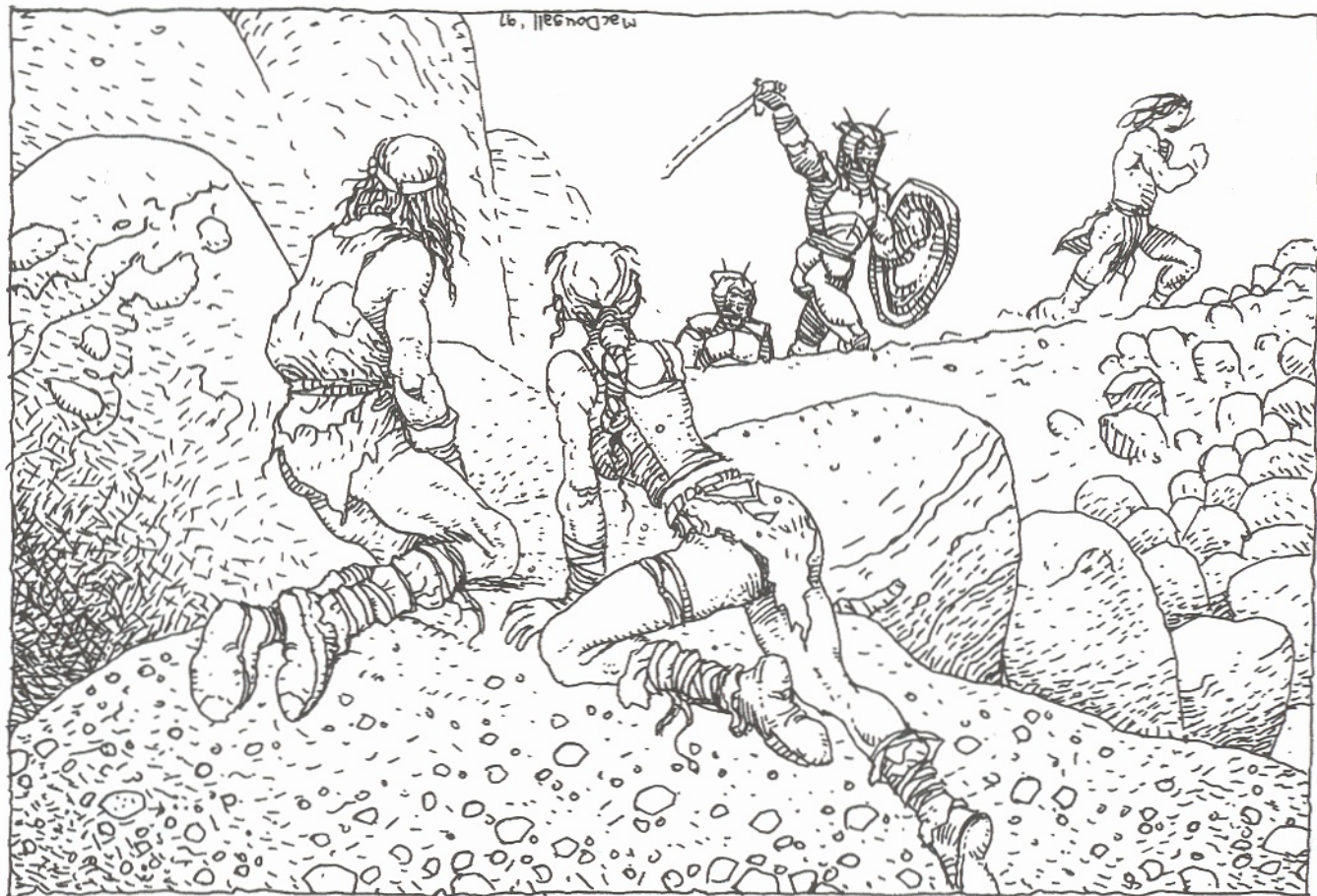
After the Fall, Gjarti saw a great resurgence on worlds far from central Church authority, and its worshippers' intense spiritual experiences increased, as if the spirits which they claimed existed had long been asleep and were now finally awake. It seemed that, in the New Dark Ages, the more that the religion sunk to its primal ancestral roots — animistic and shamanic beliefs deeply held and born from true adversity and need — the more real their

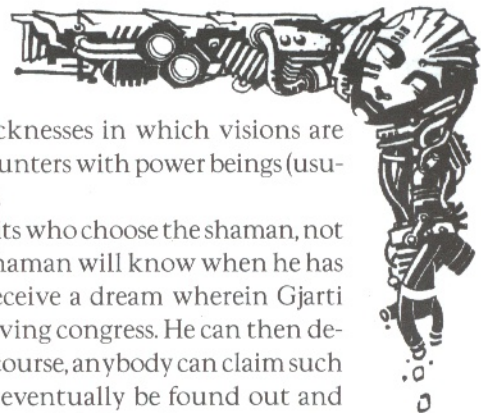
beliefs seemed to become. Tales of magic and animal powers spread on many worlds, igniting both superstitious longings and fears among the new peasantry.

The Church treated Gjarti as any heresy, wiping it out where it could. Before the fires of holy retribution, Gjarti adherents shrunk again. But this time, a core of fanatics on many worlds retreated to the wildernesses to maintain their religion. For the most part, the Church didn't care; it didn't have time to deal with a handful of outcasts. Nobles even had a certain fondness for the religion, especially if it kept serfs homesteaded on their land (they would occasionally regret this when Gjartins revolted against earth-raping projects, such as strip-mining).

Today, Gjarti is mainly practiced on the Vuldrok worlds. It can be found strong on Leminkainen and Manitou, and there are even some adherents on Madoc, Malignatius (of course), Pentateuch and Grail. Small chapters exist on most worlds with substantial wilderness. Most Vuldrok Raiders pledge themselves to a host of stellar deities, who are under Gjarti in importance and power but supposedly more able to directly serve petitioners (Gon, the Spirit of the Vortex or solar winds; Eglä, Voice of the Void; Unter, Chief of the Gates, etc.).

The majority of Gjartins are unaware of the history behind their religion. Vollmak is remembered as a shaman whose spiritual system and religion came to him in a single vision. The actual evolution of Gjarti from psychological system to religion is unrecognized for the most part.





Practice

Deacon Edwards of the Preceptors has studied the religion of Gjarti on both Leminkainen and Manitou. His tolerance and understanding of its worshippers made him many friends among them, and allowed him greater access to their secrets than most outsiders before him. While he believes they are ultimately wrong to place their belief in "old gods wearing new masks," he feels that persecution is not the way to bring them into the Pancreator's fold.

One result of his studies is the volume "Life and Ecstasy Among the Gjartins." In this anthropological work, he divides Gjarti into three different branches: Folk Gjarti, Contemplative, or Philosophical, Gjarti and Compassionate Gjarti.

Folk Gjarti is practiced mainly by peasants and barbarians, and is characterized by its emphasis on spirits and magic. Contemplative Gjarti is found on Manitou and Pentateuch, and is characterized by its more philosophical stance, often hostile to the "hedge magics" of the less educated Gjartins elsewhere. Contemplative Gjarti seeks to illuminate the mind and achieve harmony with one's instincts and intellect.

Compassionate Gjarti is sort of a combination of the two other branches, wherein the superstitions of the peasantry are used as imaginative tools for deeper meditation and the ultimate goal is escape from suffering through union with the Universal Mother. It has a strong emphasis on compassion, seen as Gjarti's central trait. Many believe that this branch, practiced mainly on Grail, was heavily influenced by the Amaltheans on that world.

Folk Gjarti

One of the purposes of Folk Gjarti is to contact spirits and gain favors or powers from them. All spirits are believed to exist in a hierarchy governed by Gjarti, the Universal Mother. Evil spirits exist, those who come from the "cold stone regions where life does not exist, far from the light of hearthfire." Gjarti is a spirit of life, and thus only governs the living and spirit realms, spirit being seen as a form of life in a more subtle body. The spirits of unlife are rare but they can appear to ravage the living world. Antinomists are sometimes believed to deal with these spirits; this makes them enemies of Gjartins and Universal Church priests alike.

Spirits are mainly believed to communicate with material beings through dreams, especially if they are called for in a proper fashion: with incense and song according to traditions set down by Gjartin shamans. Sometimes, more extreme measures are required: fasting or wilderness retreats where the petitioner prays in the wild for days or weeks until he receives an answer.

Not every practitioner can become a shaman, just as not every worshipper of the Church is meant for the priesthood. The applicant must show signs that the spirits favor her. Sometimes, these signs come as events in her

childhood, such as dire sicknesses in which visions are experienced, or actual encounters with power beings (usually local animal lifeforms).

Ultimately, it is the spirits who choose the shaman, not the Gjarti worshippers. A shaman will know when he has been chosen, for he will receive a dream wherein Gjarti initiates him in an act of loving congress. He can then declare himself a shaman. Of course, anybody can claim such a post, but impostors will eventually be found out and punished by the spirits (or so it is believed).

To become an acknowledged and respected shaman, the priest must do good deeds for the community. Only by earning their respect will the people truly accept his calling. Shamans with little respect will not be protected from the inquisition, but the valued shamans will be hidden or spirited away by villagers before the flameguns can get near them.

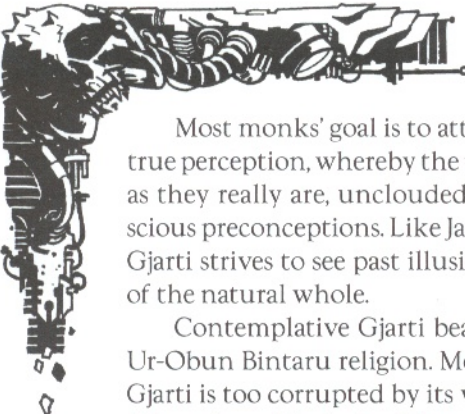
The common worshipper's religious life usually consists of a simple altar, one which can double as an ordinary, everyday object, such as a bench or table. The ritual totems are usually kept hidden in a secret cache and only taken out for prayer. The standard items are incense, one or more candles, an image of Gjarti (a painting, statue or even magic lantern projection), and a small collection of valuable fetishes, items each worshipper gains throughout his life during important events: a favored stone, twig, leaf or animal bone. Sometimes, on holy nights or during important events, psychedelic drugs may be added (mushrooms are favored).

In addition to these common items, shamans will have symbols of their totems (animals or plants who speak to them in dreams) and tools or weapons specially blessed for their work (so that they operate on the subtle spirit plane in addition to the crude physical world).

Fantasies are important to Gjarti worshippers. Imagination is encouraged, and even the leity are taught active imagination and lucid dreaming techniques. It is believed that when the imagination is allowed free reign, an active dreaming state is entered in which Gjarti can be perceived. However, since each person's imagination or dream is unique, interpretation is largely up to the individual. Shamans can provide guidelines, but each worshipper is taught to know herself better. Such individualism — even within the strong community context of Gjarti — is frowned on by the Church.

Contemplative Gjarti

Far less concerned with images and items, Contemplatives, or Gjarti monks, tend to seek personal enlightenment through wisdom and meditation. Some see the trappings of Folk Gjarti to be a hindrance to enlightenment, but others see them as tools on the path. Both branches recognize Gjarti as the Universal Mother, but monks, unlike shamans, tend not to personify her in human form. They see Gjarti as a universal principle, like the Tao, rather than a being.



Most monks' goal is to attain a state of pure being or true perception, whereby the things of the world are seen as they really are, unclouded by conscious and unconscious preconceptions. Like Japanese Zen, Contemplative Gjarti strives to see past illusion to gain true perception of the natural whole.

Contemplative Gjarti bears some similarities to the Ur-Obun Bintaru religion. Most Obun believe that Folk Gjarti is too corrupted by its worshipper's own wish-fulfillments and fantasies. There is not enough emphasis on discipline and the weeding out of false visions. Like the Contemplatives, Bintaru worshippers believe in a concept similar to Gjarti but without the female connotations.

Obun believe that false visions — aspects of a being's ego-driven desires — can possess that being's consciousness, delivering him into a world of illusion rather than liberating him into a truer state of reality. They believe that this is the case with most Folk Gjartins. Shamans, however, argue that the Obun have disconnected themselves from the deepest root of the Universal Mother, and instead project philosophies of their own onto Her. They claim that only when instinct is given full sway can She be known; analytical intelligence can help to understand Her but it cannot substitute for raw experience.

Compassionate Gjarti

As with Folk Gjarti, Compassionate Gjarti recognizes spirits. They are seen as the children of Gjarti, fellow beings in the universe. Unlike Folk Gjarti, the hierarchies of such beings are considered unimportant, as are supplications to them. Only union with Gjarti herself can bring power or a surcease to the pain of living in a divided world.

The universe is thought to be flawed, and thus its creatures suffer. There are many beliefs as to why the universe is flawed, but they are considered unimportant; it is now a simple fact of life. What is important is union with Gjarti, for only such an experience can free one from suffering.

Images and fetishes are occasionally used, but are not invested with near as much importance as in Folk Gjarti.

Death and Rebirth

All Gjartins believe in reincarnation. They believe that, in one life or another, they lived either as sentients, animals or plants, and that the divisions between these lifeforms are not as great as most believe. If they can remember these other consciousnesses, then they can achieve greater understanding and harmony between beings. Some believe that, with deep enough memory regression, even lives as Anunnaki can be recalled. None have yet proven such distant past-lives, however.

Behavior determines how one will be reborn, similar to the concept of karma. Good deeds to other beings ensure a higher form in the next life, while bad deeds bring a lower form. Gjartins argue on the hierarchies of rebirth, however. Some belief that birth as a sentient being is the highest form, while others think it is a curse and that ani-

mal or plant life is the highest. Others believe that higher forms exist which are unknown on this plane of existence, and that each being must strive for rebirth in one of these spirit forms; some can be reborn as lower spirits, or demons.

Symbology

Vollmak "encountered" Gjarti on Leminkainen. He thus chose the local jaba flower, a beautiful, multicolored lotus (now extinct), as the symbol of his new religion. Today, most worshippers have different symbols for their own world's Gjarti goddess, usually a native flower, tree or even animal.

Most Gjarti goddesses, regardless of individual image, have similar attributes. Gjarti is usually perceived as a female sitting cross-legged, eyes open with love and compassion. Long, luxuriant hair flows down her shoulders to spread across the ground. Animals and aliens play in its strands as if it were the grass of the earth. One hand is cupped and holds a puddle of water in the palm (from which an alien fish leaps upwards); the other (most often her left hand) holds a forked lightning bolt. She is naked but her body is tattooed with many fantastical images, some of weird plants, some of mythic animals (these she keeps with her until they are ready to be born into the world). A hint of gnarled branches, roots and caves can be seen around her crotch.

Although there are many Gjarti goddesses there is only one Gjarti. These various Gjartis are seen as aspects of the one true Gjarti, the Universal Mother. This universal Gjarti is often too great to be perceived by mortal minds. She thus appears to her followers in different guises, each suited for their environment. (See the Thousand Gjartis sidebar.)

Magic

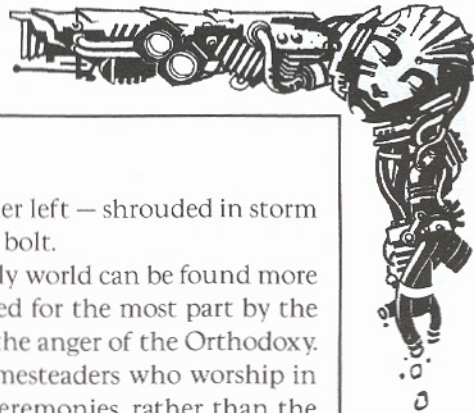
Gjarti shamans practice theurgy in the form of spells and conjurings. As far as game mechanics are concerned, Gjarti magicians learn Theurgy (and its dark side, Hubris), but these powers are considered to be more like Sympathy and its opposite, Antipathy — the classic pairs of ancient sympathetic magic. The higher a character's Theurgy characteristic, the more he is in sympathy with the natural world or Gjarti's subtle spirit realms. The higher his Antipathy, the more disconnected he is to the natural world, and the more it will be poisoned by his presence.

Otherwise, Gjarti rituals operate just like the Church theurgy rites given in the rulebook: they, too, have prayer, liturgy or gestural components, vestments and relics.

Vestments

Shamans consecrate important items to themselves to aid their magical work. While anything with a symbolic connection to Gjarti may be used, there are some specific items which are used more often than others.

Vestments are considered highly important among Folk Gjartins; working without one may cause a penalty



The Thousand Gjartis

Although Gjarti is One, She has many aspects, each different from the other yet the same:

Leminkainen: The "original" Gjarti of Edgar Vollmak, Leminkainen's Gjarti represents the template upon which all others are based, as described in the Symbolology section of the main text.

This lushly forested world has always attracted naturalists and its woods often hide civilization's discontents, whether early anti-technology farmers or modern barbarians. Folk Gjarti is now the main religion of the native barbarians, as it is for their Vuldrok brothers and sisters on other worlds.

Manitou: A shapely and painted woman with beautiful jewelry adorning her entire body (earrings, nose rings, belly ring, etc.). Tattoos depict native Manitou animals and plants. She smiles with a hint that secrets await. In her right hand, she holds the famed *zhrii'ka'a* lotus. In her left is a Vau lightsplinter crystal.

The most open and free Gjarti worshippers can be found on Manitou, unhindered by the Church. They tend to be more educated than their counterparts on other worlds, and most of them follow the Contemplative branch. Their focus is more on self-discovery through meditation and ecstasy than on the bringing of luck or good weather.

Grail: A green woman with leaves for hair and wooden skin. Her flowering body hosts many birds and mammals at her feet. Her right hand holds a feather while her left bears a talon.

The small communities of Grail worshippers are mainly Compassionates, and have included a few Etyri from time to time.

Pentateuch: A blue woman with clouds for hair. Magical sigils adorn her body from head to toe. Her right

hand holds a book while her left — shrouded in storm clouds — holds a lightning bolt.

In the wilds of this holy world can be found more than a few Gjartins, ignored for the most part by the Eskatonic governors — to the anger of the Orthodoxy. They tend to be quiet homesteaders who worship in calm, beautiful seasonal ceremonies, rather than the sometimes orgiastic rites of barbarian worshippers. Most of them are Contemplatives, although some Folk Gjartins are known.

Madoc: A woman whose hair is seaweed and whose body is water. Fish large and small swim within her body and seabirds roost in her hair. In her right hand she holds a conch, while her left bears a trident.

Madoc's few Gjartins are peasants gathered in floating communities upon the waves. Whole villages live in extended ships, strapped to one another and pulled by the great leviathans. They are mostly Folk Gjartins, concerned with fortune, good weather and a healthy catch of fish. They hold the native Oro'ym somewhat in awe.

Malignatus: A brown woman whose hair is grass and whose body is stone. Her eyes are often closed in meditation but there is a smile on her face. Carvings of animals, plants and stars can be seen over her body. Both hands meet at the belly, in a meditational gesture.

It is said that every religion ever known to humankind has at least one adherent on Malignatus. While this is surely an exaggeration, it often seems true. There are a number of Gjartins on this world, gathered in the mountains far from central authority. They tend to be the most monastic of Contemplatives in the Known Worlds, retreating from the world to study spiritual insights in dreams or meditations.

of -1 or more. They are considered extraneous to Contemplatives but useful to Compassionates.

| Vestment | Type of Rite |
|----------------|--|
| Staff | Willpower, command, spirit/matter as one |
| Robe | Shapechanging, invisibility |
| Animal remains | Summoning, calling, strength |
| Plants | Summoning, calling, healing |
| Incense | Meditation, calming |
| Gjarti image | Protection, harmony, compassion |
| Cup/water | Emotion, movement |
| Candle/fire | Magical energy (Wyrd), transformation |
| Stone/wood | Endurance, health, rootedness |
| Knife | Air, intellect, severing |

Rites

The following rites are categorized by the branch which teaches them, but the rites are not exclusive to

these branches (Contemplatives may know versions of some folk rites).

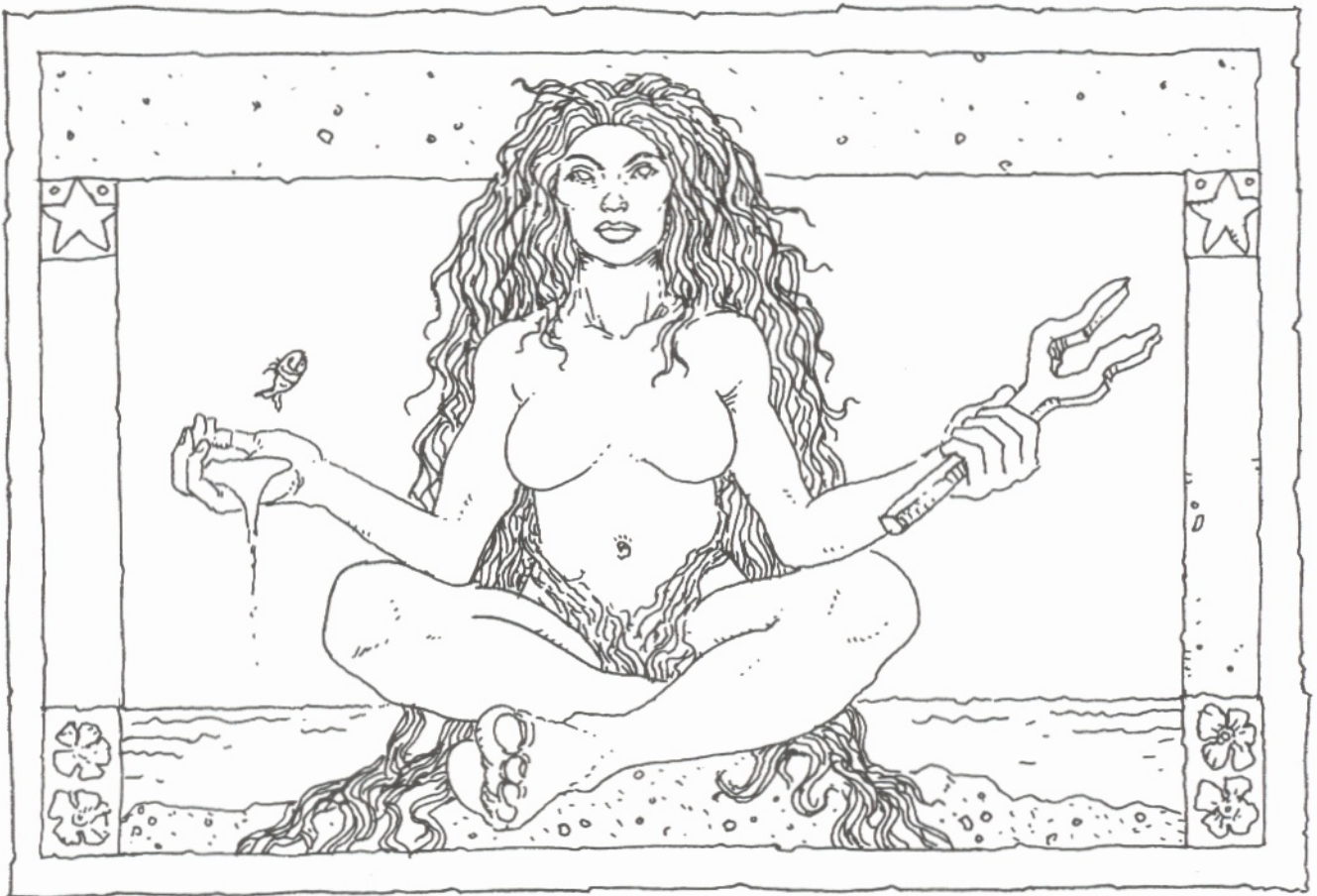
Folk Rites

These rites involve mastery over or communion with super-nature.

Purification

(Level 1, Faith + Focus, LPG, touch, prolonged, 0W)

The Gjartin can purify a being or object of its ill taint. While this will not physically change the person or object, it will cleanse its spiritual aura of exterior taint (interior, or psychological problems, will remain). Such taint can include a host of taboos: exposure to a bad place or person, exposure to bad thoughts, the object's use in a crime, long proximity to unhealthy environments (chemical plants, etc.). Tainted objects can sometimes enact penalties on rites cast with them (gamemaster's discretion). Note that this rite does not cure disease or poison —



it only cleanses the spiritual side of the person or item.

This rite must be performed over a vestment for the vestment to be effective, and the same is true for most objects used in Gjarti spells. While the rite's effects only last for one span, protected objects can remain pure for longer if they are not exposed to taint.

Gjarti's Blessing

(Level 2, Faith + Focus, G, touch, 1W)

This rite is just like the Prophet's Holy Blessing, except that it calls upon Gjarti rather than the Prophet or Pancreator.

Gjarti's Kiss

(Level 3, Calm + Remedy, P, touch, instant, 1W)

This rite is just like the Laying On of Hands: each victory point heals one wound level on one target.

Weather Way

(Level 4, Perception + Focus, G, distance, prolonged, 1W)

The Gjartin can tell what the weather will be like for one day into the future per victory point. In addition, he can manipulate weather patterns to his choosing. With one victory point, he can clear up an overcast day or bring clouds on a clear day. With two, he can summon rain or cause it to stop. With three, he can summon or quiet a strong wind. With four, he can call heavy hail. With five, he can summon a thunderstorm. With six, he can call a tornado, or hurricane if he is at sea. However, he may per-

form only ONE of these effects per casting: he may cause rain but not stop it unless he casts this rite a second time.

It takes only one turn to command the weather, but the effect will not take place until after a number of turns equal to the victory points required to cause it. This can vary with the preexisting effect: if it was already raining (two points), it may take only two turns to summon hail (four points - two = two).

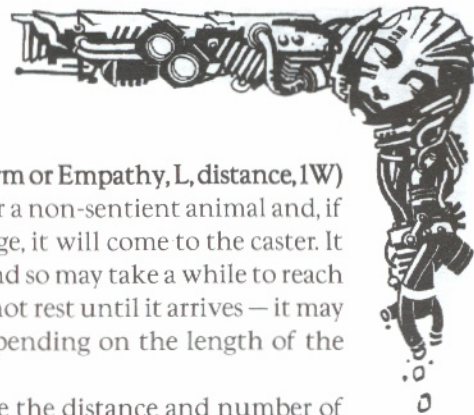
Voice of the Animal Powers

(Level 4, Faith + Empathy, P, prolonged, 1W)

The Gjartin may commune with an animal totem (which can be any animal, including non-sentient aliens such as amen'ta or grackle fox). The animal does not have to be present, but if one is not, then a vestment representing the animal must be at hand.

If performed on a live animal, a successful rite will provide the Gjartin a general idea of what the animal is feeling, its wants and needs. Or the Gjartin can choose instead to receive some clue or secret from the animal associated with its folkloric traits (the only option for those without a live animal): rats will communicate some survival secret, aiding a character to escape coming danger (a forest fire) or to forage hidden food; a grackle fox will communicate its cunning, aiding a character's Knavery or Stealth. The bonus to a skill or characteristic is equal to two plus the victory points on the casting roll.

The actual secret cannot be communicated with words and is forgotten when the rite ends.



Voice of the Plant Powers

(Level 4, Calm + Empathy, P, prolonged, 1W)

Similar to Voice of the Animal Powers, this rite allows a Gjartin to commune with the intelligences residing in plants. Unlike the previous rite, specific plants cannot be "read"; they can only be petitioned for secret traits: a lotus will provide waking dreams with profound content; trees will aid a character's Calm, etc.

This would all sound pretty dull except that Gjartins believe plants to be repositories of universal knowledge and lore. The caster may ask the plant spirits one specific question and receive an answer to that question from the gamemaster. However, the answer appears in a short dream (although the caster does not fall asleep), with all the ambiguity and illogic of such a state. With a critical success, the caster communes with Gjarti herself. He is thereafter considered purified (see the rite above) for the next month.

Sacred Space

(Level 5, Extrovert + Focus, PG, prolonged, 1W)

The shaman ritually creates a spiritually pure and protected space in which to work further magics. Any ill-intended or unwanted occult effects (psychic powers, theurgy rites, etc.) directed at anyone within the space must contend with the space's occult defenses. Before any character defends against occult powers, resolve the automatic protection afforded by the space: Roll one die with a goal of 10 plus one for every victory point on this rite's casting roll in a contested action against the invasive powers. Any leftover effects which breached the sacred space are then resolved against their targets. There is no limit to the number of attacks the space may defend against per turn.

For example, a psychic attempts a BrainBlast against a shaman within a sacred space. Assuming that the shaman received two victory points on his casting roll, the space protects with a goal of 12. The psychic rolls and gets 13 successes. The player of the shaman character rolls for the space's protection and gets nine successes — the BrainBlast gets through, but with only four successes. Now, the shaman gets to make his personal resistance roll (Theurgy + Stoic Mind): he gets five successes, which beats the BrainBlast.

It takes at least 10 minutes to create such a space, but only 10 turns to renew the rite on a previously created space (as long as no more than one phase of the moon has passed, or 23 days in places with no moon influence). It requires that the Gjartin set stakes about the perimeter, which can be shaped like a 10 x 10 circle, pentagon or square. The stakes are usually wood, but any stick will do, as long as it has been purified first (see Purification, above). Removal of even one of these stakes will void the sacred space's protection. For this reason, the stakes are sometimes hidden under rocks or in locked chests too heavy to easily move.

Call Creature

(Level 6, Passion + Charm or Empathy, L, distance, 1W)

The Gjartin can call for a non-sentient animal and, if one is within the rite's range, it will come to the caster. It must travel the distance and so may take a while to reach its destination, but it will not rest until it arrives — it may be exhausted by then, depending on the length of the journey.

The caster can increase the distance and number of creatures called with extra Wyrd points. For distance, use the normal rules given for psychic powers. For number, one additional creature may be called per extra Wyrd point spent. In the case of small creatures like rats or amen'ta, a small pack may arrive, increasing in size with each extra point spent.

This rite gives the caster no ability to control the called creature (see Command Creature, below).

Command Creature

(Level 7, Extrovert + Impress, L, sight, temporary, 1W)

The Gjartin may command a non-sentient creature to do as she wills, even if it means the harm or death of the creature. She could command it to attack her foe or to let her ride it peacefully. While she must speak to the animal in her own language, it will understand the command. The more victory points scored, the more clearly the command is understood. If the creature is small, a small pack or herd may be commanded. Also, one additional creature may be commanded per extra Wyrd point spent.

If the creature dies performing a task under magical command, the caster may gain Hubris: roll Faith + Empathy to avoid gaining one level.

Storm Lord

(Level 7, Passion + Impress, G, distance, instant, 1W)

The Gjartin can summon lightning from a thunderstorm, direct hail or wind at a particular target or aim tornadoes at it. The weather effect must already exist — it must be storming before a lightning bolt can be called — or the weather can be summoned with the Weather Way rite, above. The various effects are listed below; each must be declared before casting. If the required number of victory points is not scored, then the effect does not take place.

| Weather | Victory Pts | Effect |
|----------------|-------------|---|
| Drenching rain | 1 | Target suffers a -4 Perception penalty. One additional meter around the target may be selected with each extra victory point. |
| Wind buffet | 2 | Acts as a contested roll against any action the target tries to take. One additional meter around the target may be selected with each extra victory point. |



| Weather | Victory Pts | Effect |
|----------------|-------------|--|
| Hail pummel | 3 | Target suffers five dice of damage plus one per victory point; caster can perform an autofire action, including spreads. |
| Lightning bolt | 4 | Target suffer 10 dice of damage plus one per victory point (energy shields will defend against this) |
| Tornado grab | 5 | Target and all within three meters of him are snatched from the ground and flung two meters away per victory point (see the falling damage rules in the main rulebook). There is no resistance roll. If the caster is within three meters of his target, he is also flung. |

Strength of the Animal Powers

(Level 8, Passion + Vigor, GP, prolonged, 1W)

The Gjartin prays to a specific animal totem (including non-sentient aliens) for strength and gains one of its physical attributes, such as claws, horns, speed, etc. While such power only lasts for one span, it is available to the character anytime within that span. However, the character will also take upon the animal's attitude (in the form of a temporary Curse), which may be distinctly anti-social. Use the following chart for guidelines:

| Animal | Effects | Curse |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Claws:</i> | | |
| Cat, bear, grackle | 3 DMG | Surly (-2 Calm) |
| <i>Fangs*:</i> | | |
| Cat, wolf, grackle | -1 Init, 3 DMG | Wary (-2 Extrovert) |
| <i>Horns:</i> | | |
| Ram, stag | +2 DMG charge | Outgoing (-2 Intro) |
| <i>Speed:</i> | | |
| Cheetah, stag | +10 m run/turn | Nervous (-2 Calm) |

* Fangs may be concealable

Of course, anyone exhibiting such powers will be a target of peasant fear and a candidate for inquisitorial questioning.

Summon the Lord of the Quarters

(Level 9, Extrovert + Charm, LGP, 1W)

The Gjartin can summon a powerful spirit, one of the invisible entities of the subtle nature realms. This particular being is known by many names on many worlds but is universally recognized as the lord of the forest and the elements. His manifest aspect has many animal and plant attributes: a wolf-head with stag horns and limbs of oak.

The Lord of the Quarters can be beseeched by the summoner for one of the following tasks: He may instantly transport the summoner and his party to any wild place on the planet; he may quicken the plants of the region, directing them against foes (trees will uproot and assault

selected targets, etc.) or toward some other task (vines will weave an impassable wall); or he may call all the creatures of the region to attack selected prey or to serve the summoner in some other fashion (elephants can help build a bridge or transport treasure, etc.).

Needless to say, many priests of the Universal Church believe this being is a demon. Anyone caught summoning him may well need his powers of far transport to escape inquisition troops.

Contemplative Rites

Most of the following rites allow a character to receive knowledge or wisdom in his dreams. They usually take about a turn to cast but do not take effect until the character enters dream sleep. Note that, although the descriptions are written from the caster's point of view, they may be cast upon another for the same effect.

Subtle Memory

(Level 1, Introvert + Focus, P, 0W)

This rite, usually cast before sleep, allows the caster to remember his dreams of the night. He remembers them with clarity as if they were real experiences. These can give him insight into his own psychology, if he is attentive enough and willing to ask questions. Often, clues and omens to future events or probabilities are hidden in dreams, and they can only be pieced together over a number of nights. What may at first appear to be a useless or confusing item or being in a dream may turn out to be an important sign in the light of a later dream. Obviously the ability to remember these clues is valuable.

Foreboding

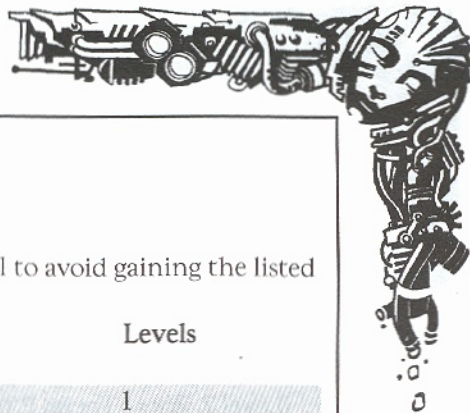
(Level 2, Introvert + Observe, P, 1W)

The character has a dream wherein forebodings of danger are revealed to him. Such warnings only apply to current situations (within the coming week). The exact situation is rarely shown; instead, a metaphorical event is experienced. A menacing priest may appear as a wizard or judge in the dream, while a person who intends the dreamer harm may appear as an animal. These dreams help to clarify real life situations but do not predict them: the danger or threat must exist or else no dream will be had.

Share Dream

(Level 3, Extrovert + Charm, P, 1W)

The character may share his dream with others or partake of another's dream. The total number of participants is equal to the ritecaster's Theurgy rating. All participants must be willing and present when this rite is cast. They then go to sleep (those who fail to fall asleep are not included). Those sleeping will experience the same dream, either that of the ritecaster or a previously designated dreamer. Those witnessing another's dream will gain some insight into that person's character and motivations, even if the dream did not directly concern these traits. This is especially valuable when the dreamer is an alien — the other dreamers can come to better understand him.



Hubris (Antipathy)

Gaining Hubris

Whenever a Gjartin is confronted with the following taboos, he must make a roll to avoid gaining the listed level of Hubris.

| Taboo | Roll | Levels |
|--|--------------------|--------|
| Performing an unclean act: | | |
| Slaying prey without proper respect | Faith + Empathy | 1 |
| Taking rare plants without leaving offering | Faith + Empathy | 1 |
| Exposure to unclean force: | | |
| Poison (nuclear waste, chembio traces, etc.) | Faith + Stoic Body | 1-2 |
| Ghost-haunted area (site of mass-murder, etc.) | Faith + Stoic Mind | 1 |
| Evil artifact | Faith + Stoic Mind | 1-3 |
| Fumbling a theurgy rite | Theurgy + Focus | 1 |
| Kin-slaying | Passion + Focus | 1-2 |
| Stealing | Wits + Focus | 1 |
| Lying | Wits + Focus | 1 |
| Disrespecting local spirits or deities | Faith + Focus | 1 |

Losing Hubris

A character can lose levels in Hubris by performing the following deeds and making a successful roll.

| Deed | Roll | Levels |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------|
| Vision quest (for self) | Faith + Vigor | 1 |
| Performing a sacred quest (for others) | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Exposure to Soul Shard | Human or Alien + Stoic Mind or Focus | 1-2 |
| Exposure to a Philosophers Stone | Human or Alien + Stoic Mind or Focus | 1-2 |
| Blessing by holy person | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Selfless sacrifice | Passion + Empathy | 1-2 |
| Flesh offering (cut off limb or organ): | | |
| Finger | Passion + Vigor | 1 |
| Hand | Passion + Vigor | 2 |
| Arm | Passion + Vigor | 3 |
| Leg | Passion + Vigor | 3 |
| Eye | Passion + Vigor | 4 |
| Vow (celibacy, silence, etc.)* | Faith + Stoic Mind | 1-2 |

* A typical vow is for one year per level of Hubris lost; if the vow is broken within this time span, the lost levels will return.

Dream Sign

(Level 4, Wits + Inquiry, P, 1W)

The character receives lore in a dream. During the casting of this rite, he must first ask a question. If successful, the dream will answer the question — although, as usual, in metaphoric form. The more victory points scored, the clearer the meaning or the deeper the answer. The gamemaster should be creative in devising the answer, cloaking it in often confusing forms (animals, children, clowns).

Mentor

(Level 5, Extrovert + Charm, P, 1W)

The character can summon a dream guide to help interpret his dreams. This requires a separate dream from those being interpreted. This guide appears in unique forms for each dreamer, but is usually an elderly person of authority (a white-bearded old man with a staff, or a wise-

woman with herbs). Most Gjartins believe this is an aspect of the dreamer's higher consciousness, although some believe it is a spirit. This mentor helps the interpretation process by asking questions of the dreamer: "How did you feel when your mother told you she hated you?" "Does the boar remind you of anyone?" The gamemaster should roleplay this exchange between dreamer and mentor, or she can simply have the character roll Wits + Inquiry; if successful, tell the player some of the real meaning of his character's dream.

Dream Skill

(Level 6, Wits + Focus, P, 1W)

The character can learn or hone a learned skill in her dreams. She does not need to possess prior levels in the skill — the knowledge simply comes to her. Thus, the dreamer may learn lore or even sciences without requiring a teacher. However, the character must still spend the expe-



rience points necessary to learn the skill to the desired level (at -1 the normal point cost). The only limit is the character's Theurgy rating: she cannot learn a skill at a level higher than her Theurgy level. This learning is not instant: it usually takes at least a week of dedicated dreaming per level in the skill being trained (longer, if Subtle Memory is not used).

Waking Dream

(Level 7, Wits + Focus, P, temporary, 1W)

The character can enter a short trance (lasting 10 turns) wherein he receives a short dream. Any dream rite (Foreboding, Dream Sign, etc.) can be cast before the waking dream, thus allowing a character to experience those effects without sleeping. However, if he is physically disturbed during the Waking Dream, all effects are lost. The dream is forgotten unless Subtle Memory was cast, and even then it is only half-remembered.

Times Gone By

(Level 8, Introvert + Observe, P, 1W)

The character dreams of the distant past, as if he were a participant in it (perhaps this is one of his past lives). Just how far back he goes depends on victory points and gamemaster discretion. His dream will usually concern current events in his life or the Known Worlds, and will thus be connected to those events: perhaps their genesis or a high-point in their cycle. The farther back in time the dream goes, the less real or specific the images. Even events in the Diaspora are cloudy and hard to remember, and may be tainted by modern attributes (Edgar Vollmak or the Prophet may appear wearing modern-style clothing).

Portents

(Level 9, Faith + Observe, P, 1W)

The character receives glimpses of the future in his dreams. As with the Omen psychic power, these are probabilities, not definite events. Just how far into the future the images go depends on victory points and gamemaster discretion. It is usually not possible to see as deeply into what is to come as it is what has gone. Nonetheless, important events can sometimes be seen, such as a coming war. Indeed, certain Gjartins of this level have claimed to have seen portents of a war between all known races, fought with minds as well as weapons.

Compassionate Rites

These rites are similar to Sanctuary Aeon rituals.

Gjartins of High Degree

The following Gjartins are among the best known in their communities and some outside the religion have heard of them:

Shadro Wisdom Kin

This renowned shaman lives in the wilds of Leminkainen. The location of his home is unknown even to the flock of Gjarti worshippers who seek his aid in healings or luck bringings. He is wanted by the Hawkwood

authorities for allegedly cursing a count's son, rendering him unable to make heirs. It is said that this curse was in retaliation for the noble lad's rape of a peasant girl whom Shadro was fond of. Others, however, say that the boy's physical shortcomings are a result of inbreeding, not a shaman's curse.

Few know the fauna and flora of Leminkainen as well as Shadro, and he is sought out as a guide by Vuldrok Raiders who come to the world to sabotage noble holdings. While there is a reward for his capture, most people believe that no amount of money is worth the bad fortune which will befall those who anger such a powerful shaman. Contemptuous priests claim that Shadro's reputation is of his own making, to scare bounty hunters away. Nonetheless, two bounty hunters who entered the wilds last year looking for the shaman have not been seen since.

Sir Roderico de Manitou

This Hazat noble has forsaken family politics for a life of contemplation. He seeks enlightenment and wisdom and believes that the political pursuits of the noble houses only distract from such goals. While he still retains a small estate on Manitou, he has few dealings with his relatives. Some say this is simply to make others believe that he is cut off, and that he is actually a spy for the head of the house, reporting the doings of covens on Manitou to those in the family still interested in psychic warriors (the Hazat were among the first to field dervishes in the Emperor Wars).

He does seem, however, to be a dedicated follower of Gjarti. He has been known to engage visiting priests in heated debates about the religion, and usually elicits at least a grudging acceptance of some tenets from them.

In fact, he is a well-known patron of quests, and has funded the journeys of Gjarti worshippers on their vision quests before, asking only an account of their spiritual experiences once their quests are at an end. Again, this activity is used against him by critics, who accuse him of funding intelligence missions throughout the Known Worlds — and into Vau space.

Caruuka Batoo

This Etyri Chirikiti is a devout follower of the Compassionate branch of Gjarti. She sees Gjarti as the perfect way to bring all beings into harmony. While many of her fellow Etyri think she is strange, she is well-liked by most local Gjarti worshippers who know her. Her philosophical publications are underground classics — even among some Amaltheans. Since she is an alien, she is considered largely harmless by the Orthodoxy, but if it were revealed how popular her ideas were among the human peasantry, she would come under investigation and perhaps censure.

Her latest interest is in studying Gjarti on other worlds. She finds the different beliefs of Gjarti worshippers fascinating (although disconcerting at times). While she is as yet afraid to leave Grail, she may pay for others to bring information to her.

Roleplaying

Roleplaying a Gjartin

A character's birthplace usually determines what type of Gjarti he practices (Folk, Contemplative, Compassionate), and the same is true if he was converted later in life (where was he converted?). The following stereotypes may help to define Gjarti characters:

Woodsmen: The character is a hunter, guide or trapper in the wilderness, and knows well the ways of the wild (in her local region and maybe in alien environments). She has seen strange things in the woods at night, and believes in spirits.

Chieftain: The character is the chieftain of a small clan or the headman of a village. If the clan is barbarian, they are open practitioners. If it is a village in the Known Worlds, they may be secret worshippers. It is the chieftain's duty to protect clan/ village secrets from outsiders.

Monk: The character lives in a spiritual retreat from the world, contemplating deep issues. Some dream or vision may draw her out into the world again.

Shaman: The character seeks to commune with spirits and to this end may quest throughout the Known Worlds for them.

Beloved Lord: The character is a noble who supports Gjarti worship among his peasants and even participates in their seasonal ceremonies. He may do this openly or keep it quiet from the local bishop.

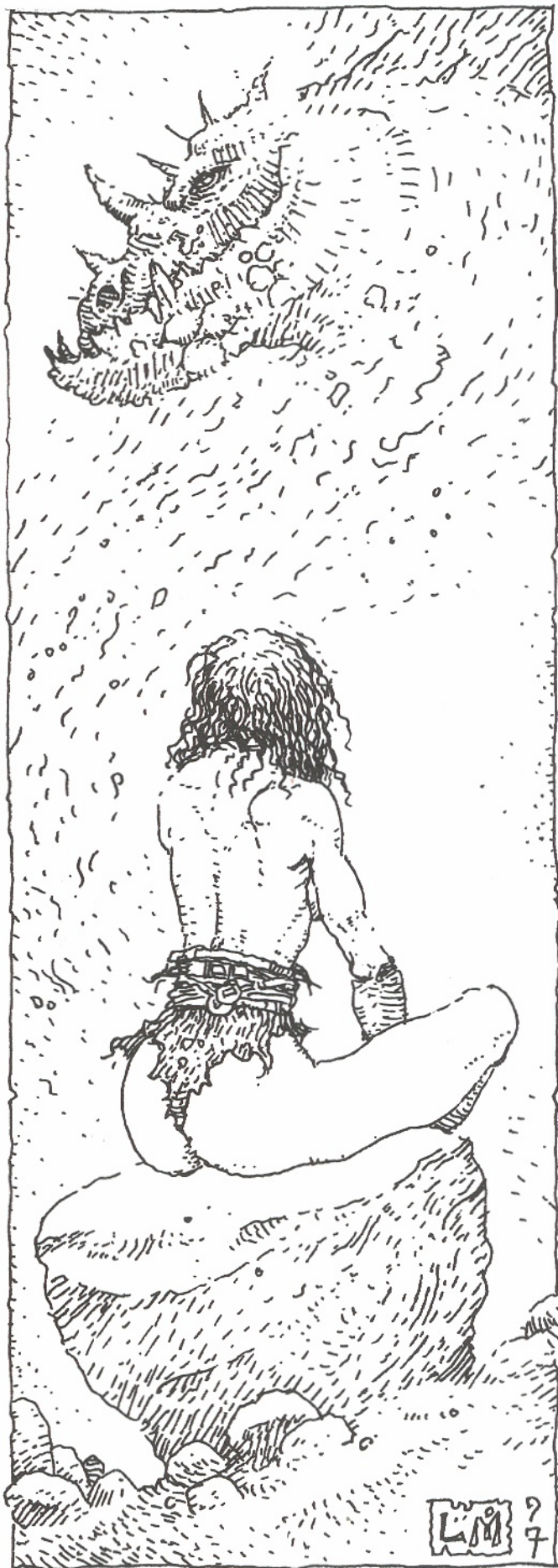
Pagan Bishop: The character is a priest of the Universal Church by day but secretly leads Gjarti ceremonies at night. He may be a devout believer in the Pancreator, and sees Gjarti as an aspect of the Universal Creator.

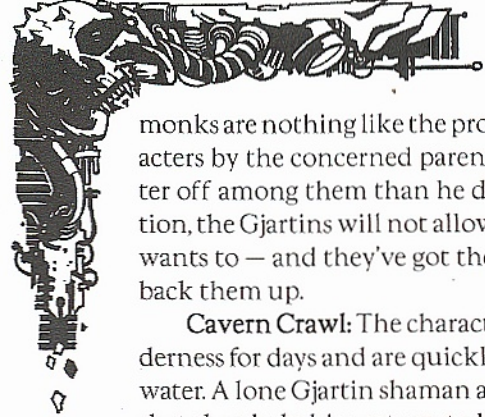
Gamemastering Gjartins

There are a number of possible dramas involving Gjarti worshippers:

Offerings: One or more of the characters suffers a life-threatening wound or disease, which is healed by a local Gjarti worshipper. As payment, he demands a small quest to aid his people. A sacred robe of a deceased shaman must be taken to the foot of a great oak in another fief. Only then will the shaman's spirit rest and bring peace to her people. But no one can take the time to go, for they are all peasants answering to their lord. The problem is that the local priest knows about this and is angered. He has been trying to convert the heathens for some time now and does not want the mission to succeed. He will call in what favors he can to prevent the characters from completing their quest — even if it means the inquisition.

The Lost Boy: The characters have been hired by a rich freeman or noble to rescue his son from a crazy cult on Manitou. They are given passage to and from the world, but their return is guaranteed only if they have the kid with them. Investigation reveals that the kid — in his teens — is living with some Gjarti worshippers. These peaceful





monks are nothing like the propaganda given to the characters by the concerned parent, and the child seems better off among them than he did with his father. In addition, the Gjartins will not allow the boy to leave unless he wants to — and they've got theurgy and psychic allies to back them up.

Cavern Crawl: The characters become lost in the wilderness for days and are quickly running out of food and water. A lone Gjartin shaman aids them on the condition that they help him return to his home across the mountains. The problem is that the local lords have placed guards at the passes, hoping to catch the outlaw. The Gjartin claims to know a passage through the caverns below, but will need the characters' aid. He claims that Second Republic treasures lie there and that the characters may take them — as long as they appease the spirits.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Introvert, Faith, Theurgy

Natural skills: Impress, Vigor

Learned skills: Artisan, Focus, Remedy, Redemption (Craft), Survival, Tracking

Blessings: Greenlore (2 pts: +2 Per in the wild)

Curses: Non-innovative (+2 pts: -2 Tech when inventing technology)

Benefices: Refuge (2 pts)

Afflictions: Persecuted by Church (+2 pts)

Manja

Tomo Matu Li Halan sat, unmoving, in the darkened private chambers of his Starway luxury yacht, staring out into the glittering star field. He was not looking at the stars, but at the vast, inky nothing between them. How like the many worlds, he mused. So much of so little consequence. So many people of so little worth scurrying and sweating and dying to so little effect. And in that endless void of useless darkness, a precious few twinkling gems of brilliant fire — so priceless, but so far away. So hard to touch. Like his venerated ancestors, may the Pancreator bless their souls.

The thought of his noble elders filled Tomo with a rosy glow, warming him and dispelling the chilly gloom that had crept into his bones as he stared into the stars for those long minutes. He reached for the cord of gold brocade that hung from his vest pocket, and drew forth his grandfather's jewel encrusted timepiece. Not long minutes. Long hours. They would reach Malignatius within the hour. Home of his revered ancestors. The origin of his majestic lineage. But the blossoms have floated so far from the roots. His people no longer live on Malignatius, but have resettled on Kish. So he must continually endure a two week excursion just to reach the land where his ancestors sleep their restless sleep. And he must endure the impertinent questions of self-important priests. Who were their ancestors? Bakers? Clerks? Sewer sluice gate operators? How much can blood be diluted over a hundred lifetimes if the original ancestor was an unworthy clod? An ignoble lineage is painfully evident to the trained eye.

The great Starway swung slowly to port, revealing the great, icy orb of Malignatius. Another gem shining in the trackless void. Tomo smiled, and caught a glimpse of his own shadowy reflection in the glass of the viewing portal. His image loomed over the planet like a gigantic ghost about to seize the tundra-covered

world. He smiled at the thought. His gaze instinctively flickered to the transparent reflection of his teeth, which appeared to glisten in the night sky. He watched the pale reflection of his smile broaden, just as it had in the vision his sacred elders had visited upon him.

"Milord, we are ready to begin docking proceedings." His pilot's voice shattered his reverie. He watched his smile fade.

"Very good. Carry on, Miranda."

"Milord, Inquisitor Refrecht has insisted —"

"I know what he wants," Tomo snapped. "I'll be there."

He took one last, long look at the viewing portal and rose to face the inquisition.

* * *

"The ship is clean, your holiness," the rat-faced deacon announced.

"Very good," replied the portly priest, wheezing as he spoke. "We are... gratified to see that you have stopped your disgusting practice of trafficking in human remains."

"Yes, your holiness," Tomo replied.

"No longer trying to smuggle disgusting old, dried out teeth?"

"Your eminence told me that you did not want to catch me doing any such thing ever again, and I have seen fit to follow the wisdom of your advice."

The fat priest wheezed approvingly.

"This nobleman hid some diseased old human teeth in the yacht's laundry chute," he said to the deacon, just as he had during Tomo's last inspection.

"Did he really, your holiness?" the deacon replied, just as had during Tomo's last inspection.

"He did!" replied the priest, who took a deep, rattling breath before continuing. "Tomo Matu Li Halan, be certain to notify us forty eight hours before your departure, that we may schedule another inspection. I grant you freedom of movement on Malignatus."

"Thank you, holiness." Tomo bowed. As he straightened, he smiled and licked his canines, which were slightly yellower than his other teeth. His honored great-grandfather Li Pong was well pleased that so intimate a part of him lives on in the mouth of so reverential a descendant.

History

Manja is a forbidden religion of ancestor worship. It has never been widespread or intended for the masses. It began as an elite cult popular among certain decadent nobles of the early Fall-era (the Li Halan and Decados being the most famous among them).

The religion, originally called Sukara Manja, is actually a human corruption of an Ur-Ukar belief. The name is Ukari and literally means "funerary devotions," which denotes the elaborate rituals an Ukari goes through when cremating or interring a dead relative: if the devotions are not properly performed, the dead will return to haunt their descendants. Such beliefs are tied to the Ukari crypt god Sukara, a very powerful figure in their culture.

Maugon Han Li Halan, called the "Red Sorcerer," is said to have contacted Preadamite gods using the names of Ukari deities. He formed the first Sukara Manja cult and devised spells which supposedly allowed the high-born — those who could trace their ancestry back at least 17 generations — an advantage over others by allowing them to consult their dead ancestors.

Needless to say, the cult was high on the Church's heresy list. Sukara Manja cultists became a more popular prey for the inquisition than Sathraists (who were quickly dying out due to the Brother Battle purge). What made this witchhunt different than others was its target: nobles. Unlike powerless peasants, nobles could fight back and bring vast political power against the Church.

At first, the cult consisted only of a few noble sons seeking to inherit high position in their families. When a few of them did cement such positions, they used their new posts to attack their priestly persecutors. A minor holy war was waged. The Church had no way out: it could not allow such degraded practices to stand. The nobles could not concede the Church's power in such matters.

Sanjiro Li Halan is credited with reforming the religion after Maugon's untimely and mysterious death. In Sanjiro's hands, it became a method of ancestor reverence, a very private communion with one's great and wise forebears. In return for adoration, honor and attention, the ancestors were said to provide advice to their descendants and sometimes to intercede through occult means. Sanjiro retitled the religion to simply Manja (devotions). Sanjiro even convinced a number of bishops to concede that the ancestors contacted in Manja rites were saints or near



saints, and that Manja was a nobles-only method of communing with the saints.

The witchhunt was called off — for a time. But the Li Halan and Decados decadence could not be curbed. The “demon Li Halan” as they were called before Cardano’s time, took to using blood sacrifice in their Manja rites. But still the Church hesitated to move against them, fearful of initiating a war. Cardano solved the problem for them.

The conversion of Cardano, “The Sword of the Prophet,” completely changed the character of the Li Halan. In addition to the mass-conversion he demanded of all his relatives, he waged a secret war within the house to weed out the Manja worshippers, using a hastily formed secret police which would later become the Hidden Martyrs.

While the entire family converted overnight, with many sent to monasteries, some secretly refused to spurn devotions to their ancestors. Of these, most quietly reformed their practices, continuing their devotions but throwing out all semblances of magic. Some, however, went underground with their worship, praising the Pancreator by day but lighting candles to the dead in dark crypts by night.

The Decados, witnessing the fall of the religion, followed suit and discouraged it. While purges were not held, social pressure was placed against those who did not follow the wishes of the Prince to end their folly. Of course, some continued their practice in secret, recognizing that

a public display of their beliefs was... politically incorrect.

Eventually, Manja worshippers in other houses gave up their practices and returned to the Church. Manja is believed to have been completely abolished by the time of Vladimir’s ascent, although, in the house purges after Vladimir’s assassination, accusations of Manja worship were used as an excuse for action against House Alecto.

Today, the religion is considered a relic of the past, long gone from the Known Worlds. Nonetheless, it still has its illicit practitioners, who sometimes gather by night in family crypts to speak with the dead.

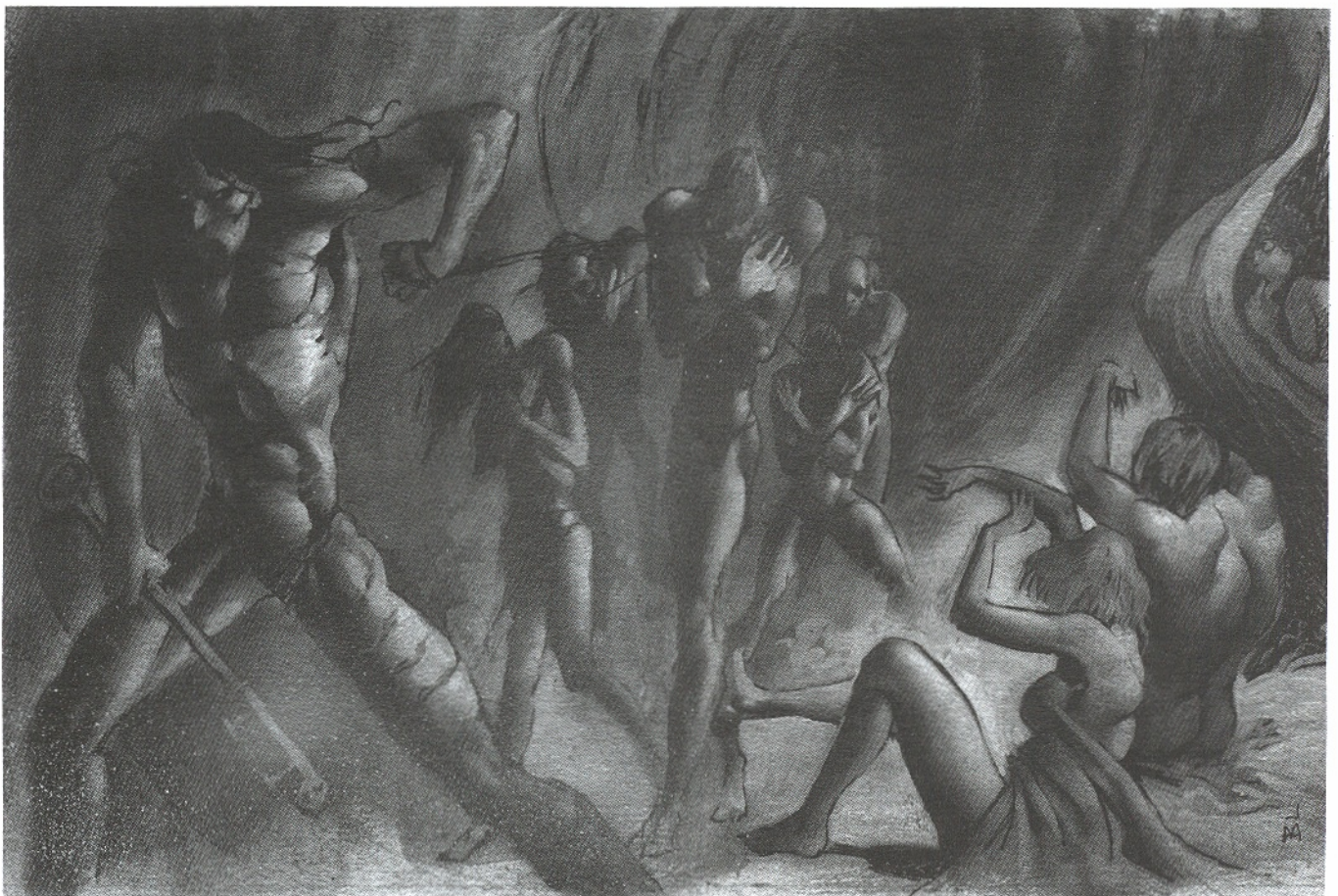
Practice

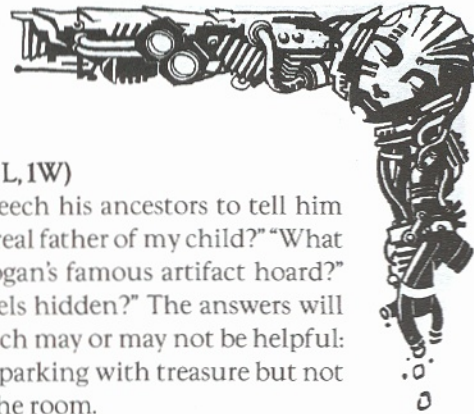
More souls have died than currently live. More wisdom has died than currently lives. A morsel of wisdom lies with man. All wisdom lies in the tomb.

— Awira Li Haran, Tome of Ancestors

The main intention in Manja is to honor one’s deceased forebears in the hopes that their spirits will reveal advice or secrets to their respectful descendant. It is a religion characterized by the lust for ancient knowledge and power. Ancestors — “kings of old” — are believed to have a more primal connection with spiritual rulership, which is often diluted through the generations. The hope of the Manja worshipper is to gain this primal connection which the kings of old once had.

The usual ritual involves a small altar, usually hid-





den in a family crypt, ground which is off-limits to non-nobles (even householders must ask permission to enter family mausoleums). An image of a favored ancestor is necessary; it can be a photograph, hologram, magic lantern projection, a painting or even a sketch. It must be authentic; that is, reproduced from an actual portrait. Those without such portraiture cannot participate in Manja theurgy. Only one ancestor portrait is required, and it must at least depict a grandparent; this one ancestor provides access to all other ancestor spirits.

A small devotional prayer is usually said to the ancestor, asking him or her to aid their progeny to attain wealth and power. Often, a Manja devotee will come to the portrait to vent their feelings, as if it were a living confidant. Such intimacy with the dead is considered helpful in later theurgic rites.

The dead speak to the worshippers through meditational trances or dreams, which for beginning practitioners requires the incense of the Ukari pomonjo-cinnamon, but later can be had through meditation alone. Some Manja rituals are similar to a Contemplative Gjartin's dream theurgy.

Ukari are horrified by this religion. In their culture, the dead are seen as hungry ghosts; to bring them back into the world for power purposes is a perversion and is sure to catch up to the practitioner. Sukara is a good (although fearsome) deity because he keeps the dead in their place, locked beyond the world. (There is said to be a door deep in the bowels of Ukar by which they can get out, but Sukara has the key. Numerous legends tell of tricksters who stole the key and released the dead before Sukara could lock the door again. Some of these ghosts still wander the stars). An Ukari's hostility to a Manja worshipper rivals that of an Avestite.

Symbology

A secret sign still used by Manja worshippers to denote a place or person who practices is an image of a crown on a skull with a tear of blood dripping from an eye socket.

Theurgy

Vestments

It helps to have a piece of an ancestor's remains when petitioning the dead for aid. Use the following guidelines for Manja vestments:

| Vestment | Type of rite |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| Bones | Protection, summoning |
| Hair, teeth | Advice, lore |
| Possession | Fortune, holdings |

Rites

Character with Theurgy ratings of three or less must use Ukari pomonjo-cinnamon incense in their rites. Once a rating of four or more has been attained, this prop is no longer required.

Birthright

(Level 1, Wits + Search, L, 1W)

The character can beseech his ancestors to tell him family secrets: "Who is the real father of my child?" "What happened to Count Donogan's famous artifact hoard?" "Where are the family jewels hidden?" The answers will come in trance images which may or may not be helpful: the caster may see a room sparking with treasure but not be shown the location of the room.

Advisor

(Level 2, Extrovert + Charm, L, 1W)

The character beseeches his ancestors for advice in matters of state or personal affairs: "Should I accept the Decados's offer of peace?" "Is Lady Gloriana fit to bear my children?" or "Is Sir Derrick fit to father my children?" As with birthright, the answer will come in trance images: the character sees himself signing a peace treaty but cannot see with whom he signs it. While Birthright gives hints about the past, Advisor hints to the present or future.

Schemes

(Level 3, Perception + Focus, P, 1W)

The character is shown a brief glimpse of what enemies plot against him: he gets an image of Reeves signing a paper with the title of his fief written upon it, or a man in an Imperial Eye outfit speaking to men in masks. While the range is theoretically unlimited, it actually only includes events that will influence the character. The content of the images are usually maddeningly vague (such as the faceless men above) — but at least the noble is warned in one way or another.

Sight From Beyond

(Level 4, Perception + Focus, P, sight, prolonged, 1W)

The character's close association with the dead allows him to see into the realms of spirit. This rite acts much like Second Sight (see Eskatonic rites in the rulebook).

Protect Fief

(Level 5, Wits + Impress, P, prolonged, 1W)

The character can beseech his ancestors for aid in defending his fief from outside harm. Poltergeists will haunt any ill-intended outsiders who enter the fief: spies, assassins, saboteurs, rebels and armies. While they cannot prevent enemies from taking actions, they can harass and spook them: the invading army runs into thick mud which slows its tanks and soldiers; the burglar suffers penalties to his Stealth rolls due to twigs underneath or the wind shifts, carrying his scent to the guard dogs; the foreign rabble-rouser slips in the mud just as he tries to exhort the peasant's to revolt. The gamemaster should devise a host of clever penalties to annoy would-be interlopers onto the noble domain. The maximum goal penalty levied against them, however, should never be higher than the victory points gained on the casting roll.

Note that the poltergeists cannot defend against harm from inside the fief: from resident householders or peasants.

Hubris (Haunted)

Hubris is said to be the wrath of the dead. Spirits curse the Manja worshipper for some slight or flaw, and deliver ill fortune onto her or even haunt her.

Gaining Hubris

| Taboo | Roll | Levels |
|--|--------------------|--------|
| Dishonoring ancestor in name or deed | Ego + Stoic Mind | 1 |
| Missing worship for more than 3 years | Ego + Focus | 1 |
| Dishonoring one's house | Ego + Stoic Mind | 1-2 |
| Betraying one's house | Ego + Stoic Mind | 3 |
| Loss of family land | Faith + Focus | 1-2 |
| Losing to a Church priest or guildmember | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Suffering humiliation from peasants | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Suffering exile or imprisonment | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Being ransomed | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Fumbling a theurgy rite* | Theurgy + Focus | 1 |
| Exposure to alien occult powers | Faith + Stoic Mind | 1 |
| Exposure to evil artifact | Faith + Stoic Mind | 1-3 |

* See Geas, below

Losing Hubris

| Deed | Roll | Level |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Gaining new land | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Winning a war | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Visit house's ancestral land on Holy Terra | Faith + Focus | 1 |
| Perform deed for ancestor | Faith + Focus | 1-2 |
| Exposure to Soul Shard | Human or Alien + Stoic Mind or Focus | 1-2 |
| Exposure to Philosophers Stone | Human or Alien + Stoic Mind or Focus | 1 |
| Great sacrifice for house | Faith + Focus | 1-2 |
| Converting other housemembers | Faith + Charm or Impress | 1-2 |

Geas

Anytime a Manja worshipper rolls a critical fumble on a theurgy roll he suffers a geas from one of his ancestors: the ghost of the dead lord appears and commands the worshipper to perform some deed for him: "Avenge my death by the Hazat!" "Regain my scepter, wrongfully stolen by the Decados!" "Spread the family seed into the Imperial line!"

If the worshipper does not work to attain this deed, he will be haunted by the ancestor in the form of Hubris: the character gains one level (no resistance roll) if he cannot or refuses to perform the required action.

Foil Rival

(Level 6, Extrovert + Impress, P, planetwide, 1 day, 1W)

The character can prevent a rival from performing one particular action by arranging events against him: a sudden thundershower prevents Duke Sobal from arriving at the ball before 8:00 pm, or a summoning from the duke keeps the count from enjoying his wife's bed that evening, allowing the character to visit her instead. This rite cannot change the target's mind concerning the action, but will provide obstacles to its completion. The rival must be on the same planet as the caster and the rite must be cast within 24 hours of when the intended action is to take place. Note that the rite Schemes (above) will reveal if someone has cast Foil Rival upon the character.

Thwart Assassin

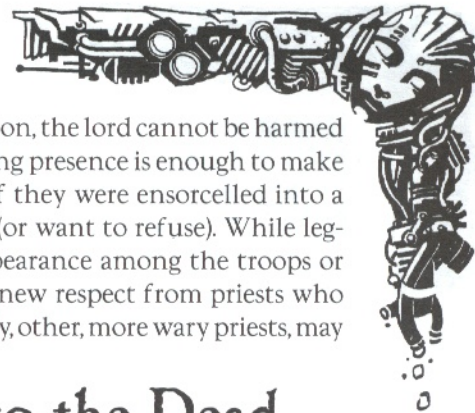
(Level 7, Ego + Stoic Mind, P, prolonged, 1W)

For the next span after casting, the first attempt on the character's life is automatically thwarted: an assassin's knife slips from his hand right before he can stab the character, the serf's cudgel snaps or the sniper's rifle jams. Regardless of the method of assassination, the would-be assassin is immediately known to the character. Successive attempts to kill the character are not protected by this rite (unless it is cast again).

Command Kin

(Level 8, Extrovert + Leadership, P, sight, instant, 1W)

The character is invested with lordly power by his ancestors such that he may command a member of his



house to perform one deed or action — even if the target is higher rank than the caster. Thus may a knight command a king. The rite's main intent is to allow the truly loyal within the house (and Manja worshippers are usually quite devoted to the house) to prevent a foolish noble from squandering the house's holdings for purely personal gain. While the action must be for the greater good of the house and cannot be merely a method of vengeance against an offending family member, if the act inadvertently leads to downfall of a senior lord, allowing the caster to rise to his position, then so be it.

This rite can be resisted but the caster can add his noble rank (as per the chart below) to his number of successes when comparing them against a contested roll.

| Rank | Bonus |
|--------------|-------|
| Knight | +1 |
| Baronet | +2 |
| Baron | +3 |
| Earl/Marquis | +4 |
| Count | +5 |
| Duke | +6 |

The target will not realize that she has been ensorcelled: she will believe that the command came as a request for common sense in house matters, and that she has chosen to honor this request willingly (thus the Manja worshipper's religion is not revealed). However, those near to the lord (her advisors, her confessor, etc.), may suspect foul play...

Summon Lord of Lords

(Level 9, Ego + Etiquette, P, 1W)

The caster can summon a manifestation of one of her greatest ancestors, one of the truly legendary and powerful figures in house history. It is believed that these ancestors have become more powerful since their death and through the reverence of successive generations of descendants. To some, they are saints. To others, powerful spirits. To still others, demons. The summoner cannot guarantee which lord will answer the call. Li Halan must be wary lest Cardano appear and admonish them for their pagan ways.

Nonetheless, the lord will aid his scion. A goal or task may be asked of him: "Help us tear down the walls of the Decados manse", "Aid me to convince the Prince that I deserve to inherit the land on Cadavus", etc. The lord will attain the goal by appearing among those who will actually accomplish it for him, and rouse them to victory: He will walk among the troops and instill them into a battle fervor against which no walls can stand, or he will appear to the Prince at night at speak well of the caster — most people will not think of such visitations as bad or even associate them with Manja, believing them to be ultimately from the Pancreator. Saints often appear to the faithful, if one believes the stories of peasants. Why not then a lord?

During his manifestation, the lord cannot be harmed in any way; his commanding presence is enough to make others follow his lead, as if they were ensorcelled into a trance and cannot refuse (or want to refuse). While legend of the great lord's appearance among the troops or among others may earn a new respect from priests who believe such an event is holy, other, more wary priests, may suspect antinomy...

Speakers to the Dead

While Manja worshipper cannot practice openly for fear of inquisitorial censure, many of them hold high positions. Even though the Church officially denies that this religion still exists, one never knows if the lord to whom one is speaking is secretly a Manja worshipper...

Countess Amita Li Halan

One of the oldest and most revered matrons of Midian, the Venerable Countess often hosts visitors to her manse, young nobles come to ask her advice in a matter of state or a more personal affair. Many owe her for their positions of power, won through her unfailing advice. Advice which often seems uncanny.

The countess is actually a Manja worshipper, and her prophetic and insightful powers come from her ancestors. Her altar is hidden in a secret room underneath her bedroom. In this chamber are many portraits of famous Li Halan nobles, some of whom the countess claims personal conversation with.

Anyone who openly accuses her of such a practice, however, will be publicly ridiculed by her legions of fans. She is effectively untouchable, as long as she herself does not reveal her allegiance.

Baron Brevort Von Bolden of House Hawkwood

The surly baron of the Black Peaks of Leminkainen is a recluse from noble affairs. He does his duty well, however. Commanded to guard the peaks and the prime crop lands they surround from barbarian incursions, he has many times led his well-equipped but small army against Vuldrok assaults. He has yet to lose an engagement, which is why his anti-social attitude is tolerated by his lords.

His success comes from his ancestors and their supernatural scrying, warning him of barbarian assaults before they take place. But the baron is an obsessed man. He yearns to speak with his dead grandmother again and spends too many hours in devout prayer before her image. He has secretly left his castle many times to travel to other worlds in search of ancient Manja sorcerous lore, hoping to find a ritual which will call his beloved grandmama back from beyond Sukara's iron door. He has even hired others to seek such knowledge, under the guise of a devout Church follower who only wishes to keep such lore from the wrong hands.

Roleplaying

Roleplaying a Manja Cultist

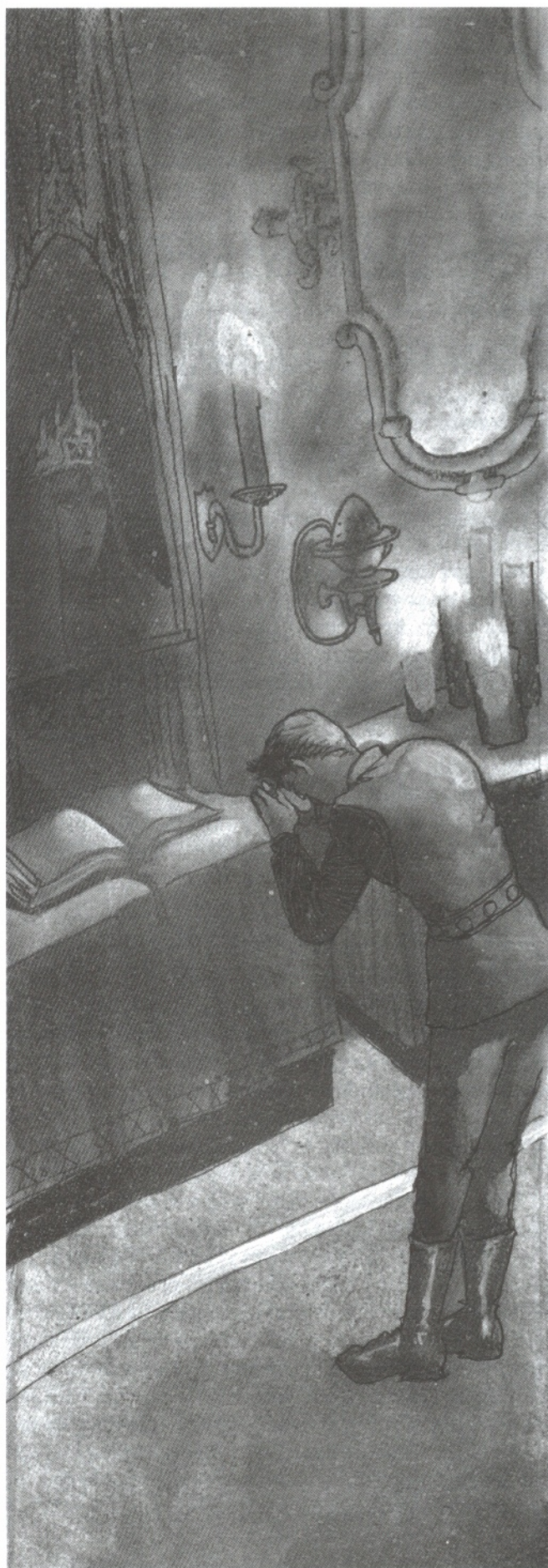
While Manja worshippers must practice their beliefs incognito, they can also be full members and believers in the Universal Church. Nothing in Manja denies the Pancreator or the Prophet's words, but it certainly departs from the standard interpretations of the Pancreator's plan.

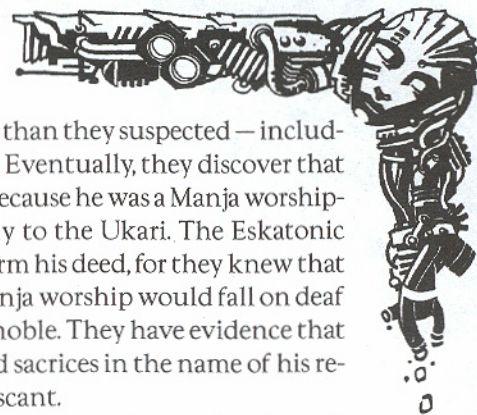
Below are some stereotypes to use when considering what type of worshipper to devise:

Devout scion: The character is flush with pride over his family history, such that he reveres his ancestors in the ways of Manja. He may be a bit too willing to defend slights to the family, especially if such slights are delivered against a favored grandparent or more distant hero of the house.

Crypt keeper: The character spends perhaps too much time in the family mausoleum, talking to himself and his ancestors. His melancholy moods disturb his family, who may or may not know the truth behind his concerns — perhaps his dead father has commanded him to avenge his murder. But can a ghost's version of the events be trusted?

Sorcerer: The character cares less for reverence of the dead and more for the power which can be pleaded from them. He wants to use such power to carve a path to the throne.





Family curse: The character suffers from the “family curse”: every third or fourth generation, a child born to the house is strange. She talks her “friends” but others only see thin air. While these problem children are often kept in high towers away from society, they usually come to their senses as they grow older, eventually taking their place in house affairs. Few suspect that they have been chosen by their ancestors to practice Manja.

Gamemastering Manja Cultists

The Relic: The characters are hired to reclaim a noble family relic. Their patron wishes to return it where it belongs: “By the grave of my forefather who first bore it.” However, he is insistent that they maintain the utmost secrecy in their search, for he fears that others will try to steal it from them and ransom it. In actuality, the relic is a vestment once used by a Manja worshipping ancestor. The sacred item is considered foul by the Church and was hidden by a priest. The Inquisition guards it and will heavily question anyone seeking it or trying to steal it from its hidden place. To complicate the affair, the relic has some strange properties, almost as if it were haunted...

Insult and Injury: The characters are hired to track and find an Ukar assassin who just killed a beloved noble. But as they get closer to their prey, they find that the Ukar’s

network of friends is larger than they suspected — including some Eskatonic priests. Eventually, they discover that the Ukar killed the noble because he was a Manja worshipper — a horrible blasphemy to the Ukari. The Eskatonic priests helped him to perform his deed, for they knew that any open accusation of Manja worship would fall on deaf ears, so well-liked was the noble. They have evidence that this noble performed blood sacrifices in the name of his religion, but the evidence is scant.

The characters are forced to consider their actions: If they are devout followers of the Church, then was this killing not just in some sense? Or is it just disguised fanaticism and bigotry? Was the noble really harming anyone with his private religion? What will they do?

Suggested Character Traits

Characteristics: Wits, Ego

Natural skills: Impress

Learned skills: Focus, Lore (house history), Stoic Mind

Benefices: Noble rank (Manja worshippers must be noble-born)

Afflictions: Persecuted by Church (+3 pts)







Chapter Four: Guilds

The Merchant League is a powerful force in the Known Worlds. Without the League, space transport would only be possible for the elite of the Church and the nobility. The Merchant League is responsible for the upkeep and manufacture of technologies in the New Dark Ages. The houses depend on the League for scientists to build their weapons and their homes. Even the Church must grant the League a grudging respect.

But the five guilds within the Merchant League are not alone. In addition to the Big Five, there are numerous guilds sharing the resources of the League. These other guilds, not as famous as their more intergalactic partners, often specialize in very small but extremely useful goods and services. For example, the Prospectors are effectively the only group with enough experience and equipment to successfully mine the numerous asteroid belts and planets which lack life-sustaining atmospheres. Those few groups who have tried to take a piece of this action for themselves usually end up investing in failed ventures. Even the houses' own ventures into this area are seldom profitable, although still deemed necessary. Most have

learned to hire Prospectors for such dangerous labor.

In addition, there are those guilds outside the League, independants or rogues who spurn the strict guidelines of the League. In some cases, these other guilds are simply too small for the League to bother with, but as often as not, the groups choose not to pay the dues, operating on their own.

Called "Hawkers" by the Merchant League, they provide the only competition against the often outrageous prices of the larger guilds, and for this reason they are sometimes illicitly supported by nobles. These guilds' alternate services are sometimes illegal in the eyes of the Church — and often in the eyes of the Merchant League — but many turn a blind eye to these sins, so long as the Hawkiers don't profit too well from them.

Most Hawkiers do not hold the intergalactic power or influence of the Merchant League, but they often offer services not found within the League's ranks. While the League does not approve of the competition, they respect the challenges offered by the Hawkiers — even if such respect is tempered with envy or hatred...

Entertainment Guilds

There are two main entertainment guilds in the Known Worlds, the Masque and the Carnivalers (there is also a Jesters guild, which is smaller and more sophisticated). Both of these groups strive to bring entertainment to the Known Worlds, but one aims for high class and the other for big fun. Both are nonetheless fearsome in their competition against each other. The level of antagonism between these two guilds often rises to brawls and even outright warfare, though most of their assaults against each other are never seen by the public.

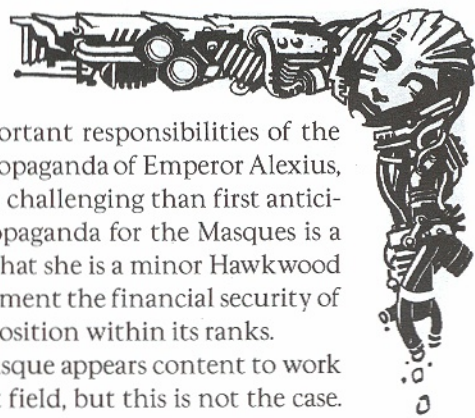
The duties of these guilds are to entertain and amuse, to educate and enlighten — to make a profit while delivering a smile. Most Masques and Carnivalers are not identified to the public by their guilds but by their fame or skill. The guilds work as behind-the-scenes agents for the famous and offer security to the fresher faces who are eager to make their mark on the world at large. There are a number of smaller guilds who deal in this area, but they are local, with territories of a single city or world at best. Only the Masques and Carnivalers span the Known Worlds. More often than not, the smaller guilds are responsible for illegal or immoral shows banned by the Church,

although both Masques and Carnivalers have been known to put on such shows themselves.

The constant tensions between these two guilds/agencies are only increased by the often vicious bidding wars over who will represent the more renowned performers. If an entertainer is well-known and liked on most worlds, the chances are good that she has been represented by both of the major guilds at one time or another. Musicians, actors (both magic lantern and stage), artists and dancers can often increase their profits by threatening to leave one guild to work for the other.

There are any number of performers who owe their livelihood to the guilds — as well as their lives. On numerous occasions, the guilds have provided escape routes for entertainers whose actions have offended a local noble or Church leader, eventually managing to placate the offended parties with careful words and generous bribes. The guilds look out for their own, especially those who stir controversy yet make large profits. Applying spin control to scandalous romances with local officials and rumors of the same are the meat and potatoes of the guilds.



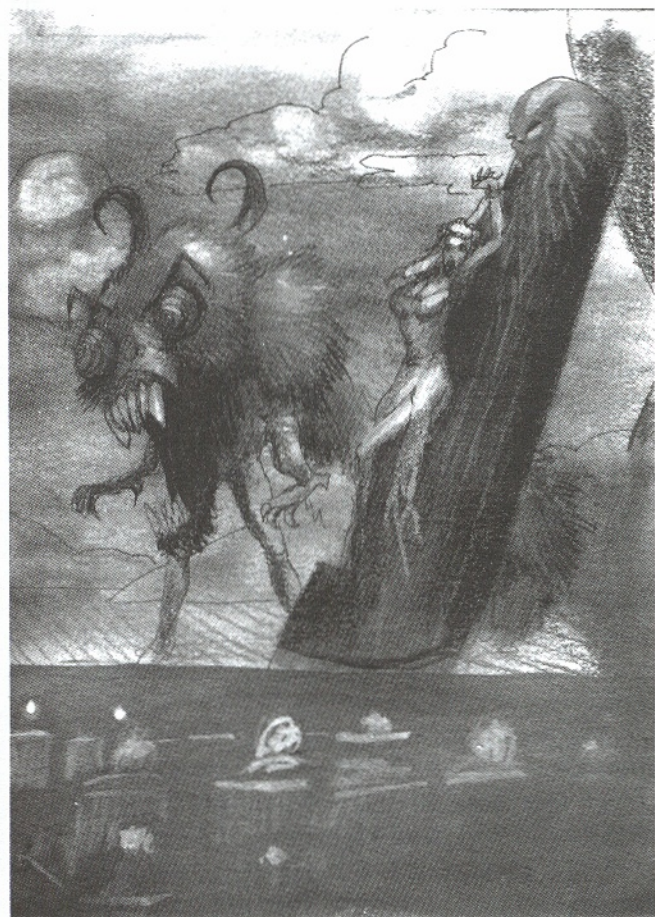


The Masque

The Masque, part of the Merchant League, is by far the oldest and most prestigious of the entertainment guilds. A remnant of Second Republic entertainment conglomerates, many have pointed to this guild as the primary reason for the post-Emperor Wars renaissance of live entertainment in the Known Worlds. Almost as many people, however, have pointed an accusatory finger at the Masques, claiming that their plays — “distortions of the truth” — lead to an increase in sin. Whether loved or hated, the Masques have always managed to make a solid profit.

While traditionally an actor's guild, the Masque also represents musicians and authors, especially playwrights and realitywrights. The most prestigious talents can be found with the Masque and the guild's customers include Royal Houses, the Church and even Emperor Alexius.

The guild is run by a congress of former stars: Actors past their prime, performers who've surrendered their place in the limelight to fresher faces, and agents capable of creating stars with but a few words in the right ears have all joined forces to make sure that the Masque is the premier entertainment guild. The powers-that-be in the guild are directly responsible for the rating system that now protects their members from Church interference and are notoriously friendly with the higher echelons of the houses.



One of the most important responsibilities of the Masques is handling the propaganda of Emperor Alexius, a task that proves far more challenging than first anticipated. The Minister of Propaganda for the Masques is a powerful person; the fact that she is a minor Hawkwood scion has only helped to cement the financial security of the Masque and her own position within its ranks.

On the surface, the Masque appears content to work only in the entertainment field, but this is not the case. While their propaganda work with Emperor Alexius is still considered experimental, it has already caught the attention of several nobles. If all goes according to the Masque's plans, it will soon be working on several public relations campaigns for the houses and possibly even working with the Muster to aid in recruitment exercises. While entertainment is the root of the guild's success, the idea of expanding their market appeals to the congress of leaders. Some in the Merchant League are actually considering extending an invitation to admit the Masque into the League.

Such high-class attention does have its downside, however. A failure in such circles can lead to interstellar blackballing, as word spreads of the actor's flubbed lines or the musician's squawking horn. While the profits are potentially higher for Masque gigs than for the types of venues usually serviced by the Carneys, the risks of such exposure can make performing for the Masque more dangerous. The Carnivalers may suffer rotten tomatoes and occasional Inquisition raids, but Masques risk exile and possible imprisonment if their plays or lampoons fail to bring applause. Nonetheless, success here can ensure that one becomes a household name on many worlds.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Wits, Extrovert

Natural skills: Charm, Observe

Learned skills: Artisan, Arts, Bureaucracy, Etiquette, Performance, Speak Urthish

Blessings/Curses: Shrewd (2 pts: +2 Wits against attempts to fast-talk)/ Selfish (+2 pts: -2 Calm when cut out of the action)

Benefices: Passage Contract (4 pts), Fame (see sidebar)

Average Salary (per year):

75 firebirds for beginning performers

150 firebirds for established performers

300 firebirds for high ranking performers

700+ firebirds for superstars

Carnivalers (the Menagerie)

The Carnivalers guild makes no claims to high culture or a prestigious Second Republic lineage. Quite to the contrary, the guild simply states that they are more innovative and aggressive than their renowned counterpart, the Masque. The Carnivalers, only recently admitted to the League (due to an administrative error, claims the Masque), used to deal almost exclusively with popular musicians, but have expanded over the years to include sports figures, actors and performers of all types — especially circus performers and freak shows (one of the reasons for their nickname, the Menagerie).

Much to the chagrin of the Masque, they have done an excellent job of holding their own against difficult odds and Church, house and League censure. Their willingness to accept alien performers as members gave them an edge in popular magic lantern shows, plays and circus acts. The Masque follows the old tradition of dressing humans up in alien costumes to perform alien roles, but the Carnivalers' success proves that people want the real thing. Indeed, some of these aliens have become stars.

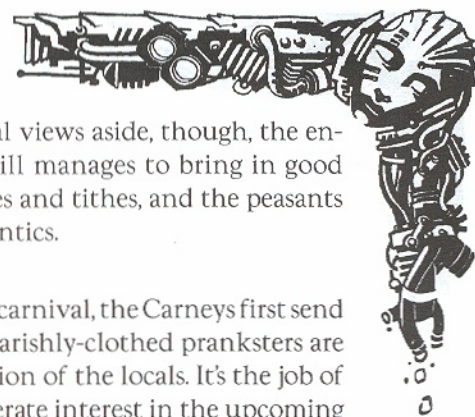
The Carneys (as they are also called) are not as well-regarded in society circles as the Masque, but their ability to generate money is very real, and many performers are willing to join with them for the chance to make greater profits. Despite the relative newness of the guild, they are the only real competition for the Masques and the only guaranteed source of income for some of the less-established performers.

Carnivalers excel at devising new and interesting ways to make money and entertain the masses. Many of their acts border on heresy and require a careful use of extra cash to ensure that their shows are not raided by the Church. Bribery, grandstanding and laughter are the secrets of the Carnivaler's success.

Since the Emperor Wars, its distribution outlets and arena contacts have greatly increased, placing it into some of the same venues as the Masque. But where there are no stages or arenas, the Carnivalers guild provides its own. After announcing a coming event, the guild arranges an area, lands one of its haulers and works night and day to make its miracles happen. It is not uncommon for the locals in any given area to discover that last night's empty field has sprouted a full-blown tent and arena by the next morning. Where the field once stank of Brute droppings, now the air is filled with the aroma of exotic foods and confections of all kinds.

The best-kept secret of the Carnivalers is that the guild is run by a group of humans and aliens working together. The managing body of the guild includes representatives of the Gannok, Shantor and Etyri. The leaders keep their jobs as long as they are able to handle the massive workload and as long as the profits keep coming in.





There are still racial tensions within the ranks of the guild, but they are seldom a consideration when the goal is a solid profit.

Gladiators

The Intergalactic Gladiatorial Bouts make an enormous profit by transporting a crew of famous gladiators to different worlds and holding open challenges. Large magic lantern screens are unloaded at each port, and propaganda often runs for weeks before the bouts take place. Famous gladiators are shown in combat along with hefty offers of reward money for defeating the champions. Anyone with the willingness to risk life and limb is welcome to join the bouts — provided they don't mind wagering a few broken bones for a chance at the prize money.

Naturally, the prizes differ for the size of the challenge offered. Fighting another human is not exceptionally lucrative, but a human going into unarmed combat with a well-trained Vorox can become rich for a lifetime — provided he wins, of course. Some of the most spectacular bouts — those involving members of the Carnivalers in opposition against one another — are rigged, but most of the contests where natives go against the gladiators are actually fair. The risk to the gladiators is considered minor, as most of them train extensively in unarmed combat.

Adding to the appeal, several masked gladiators dress garishly and scream threats to the crowds while hiding their true identities. The Carnivalers understand the appeal of a mystery villain and often spreads rumors that the people behind the masks are actually wanted by the Church or the Emperor for crimes against the Empire. Naturally, anyone who can defeat the masked gladiators is permitted to reveal their identity for all to see, and to claim any bounties already placed on their heads. Of course, there are rarely any real bounties on the heads of the gladiators; they are simply performers (although it sometimes turns out that a few of them actually are wanted criminals).

A great deal of gambling takes place at these events, but those who manage to make the most profit are the same people who run the bouts. Many people have wondered why the Church doesn't condemn the brutality of the games, unaware of the hefty tithe the Church receives from the bouts. Why ruin a good thing?

Other athletic ventures have proved equally profitable for the Carnivalers. Exploiting the natural talents of alien races, the Menagerie has created sporting events ranging from team sports to zero-gravity gymnastics. The athletes are relatively well-compensated, although only the very best are paid a truly reasonable amount when their ability to draw crowds is considered. Even then only those shrewd enough to barter for better rates while threatening to join with the Masque are treated properly.

It is with the Carnivalers, as nowhere else, that aliens and the Changed have a chance to make an honest living. For that reason alone, the Menagerie is despised by many

priests and nobles. Political views aside, though, the entertainment they offer still manages to bring in good money in the form of taxes and tithes, and the peasants are kept amused by their antics.

Harlequins

Before a major bout or carnival, the Carneys first send in the Harlequins. These garishly-clothed pranksters are paid well to get the attention of the locals. It's the job of these street clowns to generate interest in the upcoming sporting events and to spread rumors about the contestants involved. It's also their duty to get the lay of the land... politically speaking. The Harlequins scout for likely areas to set up the arenas, and grease the palms of the local officials to make certain that the events go uninterrupted. They work both as scouting agents for the events and as a safety buffer against possible legal actions on the various worlds to which they travel.

There are always fears that the Harlequins actually work for the Imperial Eye, but no one has ever confirmed these rumors. Despite the paranoia — or perhaps because of it — the Harlequins are usually left unmolested.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Wits, Strength

Natural skills: Charm, Fight, Observe

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Disguise, Inquiry, Knavery, Performance, Streetwise

Blessings/Curses: Bold (2 pts: +2 Passion when others hesitate)/ Shifty (+2 pts: -2 Knavery)

Benefices: Passage Contract (4 pts), Gossip Network (4 pts), Refuge (3 pts), Fame (see sidebar)

Average Salary (per year):

50 firebirds for beginning performers

100 firebirds for established performers

200 firebirds for high ranking performers

500+ firebirds for superstars

New Benefice

Fame (varies): Fame comes with its own rewards. Many nobles like being seen with celebrities; in order to assure that they are spotted with the famous, they'll often treat the celebrity better than they do members of their own family. There's a certain prestige that comes with working in an entertainer's guild, and almost every performer has a rating in this Benefice. The higher the rating, the more famous the individual. Career-wise, being very famous is usually a boon, unless the celebrity tends to speak out of turn or say the wrong things in high society.

1 = Locally known. Occasionally offered a free meal at a tavern.

3 = Known on a number of worlds. Invited to parties.

5 = Famous across the Known Worlds. Invited to lavish parties or even the Imperial Balls.



Slayers Guild

Perhaps the least well known of the guilds is the Slayers, an assassins' league that is very good at what it does and very illegal as well. These assassins are the cream of the crop, well-trained for both their work and their ability not to talk about what they do. While many have heard rumors of the Slayers, few alive have ever encountered one. Once assigned to a mission, nothing will stop a Slayer from completing her task. Though it may take a while for a Slayer to complete an assignment, they often work in teams, sharing the same wage.

Most Slayers have other "day" jobs, which are fairly lucrative and that allow them to choose their own hours. It is rumored that some even belong to the Church, though scant evidence ever comes to light which can prove the claim. The Slayers Guild does not officially exist in the eyes of the Church or the nobles. Even the Merchant League makes no claim to knowing anything about them. On the few occasions when someone has made the mistake of speaking up, accidents have occurred which soon silenced that solitary voice.

For an organization which "doesn't exist," the Slayers guild has more influence than most would like to admit. Nobles often seek a Slayer when rivals and nuisances must be disposed of. Members of the Church who lean more towards political ascension than spiritual rewards call upon the Slayers to handle obstacles that can't otherwise be removed. The Merchant League often handles their own problems, but they too call upon the Slayers when their own members or even priests or nobles begin treading too close to their secrets. The Slayers are discreet and successful. They have no interest in blackmail or bribery. They consider their duties an art form and, in some cases, a sacred calling.

While preferring the older, time-honored methods of assassination, the Slayers understand the need to explore new ideas. A surprising number of the Changed are Slayers — the guild makes a good place for these genetic monstrosities to hide. The most impenetrable fortresses often seem open to the Slayers — which isn't surprising: the finest technological wonders are available to them, provided they can justify to their mediators the need for proscribed technology. In many cases, individual Slayers own a collection of weapons and high-tech wonders that would be the envy of most in the Known Worlds: think machines, golems, nanotech devices and more. These items would surely be enough to guarantee their punishment by the Church — if the Church were to acknowledge their existence.

Each individual Slayer is trained in secrecy by their one contact within the organization. In all cases, only one person ever acts as go-between, either for a single Slayer or

a team. This person, known as a mediator, also serves as the Slayer's instructor and is usually a retired master assassin. Secrecy is everything, and only the very highest echelons of the guild know the names of all the members. Capturing a member of the Slayers is difficult but possible. Since the Slayers in the field only know one contact name each, the group is well-protected against reprisals. It would take years to get anywhere near the top members of the guild; during those years, the leaders would surely discover anyone asking too many questions.

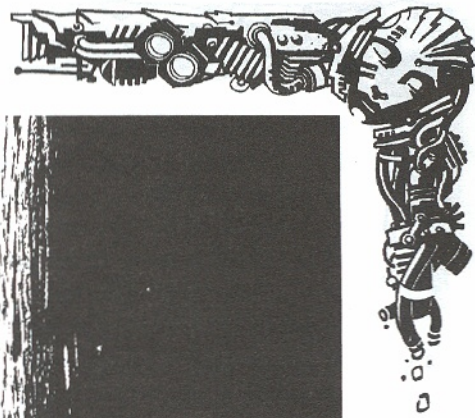
Slayers are chosen for their physical prowess, their wits and their undying loyalty. Rumors persist that each member of the Slayers undergoes extreme mental conditioning to guarantee their ability to remain silent about their deeds. Some even claim to have captured members of the guild only to have the captives die without ever uttering a word.

There are rumors that the Imperial Eye is the true master of these scourges, but few have dared ask in case the person they query might actually work for the Eye. Those in the know, however (the heads of the houses, League deans, etc.), are aware of the true master behind the Slayers: the undying Monk of Shadows. This legendary being is the head of the order, pledged throughout centuries to maintain the utter neutrality of the guild. If it were not for this pledge and the proven ability to keep it, the Slayers could not have survived for so long or benefited from access to high technology. But nearly everyone eventually needs an assassin, so the guild continues.

While the Monk of Shadows is said to be immortal, the role is actually a lineage. Only the best of the Slayers can succeed the previous monk, and then only after years of rigorous training. It is said that the monk chooses a handful of the guild to secretly groom for succession, and these candidates are never aware of the scrutiny they are under — although the threat of such favor is known to all Slayers. Most of the monks who have led the guild use longevity serums, so succession is rare and usually occurs only once or twice within a century.

It is also said that the Monk of Shadows wields a Philosophers Stone of immense power. While there is no proof of this artifact but in story, those who allow the guild's continued survival attest to its existence and are wary not to betray the guild.

Almost all of the major powers in the Known Worlds have access to a contact who can reach the order. These contacts are often little more than well-placed servants, the sort who are normally ignored until their employers should need to call on the Slayers. The actual network of contacts who work as "acquisitioners" is fairly small. There is little need to have a lot of people in the know, because



the list of clients who can even consider affording the Slayers' rates is a short one.

There are also other, lesser assassins guilds throughout the Known Worlds, usually local bully boys who won't hesitate to remove someone's burden for money and even dispose of the body for an extra fee. But there is only one Slayers guild. The Slayers tend to have at least a few members in each of these smaller guilds, people who work as talent scouts for their lethal trade. Only the finest are considered, and they'd best be willing to prove themselves if they want to join. Once a member is accepted into the ranks, there is no turning back. No one ever quits the Slayers. A few people have retired, but even then, they are watched by the guild.

The benefits of working for the Slayers are top rate. Mediators can arrange access to advanced rejuvenative processes, including one of the few Appendage Regenerators ever built, the finest training available and a pay scale fitting for the truly elite. The guild guarantees the safety and anonymity of its members... provided they are never caught. Capture would surely mean torture, and even the best-disciplined minds will eventually crack under constant pressure. Allegedly, those Slayers who face trial never survive long enough face their accusers.

Slayers never meet with their clients. Rather, they are given assignments by their mediators and sent on their way. In no circumstance are they ever told who hired them. This is one of the many ways in which the guild ensures secrecy for its clients. The mediators, a select few go-betweens for the Slayers and their clients, negotiate all deals. Any member of the Slayers caught trying to work out a deal on her own is signing her own death warrant. Any attempts at treachery on an assassin's part is dealt with harshly.

Slayers are normally very solitary souls, forever apart from society except where their cover jobs are concerned. No Slayer can turn down an assignment, and getting close to others can lead to the execution of painful contracts.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Wits, Calm, Tech

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Fencing, Martial Arts, Firearms), Disguise, Focus, Lockpicking, Lore (Poisons), Sleight of Hand, Stoic Body, Stoic Mind, Streetwise, Tracking

Blessings/Curses: Obstinate (2 pts: +2 Stoic Mind to resist divulging secrets)/ Paranoid (+2 pts: -2 Calm when scrutinized)

Benefices: Passage Contract (2 pts), Professional Contract, Secret Identity (1 pt), Secrets, a variety of weapons

Affliction: Dark Secret (3 pts)

Average Salary (per year):

150 firebirds for acquisitioners

500 firebirds for beginning assassins

1000 firebirds for journeyman assassins

2000 firebirds for mediators

3000+ firebirds for master assassins



Vagabonds

Perhaps the most unusual guild of all is the Vagabonds. These intergalactic hobos are more common than most people know, and are also more overlooked than even the lowliest of peasants. The Vagabonds are not so much a guild as a collective of familiar faces and half-seen bums joined together in a mutual protection society. There are no rules for joining the Vagabonds and the only prerequisite seems to be a willingness to lend a hand when it's needed. Any Vagabond can initiate someone into the "guild."

Vagabonds are everywhere. They are the down-and-out, the ignored and the unwanted. Where poverty is the norm, they are often the poorest. More often than not, this is by choice. Vagabonds are loners and travelers, the dreamers who won't work and the crippled who can't work. They have their own language, using universal hand gestures and whispered grunts.

Vagabonds do not earn a salary, nor can they call any place home, unless that place has already been abandoned by someone else. They have no interest in court intrigues or the cutthroat world of the Merchant League. The Church is seldom of more than passing importance. They

are far too busy surviving. But if a person knows the signs to watch out for, it is easy to find a shelter or a filling if untasty meal.

The main rules for the Vagabonds are easy enough to follow. First, you must know how to survive; the best fights are those you can completely avoid. The best way to avoid a fight is not to make trouble. However, as is often the case for the down-trodden, there's always someone willing to try taking out a bad day's frustrations on a lonely bum. Knowing who to watch out for is as important as knowing who you can depend on. Few among the loose-knit group is ever without a weapon and virtually all of them know how to use whatever fighting equipment they've managed to obtain. This specialized training sets them apart from other down-trodden and is one of the things which makes membership in the guild appealing.

The second rule is knowing who you can depend on in a time of need. Vagabonds have a long-standing code of honor. No one is ever truly alone in the group, unless he chooses to be. Secret signs exist all over the Known Worlds, pointing to hidden locations where a night's shelter is waiting or where food can be obtained. Scratch marks





on walls, twigs placed in certain angles and carefully laid patterns of stones in the streets all are reliable sources of information to the Vagabonds.

The third rule is simply to keep well-informed. The more experienced members of the guild often know some damaging secrets on just about everyone of importance in a city or town. Knowing this information is important not because there's a profit to be made, but because such secrets provide blackmail that can be used to avoid trouble with the local law. There might actually be a few Vagabonds who consider selling information to others for a personal profit, but the vast majority understand the importance of not being noticed. Once a Vagabond is recognizable to the powers that be, he is almost certainly in danger. Long years of dealing with minor nobles and officials in various cities have proved that the haves are always willing to eliminate the have-nots, should they prove to be more than a minor inconvenience.

The opposite side of the coin stands true as well. Most Vagabonds are willing to spread the word if they have information that can be of assistance to others in their informal guild. Warnings against sleeping near certain places are as important as marking areas where it's safe to get a night's rest. Likewise, unscrupulous people in power who ignore the carefully worded threats of a Vagabond often find their secrets exposed for everyone to hear, and if the secret is dirty enough to bring that soul to the attention of the Inquisition, the individual in question just might not live long enough to regret making the wrong choice.

The fourth rule of the Vagabonds is simply to be useful. Helping a stranger find his way when lost in the city is often the best way to ensure kindness for others in the future. In some area of almost every town the Vagabonds gather together in the cold of night and work as a sort of neighborhood watch. In those places, violent crimes are less-frequent than most people would expect. The Vagabonds often handle would-be criminals with their own form of street justice. More than one body has been found stripped of all its possessions — criminals who chose the wrong prey.

Information, services rendered and kindnesses granted are the main tools of survival for the Vagabonds. Though there are no formal leaders for the group, there are almost always a few to whom the others turn to for advice. Some of the unofficial rulers of the Vagabonds are reputed to have powers all their own, unique talents that make life for the Vagabonds as a whole much easier to accept. These beggar-kings are usually known to the people in power, and are normally held with a grudging respect, or with a very real sense of fear for the secrets they know. Many of the respected elders in the Vagabonds could bring minor nobles to their knees or ruin the careers of unscrupulous members of the Church hierarchy. The secrets they know about the guilds are enough to allow them occasional transport on a starship, even if the accommodations are cramped and the food less-than-fresh.

The Vagabonds do not play political games. They have no desire to rule others. They do not wish to preach and rarely do they delve into scholarly subjects. More often, they are simply people who've decided they'd rather be poor and free than be beholden to another. Sometimes they have experienced the world of the wealthy and stepped away from the maddening intrigues and clandestine meetings in an effort to discover who they really are beyond a title or a salary. Some were once members of the Church who learned that the Pancreator takes second place to the desire for power among the higher echelons of the religious community.

Vagabonds are not poor souls who've had a fear of life beaten into them by years of struggling to survive; they have taken survival as a right, and would kill to keep that sacred right. They are not scavengers who dwell in shadows and wait for some fool with a fat purse and less brains than money to come stumbling drunk into their territory; they are the eyes of the underground and the ears of the people. They are those who sit in alleyways, content to draw another breath rather than lamenting that they have no fortune to spend. They are the street bums who tip what is left of their hat to a lady, rather than leering at her with a desperate grin and a dark thought in their hearts.

They are perhaps the most civilized survivors in the Dark Ages, in a time when most people in power are simply out for their own agendas, regardless of the cost to others, and when most of the lower classes are too desperate to care what happens to the person next door.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Calm

Natural skills: Charm, Observe, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Knavery, Sleight of Hand, Speak Vagabond Patois, Stoic Body, Streetwise, Survival

Blessings/Curses: Compassionate (2 pts: +2 Passion when helping others)/ Uncouth (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert at society functions)

Benefices: Gossip Network (4 pts), Well-Traveled

Average Salary (per year):

15 firebirds for beginning Vagabonds

30 firebirds for experienced Vagabonds

50 firebirds for the very finest beggars

Learned Skill

Speak Vagabond Patois

Roll: Wits + Speak Hobo Patois

The language of gestures, grunts and slang spoken exclusively by the Vagabonds. Often interpreted as schizophrenic mumblings by the upper-classes. A Vagabond telling another about a local lord's secret tryst which she witnessed through a window while rummaging the manor's garbage might say: "Whoah! Bad-a-boom! (slaps hands to-



gether, smiles) Don't touch the merchandise." A warning of danger near the junk yard might be: "Whoah damn, can't shop no more. Grrrr (mimics a dog's jaws chewing with his hand)."

Hexery

A small number of Vagabonds, those who see their journeys in poverty and freedom as spiritual ones, know a few special tricks for good luck. Hexery is a form of theurgy which does not require ordination or training by a religious order; it's simply a bunch of hexes taught from one Vagabond to another. Many outsiders who are aware of this witchery consider it more a form of innate psychic talent which would be available to most people if they were aware of it. Those who practice hexery, however, believe it comes from a higher power — although not one which would damn a man for stealing a loaf of bread. Indeed, this power might help him do it.

Like theurgy rites, the Vagabond must possess a Theurgy characteristic of the proper level to learn a hex. There are no known hexes past level three, but some beggar-kings have displayed baffling powers. Hubris can strike such Vagabonds, taking the form of bad luck.

Twig Hex

(Level 1, Dexterity + Charm, G, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

The Vagabond can make his environment more comfortable by placing arrangements of twigs in key spots surrounding him. If done properly, his bed roll will be softer, the night air more temperate and the sounds calmer. His food will even taste a bit better. There is no code for the arrangements; the Vagabond simply follows his impulses in placing them. Some may wind up in the shape of pictures (a house, a man, etc.) or be simply scattered across the ground. If anyone disturbs the twigs, the hex is canceled.

A whole new arrangement is called for. This hex also works on the Vagabond's traveling companions, whether a good ol' dog or a gang of bums.

Lucky Wink

(Level 2, Wits + Charm, G, sight, temporary, 1W)

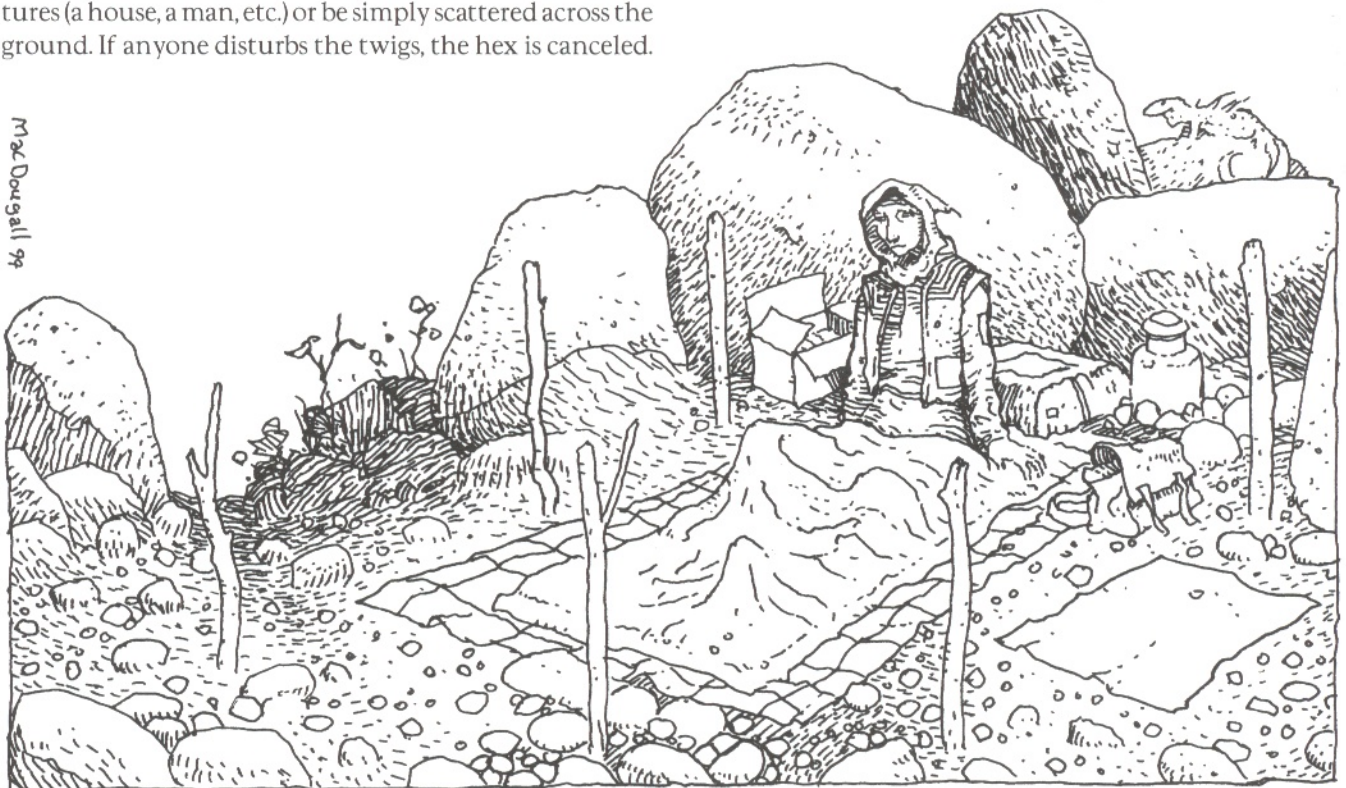
The Vagabond can increase his luck in a particular area of endeavor (gambling, bartering, combat, etc.) by winking at the object of the endeavor (dice, cards, a coin, etc.). The amount of victory points gained on the casting of the hex are applied to the goal roll of the endeavor. This hex will not work to increase luck in combat, except to help the Vagabond flee his attackers. The Lucky Wink can only be attempted once per endeavor within the same span.

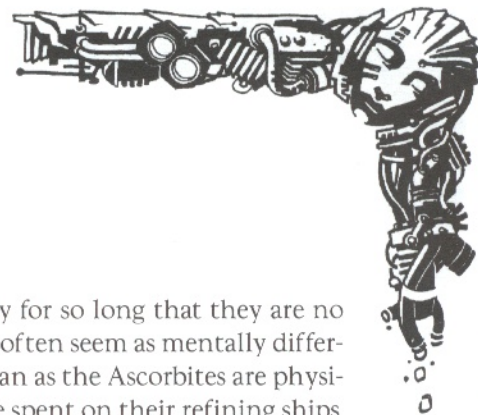
Git Gone

(Level 3, Wits + Knavery, L, sensory, temporary, 1W)

The Vagabond can conceal his identity from those around him. He won't be invisible, just ignored, unimportant to them for as long as the hex lasts. Most Vagabonds use this to leave the scene of an official's rage. The Vagabond must do nothing to draw attention to himself — even speaking may cause folks to look at him, although the whistling he must do for the hex's casting can actually help keep the effect going. If someone was actively engaged in confronting the Vagabond during the casting, the hex's victory points determine how well the Vagabond slips from notice; With one or two success, the person will still pay attention to him but will be more absorbed in his own harangue or lecture and is easily distracted by others. Three or more success allows the Vagabond to slip away, leaving the person to rant to the empty air.

MacDougall 99





Prospectors

They are also called Belters, Astromasons, Moon Moles and Hell-Walkers. They are simple miners, but their digs are in the void of space or in atmospheres of corrosive toxins.

Prospectors are a hard working, high-tech and low-anxiety people with a love of life in zero gravity. Their's is a tight-knit society composed of families who have been mining asteroids and uninhabited planets since the Second Republic. Prospectors live a life that few would want, spending their days blasting apart asteroids and refining the raw ore they find into metals used to manufacture a variety of goods. Where many of the terraformed planets inhabited by humans have long since given up their mineral wealth, the rocks floating in the void, the barren moons or the planets far from the sun still have treasures to offer for those daring enough to seek them out.

Although nominal members of the League, Prospectors aren't interested in politics or power-plays. They just want their wages and a good place to spend them. Their technology is old but reliable, often passed down from generation to generation and kept up meticulously. Hard suits and drilling lasers powerful enough to carve through the hardest stone are the primary tools of their trade, along with explosives and refining ships large enough to move megatons of raw ore. When a Prospector ship docks in port, its miners are renowned for their odd behavior and their quick and easy way of spending firebirds.

The Prospectors guild has no central leadership. Instead, each of its massive mining ships has a Council of Elders which represents each family within its floating city. Each Council elects one senior representative to discuss business and rates with fellow Prospector ships. Politics are kept to a minimum by the guild; personal grudges are not permitted to get in the way of an honest profit.

Most Prospector ships are contracted to a house, guild or Church operation, laboring to uncover metals vital to those factions' manufacturing concerns. Those operations which cannot afford a full ship will contract lone Prospectors to act as foremen, supervising serf laborers.

Many believe the miners have

been apart from humanity for so long that they are no longer fully human. They often seem as mentally different from the average human as the Ascorbites are physically. Most of their lives are spent on their refining ships, with little or no outside contact with Known Worlds culture. Many of the sites where they work are hidden from the faint light of the fading suns.

For all their eccentricities, the Prospectors seem happy with their lot in life. Perhaps for this reason alone, few Known Worlders really trust them.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Endurance, Tech, Alien

Natural skills: Vigor

Learned skills: Gambling, Redemption (Mech, Volt, High-Tech), Science (Geology, Physics), Spacesuit

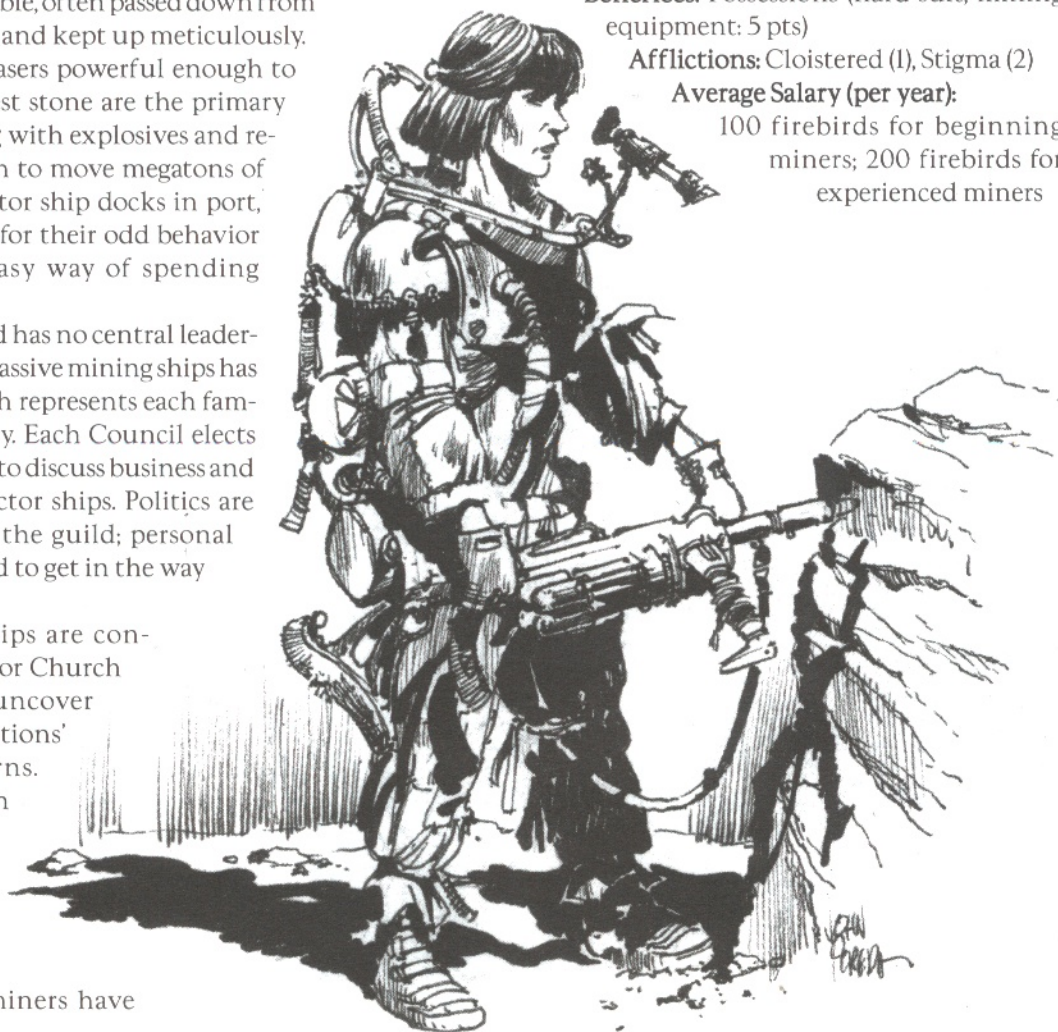
Blessings/Curses: Grease Monkey (4 pts: +2 with all Tech Redemption skills)/ Weir (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among Known Worlders)

Benefices: Possessions (hard suit, mining equipment: 5 pts)

Afflictions: Cloistered (1), Stigma (2)

Average Salary (per year):

100 firebirds for beginning miners; 200 firebirds for experienced miners



Apothecaries

Apothecaries are the main alternative to the healers of Sanctuary Aeon. While untrained in the mystical healings of the sect, Apothecaries are quite adept with high-tech medicine. Unlike the Amaltheans, this League guild works strictly for profit — but they do not ask questions or demand moral penances. They are very discreet, something their noble and guild patrons greatly appreciate.

Rumors persist that the Physickers delve into forbidden lore, such as cloned body parts and genetic enhancement. The Church continues to investigate the rumors, but with little success. Some claim that the Church turns a blind eye toward the Physickers' illegal and immoral use of "wonder drugs" and continuing research into the lost arts of the Second Republic's healers. It is known that many ailing nobles have entertained personal Physickers in their homes and made miraculous recoveries from what should have been fatal injuries and diseases. Some nobles even manage to live far beyond the usual number of years.

The Apothecaries are strictly a mercenary operation. Those who can afford their fees are few, but they are always treated with the best possible equipment. They will administer to the poor, but those who can't pay with money usually donate organs instead. Sanctuary Aeon is usually disapproving but tolerant of the guild, for they often free the priests to heal those in true need, rather than waste their time on noble hangnails. But the practice of organ payment horrifies the sect, and they have begun a campaign against it, standing in front of Apothecary

shops and telling passersby about the immoral practices. This does little to prevent a dying serf from consenting to losing a leg or kidney in return for his life.

The Apothecaries charge high prices not only for their medical treatment, but for their discretion as well. Many nobles who contract embarrassing diseases prefer to pay the extra money rather than face a lecture from an Amalthean about the wages of sin, doubly so because any indiscretions are likely to be reported to their local clergy. Where Sanctuary Aeon takes patients on the basis of who needs their attention the most, the Apothecaries regularly accept bribes to move their patients to the front of the line. They also deal in makeover surgery, altering the faces and bodies of individuals who are on the run from the Church or the law.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Wits, Calm, Tech

Natural skills: Charm, Observe

Learned skills: Alchemy, Physick, Remedy, Science (choose one medical science)

Blessings/Curses: Innovative (2 pts: +2 Tech when trying to invent something)/ Callous (+2 pts: -2 Passion when asked for aid)

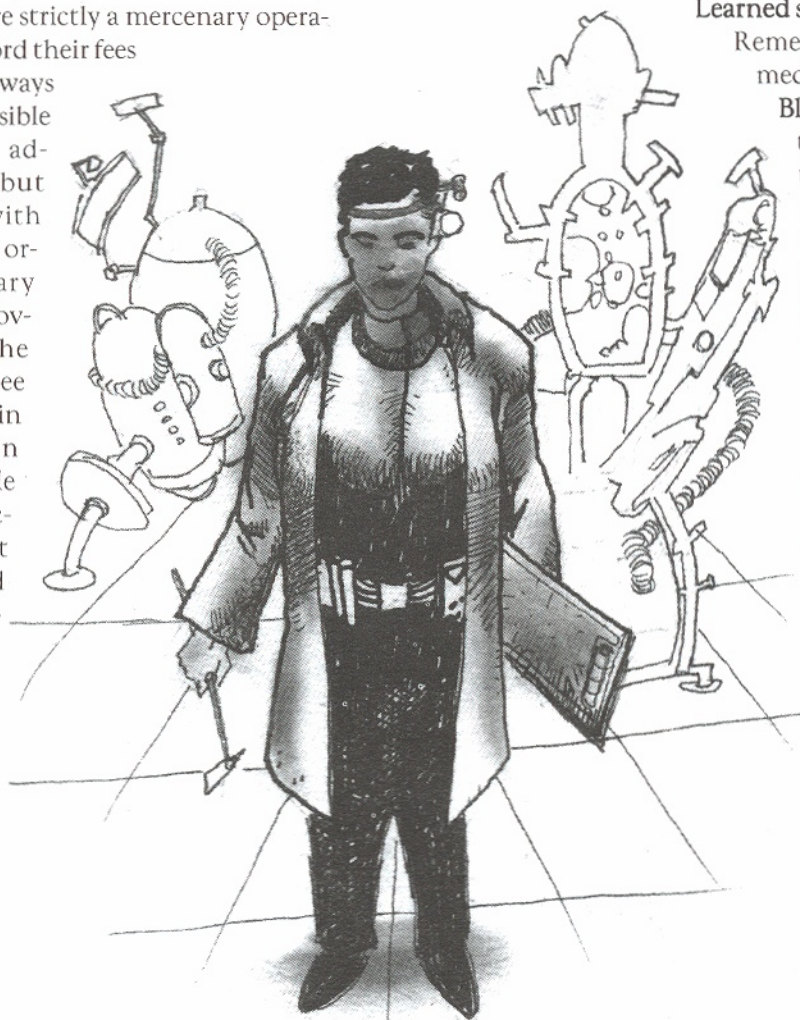
Benefices: Passage Contract (6 pts)

Average Salary (per year):

300 firebirds for beginning doctors

500 firebirds for well-established doctors

700+ firebirds for doctors dealing in illegal services



Weaponsmiths

So long as humans and aliens feel the need to conquer others, there will always be a profit in the art of weaponsmithing. Many small guilds — most of them independent of the League — and families are known for their skill in this area: the Mitchau family (patroned by House Hazat), Martech guild (connected to the Engineers), the Varsten family (House Decados), the Sumpter family (patroned by House al-Malik), the Radir family (patroned by House Decados), and famed individuals such as Ariman Dreskel (under contract with the Scravers) and Boltan Arbogast. Competition is fierce between them, but is nonetheless civilized.

Most families are run by a family head, usually the premier crafter in the family, who trains his progeny to follow in his or her footsteps. Those in the family who have no talent for weaponsmithing instead learn to run the business side of the family calling, selling the weapons to customers and landing contracts for new designs.

It is vital that each family gain a patron, a lifetime contract with a house or guild (more rarely a sect) to design and produce weapons for that patron. Such contracts were necessary during the Emperor Wars; each faction wanted to ensure that their prize designer did not leave to work for a rival. However, in the new peace, many of these factions are considering canceling contracts or signing for less-than-lifetime periods, making competition between weaponsmiths fiercer than ever.

A patron provides the family with a good stipend, and in return the family produces fine weapons. All such families and guilds are constantly trying to recreate Second Republic technologies, and to this end usually send their journeymen sons and daughters out to search for such tech.

The guilds are managed in a number of ways. Most contract with another faction for a specific task or a set amount of time. They will usually have multiple contracts going, sometimes with one of their customer's competitors. This makes many people uncomfortable, but the guild's access to high-tech, mass-manufacturing gives them an edge over crafter families. Martech, a sub-guild of the Engineers, is owned by its members — a radical concept that makes many houses and guilds uncomfortable. Every member of Martech shares in the profits. For this reason, membership in the guild is only open to the best, and more than a few rising stars have been lured from their family business to join Martech.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Tech

Natural skills: Observe, Shoot

Learned skills: Artisan, Lore (Weapons), Redemption (Mech, High Tech), Science (Ballistics)

Blessings/Curses: Curious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when seeing something new)/ Competitive (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around rivals)

Benefices: Protection (3 pts patron), whatever sidearm the family/guild specializes in

Average Salary (per year):

100 firebirds for beginning crafter

300 firebirds for experienced crafter

700+ firebirds for master crafter



Courtesans

Courtesans are a vital part of noble society. While many are little more than prostitutes — both high and low cost — a surprising number are well-educated in several fields. The highest caliber Courtesans specialize in exotic tastes, and are able to deliver unique pleasures which only the decadently wealthy can hope to afford. The most accomplished are often highly-sought after, moving from house to house and noble to noble, depending on who can pay the best wages.

But the Courtesans don't only deal in the flesh trade:

they also know the art of making their employers look good, as professional entourage hangers-on. These specialists work as advisors — though few nobles would admit to taking their advice — and as symbols of social status. Their job is to deftly move conversations in directions which will please their employers and reveal information about numerous topics while simultaneously keeping the attention of as many important people as possible. However, Courtesans are paid as much for their silence as for the quality of their conversation.

Some courtesans also work as go-betweens for their employers. If a special, discreet purchase is needed by a noble, the odds are excellent that a Courtesan can and will procure what is needed. The Courtesans maintain a gossip network on many worlds, and are especially good at finding things. For those nobles who seek questionable entertainment and diversions, Courtesans provide one of the few safe methods of gaining their desires.

Courtesans come in all shapes and sizes, and many of the most popular Courtesans are aliens. These often become favored "pets" in noble entourages. Most tend to adopt very human behavior patterns as time goes on, and many are no longer welcome among their own kind. The long-standing resentment that most aliens share toward their human counterparts is a curse alien Courtesans must endure in order to succeed in their chosen profession.

The Courtesans at the top of the pecking order, usually former field operatives themselves, act as procurers for members and establish the guidelines that all Courtesans must follow.

Suggested Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity, Extrovert

Natural skills: Charm, Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Arts, Etiquette, Inquiry, Speak Urthish

Blessings/Curses: Popular (2 pts: +2 Charm among customers)/ Vain (+2 pt: -2 Perception when flattered)

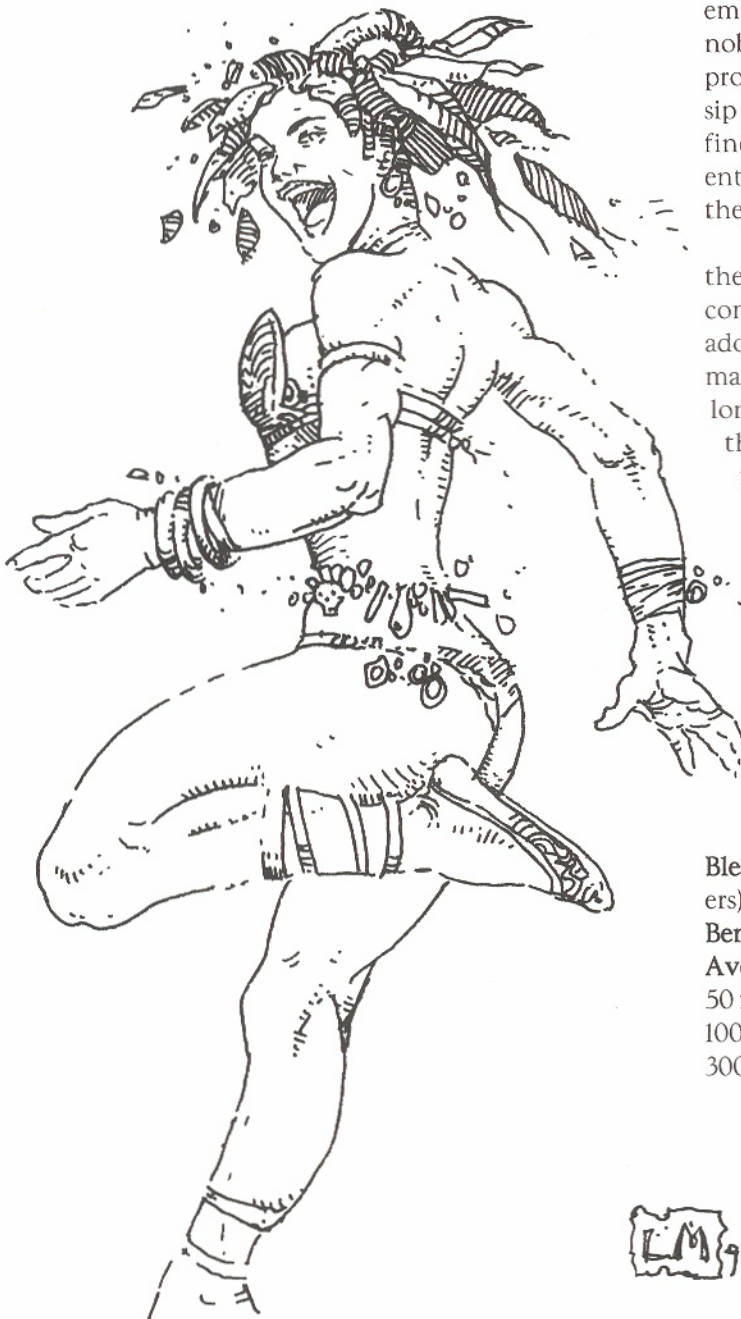
Benefices: Gossip Network, Secrets

Average Salary (per year):

50 firebirds for beginning Courtesans

100 firebirds for seasoned, well-liked Courtesans

300+ firebirds for experienced and popular Courtesans



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Mercurians

There are many people in places of power who aren't satisfied with the current political situation. Some simply complain, but the Mercurians prefer to handle the matter in a different way. They choose to create chaos in opposition to the current order.

Most Mercurians lead a double life. In their day-to-day existences, they are nobles, priests and guild members in good standing; when they are alone, or in the company of others of their ilk, they are a serious threat to order and respect.

Some claim that hull rats were originally introduced as a result of the Mercurians, and almost everyone in the know is certain that the occasional unaltered Brute on a ship is a direct result of their efforts. More than one ship has suffered a long, arduous space journey with the constant odor of Brute musk. Fumigating such ships is costly and time-consuming, often delaying shipments by weeks.

But not every action taken by the Mercurians is a grand or sweeping gesture. Many of their maneuvers are subtle enough not to be noticed at all. Despite this fact, they seem to prefer the more outrageous methods of handling matters. Many naive nobles assume that they are little more than practical jokers — a mistake. The Mercurians take monumental risks for a laugh, and in some cases have actually caused skirmishes and outright wars between noble houses.

There is a purpose to the pranks pulled by the Mercurians, though only the very highest ranking members know what that purpose is. Most members of the Mercurians don't even begin to comprehend the scope of the organization. The cabal that leads the pranksters' guild tends to recruit members gradually, giving the new members minor assignments that seemingly mean nothing little by themselves. It's only after a plan has come to fruition that a Mercurian begins to understand just how her assignment helped pull off an incredible escape.

Working with the Mercurians offers a certain degree of safety. They protect their secrets as defensively as the Slayers guild does. The main difference is that most Mercurians who are captured are quickly bailed out of jail — or broken out, if necessary. Anyone found guilty of being a Mercurian is sentenced to death. To date, only one Mercurian has ever been captured and tried. Guillermo Decados was convicted for high treason directly after causing the panicked evacuation of the capitol city of Midian. The cause of the panic? Rubber Manitar falling from the sky.

Most Mercurians are not paid for what they do. Rewards comes in the form of secretive smiles and fond

memories. Many of the Mercurians only meet other members of their secret group after helping them escape from prison. It normally takes years for Mercurians to even begin to understand what the group has accomplished and what they are planning for the future.

Suggested Traits

Most traits vary with the Mercurian's true calling.

Benefice: Protection (3 pts)

Affliction: Dark Secret (2 pts)

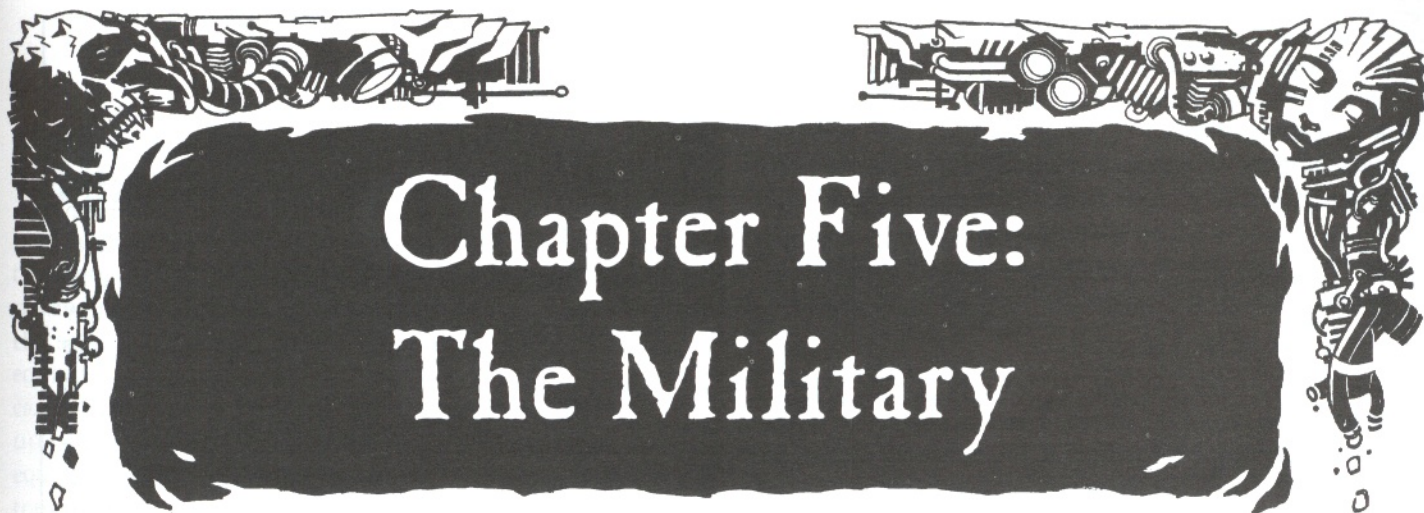
Average Salary (per year): Satisfaction for a prank well done



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Chapter Five: The Military

With the Emperor Wars having ended a scant few years ago, the number of people in the Known Worlds with military training and experience is at an all-time high. It does not matter if they fought for one of the Royal Houses, the imperial legions, the Patriarchal Fleet, one of the League mercenary forces or any of the many other groups — they learned to kill and had ample opportunities to practice their craft. Thus players can choose from a wide range of military backgrounds for their characters, and the gamemaster can use any of these groups for their opponents as well. Please note that the suggested traits are for characters who have left the service. Characters still in the military would have access to much better equipment, but would not have much freedom of movement unless the gamemaster wants to center the epic around a unit's exploits.

House Legions

The most common form of military experience comes from serving one's lord. Low-level nobles owe their own overlords a certain number of soldiers at their master's request. These nobles owe more troops to their own superiors, who owe them to their own superiors, up to the head of each house. The prince of each of the five Royal Houses can call on millions of troops across a number of planets, although doing so would strip their planets of their productive work force. This is exactly what happened at the height of the Emperor Wars. The nobles called up millions of peasants, gave them the rudiments of weapons training and sent them off to die. Those who survived have now returned to their homes, but more than a few left once again, unsatisfied with their lives after having seen far more of the Known Worlds.

Most of these soldiers spent their time as the equivalent of enlisted troops. The houses had very few ranks for them, generally calling them privates, corporals or sergeants. Command positions went to house nobles, allied nobles or a few skilled mercenaries. Tales do exist of des-

perate field commissions, when peasants became freemen or freemen became knights so that they could take an important command. One or two peasants may have even been made freemen and later knighted. These promotions usually lasted for the life of the newly promoted — often a short period of time considering the circumstances that led to the promotion.

Still, some new nobles and even an extremely minor house or two came out of these field promotions, with the new nobles' progeny getting to inherit their predecessor's title. It remains to be seen if these new nobles can turn a battlefield promotion into a dynasty. In these post-war times, such embarrassments are usually forcibly mustered out with a good pension — as long as they retire well out of sight.

The Imperial Legions

At the end of the Emperor Wars, the leaders of all the Royal Houses (and most of the minor ones) pledged fealty to Emperor Alexius. Alexius could theoretically call on their troops at any time, but it is unlikely that many of the houses would give him anything better than their worst unless there were some compelling outside threat.

Most of the imperial legionnaires come from imperial territory or Alexius' own followers. The garrison on Stigmata is recognized as one of the strongest forces anywhere and receives the Empire's best troops and equipment. The Emperor also has several legions of elite bodyguards drawn primarily from his former Hawkwood troops and now stationed on Byzantium Secundus.

League Mercenaries

The Muster has the strongest reputation for military power in the League, but each of the major guilds has its own troops, from the Reeves' debt collection forces and the Charioteers' antipiracy fleet to the Scravers' reclamation troops and the Engineers' cybernetic guards. The League itself has some joint forces at its disposal, but most



of its troops come from the individual guilds.

Most of these troops are freemen from Leagueheim, Madoc and Bannockburn, though the nobles sometimes accuse these units of being havens for escaped serfs. They also charge (with reason) that the Muster often tries to steal away their best legionnaires, promising them freedom, money and rank. The Muster has officially bought some promising serfs from nobles to turn into mercenaries. Almost all officers have a commission in some guild or other.

Church Troops

Despite its many pleas for peace, the Church fields an army that is second to none. Even without the military orders like Brother Battle, the Church commands legion upon legion. Most of these soldiers come from Holy Terra, though Pyre contributes many hardened fanatics. While in the past Brother Battle and the other military orders have proven fairly independent of the Church hierarchy as a whole, they have also done as Patriarchs have commanded.

The Church's enlisted troops come from its fiefs, and while they are not called serfs, they must do as the Church says. Officers are ordained, and more than a few have come from the noble houses. Some get Brother Battle training but most learn their craft in the Church's colleges. The Church can also conscript troops on noble lands for special purposes, and this is where the Inquisitorial armies often come from. More than one noble has met death at the hands of his own peasants, inflamed by the words of an Inquisitor.

Barbarian Hordes

Vuldrok warlords draw their troops from their own personal fiefs. When groups of them combine forces, they generally do so voluntarily, without feudal requirements. While they will recognize one of their own (generally the strongest) as overall commander, the other warlords may leave at any time. Some say this is the main reason House Hawkwood has managed to keep them from making significant gains — whenever the Vuldrok start making headway, their hordes begin to break up in disputes over loot and slaves. Most of these troops are heavily armed and

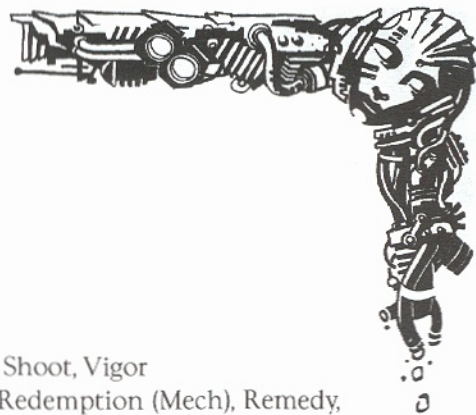
Aliens in the Army

Aliens have found a place in all the military forces of the Known Worlds, but don't expect their more human commanders to brag about their successes. While all Ukar might know of the sacrifices the Fifth Dark Legion made for the al-Malik at the Battle of Criticorum, word of its deeds has not reached the general populace. Leaders do not like to admit just how effective their alien levies have been, but the aliens know.

Some of the best known of these alien units include House Li Halan's Vorox shock legions, House Hawkwood's Ur-Obun Gray Scouts and House al-Malik's Ur-Ukar commandos. During the Emperor Wars aliens served in every part of the Known World's military forces, but generally stayed in their own legions under the command of human officers. The only places where alien commanders were common were their homeworlds. Thus alien characters can choose any military background they like, but should not expect the same respect accorded human veterans.

armored infantry, though everybody seems to have multiple duties. A ship's pilot may also lead infantry assaults on the ground.

The Kurga Caliphate, on the other hand, seems to have an extremely regimented military with large numbers of professional soldiers. While its armies seem extremely diverse, each individual legion appears culturally homogeneous. The Hazat believe that different planets, or different regions of different planets, specialize in the kinds of troops they produce, but no direct evidence has appeared to back this up. What has become apparent is that the Kurgans maintain a high level of discipline and have produced some very talented commanders. They seem to lack the heavier weapons of the Known Worlds, relying more on speed and maneuverability, but this weapons imbalance may be changing.



Regular Army

Infantry

The backbone of the Known Worlds' military might, these foot soldiers bear the brunt of combat, get the worst pay and die at some of the highest rates. At the low end of the scale are the militia legions, poorly trained and equipped peasant levies. Many of these lack armor and carry nothing more powerful than an axe or spear. Next up is the regular infantry, semi-professional soldiers equipped with cheap firearms and cheaper armor. At the top of the scale are the elite units, heavily armed, very well trained and sometimes genetically altered. The very best of these are included in the special forces section (below).

Militia

Characters who want a basic familiarity with weapons can pick this background. These are peasants who, at best, train one day a week. Most get no training before being thrust into battle.

Characteristics: Strength

Natural skills: Melee, Shoot

Learned skills: Gambling

Benefices: Axe or Spear

Average Salary: 1 firebird/month

Infantry

Characters with this background committed to several years of duty with somebody's military force. At the beginning of the Emperor Wars, most infantry legions were a hodgepodge of men and equipment, with spearmen standing next to riflemen. By the end of the war infantry troops had become much more specialized, and nobles tried to divide them into regular infantry, heavy weapons groups, shock troops, heavily armored troops and the like. Unfortunately, the high casualty rates of war often meant that spearmen still served next to riflemen.

Characteristics: Endurance

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Gambling, Remedy, Survival

Benefices: Imperial Rifle (2), Scale Armor (1)

Average Salary: 4 firebirds/month

Heavy Weapons Specialists

While some military forces try to give all their foot soldiers some practice with support weapons, most still just pick the biggest, strongest guy and make him lug the stuff around. These guys are generally the best protected part of any infantry group, however, so it is not that bad a job to have.

Characteristics: Strength

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Gambling, Redemption (Mech), Remedy, Survival

Benefices: Jahnisak Light Machinegun (5), Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 4 firebirds/month

Tracker

The Tracker legions do not quite fit the definition of special forces, but they play much the same role. They scout ahead of regular forces, set up ambushes, delay enemy advances and retreats, and harry the enemy at all points. Still, they lack the extensive training which marks the special forces.

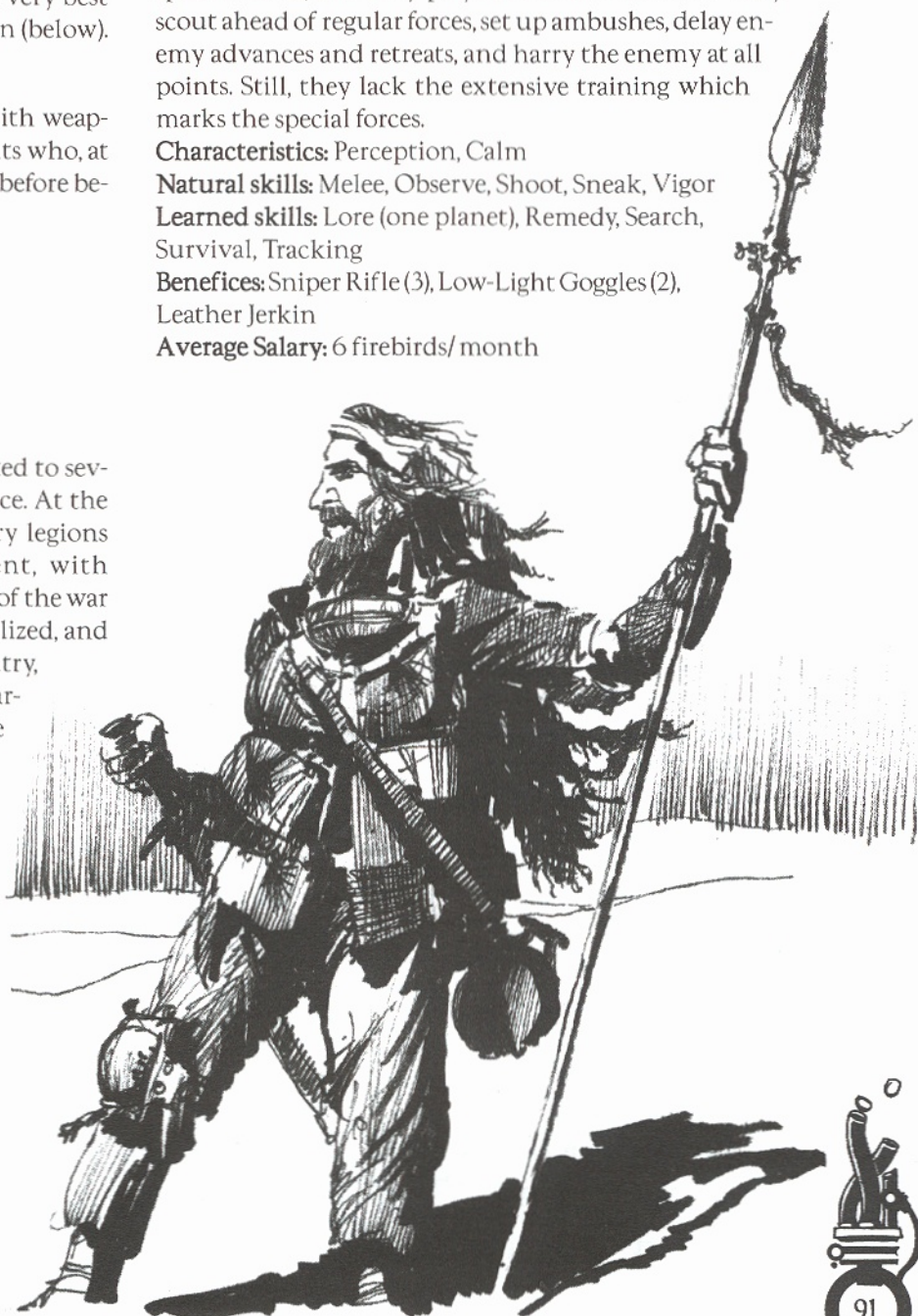
Characteristics: Perception, Calm

Natural skills: Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Lore (one planet), Remedy, Search, Survival, Tracking

Benefices: Sniper Rifle (3), Low-Light Goggles (2), Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month



Beast Cavalry

During the Emperor Wars all the major factions utilized beast cavalry for a variety of duties, including scouting, raids and the fabled mounted charges. At some point or another almost every rideable creature has been used in battle, though horses remain the most common. Some of the most famous mounted troops include House Hawkwood's Urroc fliers and Ur-Obun Gray Scouts, Brother Battle's Knights of the Steed, and the Rolas Raiders of the Hazat.

Cavalry Raider

Characteristics: Dexterity, Passion
Natural skills: Impress, Melee, Shoot, Vigor
Learned skills: Beast Lore, Remedy, Ride, Survival
Benefices: Heavy Revolver (3), Chainmail (2), Cavalry Horse (4), Spear
Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Armored Vehicles

Still rather rare in the Known Worlds, tanks and the like went through a major revival during the Emperor Wars. All the houses made substantial changes to their armored forces so that by the end of the wars armor had become a key factor in deciding almost every major battle. As a result, armored units could choose from some of the best troops available. These troops received better pay and training, but since tanks tended to lead attacks, they also tended to have some of the highest casualty rates. Hovortank drivers are the elite of the elite, but their losses were even worse than those of other ground units.

Tank Driver

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits
Natural skills: Observe
Learned skills: Drive Landcraft, Read Urthtech, Redemption (Mech, Volt), Warfare (Gunnery)
Benefices: Submachine Gun (3), Mech Tools (1), Volt Tools (1)
Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Support Troops

Not everyone in the army goes head to head with the enemy. Cooks, accountants, mechanics and others all have their place in the military, and characters can have these backgrounds as their own. This category also includes more martial occupations like artillery and combat engineer.

Artillerist

During the Emperor Wars the Royal Houses used everything from catapults to meson cannons in their attempts to cause mass destruction. While any soldier can be taught to use these, only the best trained use them to their full potential.

Characteristics: Wits, Calm

Natural skills: Observe

Learned skills: Academia, Redemption (High-Tech, Mech), Think Machine, Warfare (Artillery)

Benefices: Light Revolver (1)

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month

Combat Engineer

This category covers a wide range of soldiers, including demolitions experts, construction specialists and special weapons technicians. Engineers serve the dual function of building fortifications for their side and tearing down the enemy's. Some of their specialized equipment is detailed in Chapter Eight: Rules.

Characteristics: Strength, Tech

Natural skills: Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Academia, Redemption (Craft, Mech, Volt), Science (Engineering), Warfare (Demolitions)

Benefices: Shotgun (3), Leather Jerkin, Redeemers Kit (3), Demolition Rig (5)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Chaplains and Medics

The same person is often responsible for a unit's physical and spiritual well being. The Church provides many of these healers, though each house started fielding advanced hospital corps late in the Emperor Wars.

Chaplain

These vary from House Li Halan's fighting chaplains, who are as likely to lead an attack as to help the wounded afterward, to the Sanctuary Aeon healers who will not fight but whose acts of battlefield heroism have attained legendary status.

Characteristics: Wits, Faith

Natural skills: Dodge, Vigor

Learned skills: Academia, Empathy, Physick, Read Latin, Remedy, Social (Oratory)

Benefices: Expedition MedPac (2), Elixir and five doses (2), Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 5 firebirds/month

Combat Physick

Not all of the technological advances during the Emperor Wars came in weapons development. Medical training and techniques advanced rapidly as well, especially when nobles discovered that they were at almost as much risk as the militia. These nobles culled some of the brightest soldiers in the ranks to become combat physicks, capable of performing near-miracles in the worst of conditions.

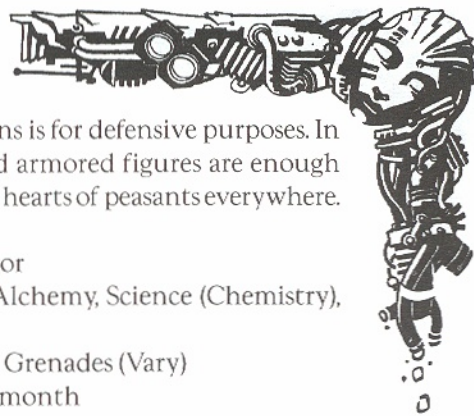
Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits

Natural skills: Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Academia, Empathy, Physick, Read Latin, Remedy, Science (Medicine)

Benefices: Surgery Kit (3), Elixir and Five Doses (2)

Average Salary: 10 firebirds/month



Military Police

The Royal Houses are not as concerned about the public relations of their armies as were the political leaders of the twentieth century, but somebody needs to chase down draft dodgers, anti-war activists and the like. In most armies these are just troops of thugs strong enough to bash down anyone who might oppose them, but Emperor Alexius has introduced a real police force to ensure that imperial legions stay on their best behavior wherever they might be.

Characteristics: Strength, Endurance

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Observe

Learned skills: Inquiry, Search, Streetwise, Torture

Benefices: Stunner (4), Squawker (1), Plastic Restraints, Club, Studded Leather Armor

Average Salary: 5 firebirds/month

Chemical/Biological Warriors

Rumors of chemical/biological warfare abounded during the Emperor Wars, with every house accused of using plague germs, hallucination gas and more. Nobody admits to using these troops offensively, explaining that the only reason they maintain these troops and their

stockpiles of deadly weapons is for defensive purposes. In any case, these cloaked and armored figures are enough to strike true terror into the hearts of peasants everywhere.

Characteristics: Wits, Calm

Natural skills: Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Academia, Alchemy, Science (Chemistry), Spacesuit

Benefices: NAS Suit (5), Gas Grenades (Vary)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

NCOs

(Non-Commissioned Officers)

While nobles fill most of the officer positions in house armies, peasants and freemen make up the bulk of the non-commissioned officers. These are the grunts who do the officers' real work. They train the troops and usually lead them in combat as well. Each branch of the military has its own NCOs, but they all have certain features in common. The following suggestions are in addition to the typical ones for their branch.

Characteristics: Extrovert

Natural skills: Impress

Learned skills: Social (Leadership)

Benefices: Heavy Autofeed (3)

Average Salary: +2 firebirds/month



Special Forces

While standard army forces handled most of the fighting during the Emperor Wars, theirs are not the exploits which have gone down in story and song. That distinction belongs to the various special forces legions, highly trained groups of extremely colorful individuals. These were the troops who did the jobs no one else could, who went deep behind enemy lines to rescue prisoners, who sabotaged major installations, who caused rebellions in other houses' fiefs, who carried out assassinations, who cleared the way for assaults and more.

Probably the most famous use of special forces came during Alexius's final efforts to solidify his reign. His Hawkwood Rangers would infiltrate planets ahead of an attack force, relying on their chameleon and blur suits to avoid contact with the enemy while they carried out reconnaissance, sabotage and assault preparations. When the invasion started, chemical shock troops and cybernetically enhanced legionnaires would hit key installations, working behind the lines to create as much havoc as possible. After the invasion, counterterrorist specialists would move in to pacify the planet and seek out secret enemy agents.

The final battle for Byzantium Secundus brought almost every house's elite units into the conflict, with Decados Kossacks battling al-Malik Dervishes hand-to-hand as a prelude to the battle, and Alexius's own Phoenix Guard clashing with Hazat Grimsons. While the Siege of Jericho finally settled the matter, these special forces gave a valiant account of themselves. For many it was their proudest moment.

Now the Royal Houses have disbanded these great armies, though each kept a legion or two of special forces troops around. The rest of these soldiers have retired or sought work elsewhere. They flooded the ranks of mercenaries, signed on with individual lords, joined the guilds or even turned to the Church. Players can opt to play characters with special forces training or even characters on active duty, since the houses tend to use their special forces before any of their other units.

Rangers

Once a generic term for special forces troops, the word "ranger" has come to refer to special infiltration troops who have mastered the art of sneaking behind enemy lines and causing all sorts of chaos. Most rangers wear chameleon suits, but an elite cadre usually has access to blur suits which actually make the wearer almost invisible. See Chapter Eight: Rules for more information on this equipment.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Endurance

Natural skills: Dodge, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Lockpicking, Read Urthish, Redemption

(Mech), Remedy, Search, Survival, Warfare (Demolitions)
Benefices: Assault Rifle (3), Chameleon Suit (7), Demolition Rig (5)

Average Salary: 9 firebirds/month

Cybercorps

The Church may have frowned on the way houses altered and modified their troops, but no one could deny the effectiveness of these warriors — or their expense. Nobles picked troops who had already proven themselves as among the best to undergo costly cybernetic enhancement surgery. This equipment was not like the expensive armor and weapons given to other elite forces — these tools could not be passed on to another soldier after their current user died or retired. For this reason their recipients were usually the most loyal troops as well, though this was not always the case. Most cyberlegionnaires are still in their house's military, but a few have left, either retiring or going on the lam.

The cybercorps generally served as a mobile reserve, either moving to stop enemy breakthroughs or to exploit ones created by their own side. They also led critical assaults, but nobles tried not to use their most expensive troops in this fashion too often. Instead they kept them in the rear, ready to strike when the moment was right.

Characteristics: Tech, Alien

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Redemption (High-Tech), Warfare (Military Tactics)

Benefices: Cyberlimb (12), Goliath Skin (10), Lithe Wire (7), Omnisocket (5), Shoulder Mounted SMG (6), Standard Shield (5), Assault Rifle (3)

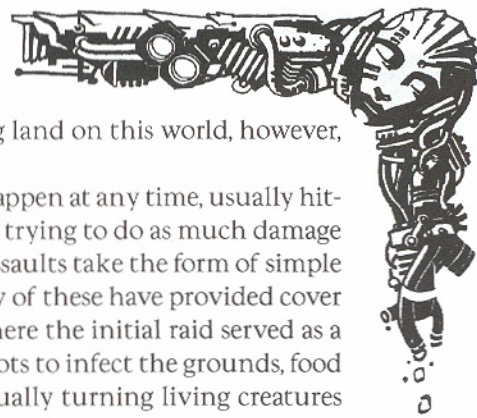
Afflictions: Vendetta with Modifying House (3), Obligation to Modifying House (2)

Average Salary: 15 firebirds/month

Chemical Shock Troops

Like the cybercorps, chemical shock troops are made, not born. Their modifications just take a little longer, though they have at least as many ugly side effects. The Church objects to these forces even more strenuously than they do the cybercorps, because at least cybernetically enhanced troops have the option to one day detach their foul devices. Most chem troops enter the labs before they hit puberty and come out a few years later, never to be rid of the effects of their "enhancements."

These units do not cost houses as much as the cybercorps do, and as a result they often see front-line action. During the Emperor Wars, some houses began chemically enhancing large numbers of their soldiers, cranking them out as quickly as possible. These processes were not well-monitored, so more than a few of the troops who



survived both the process and the wars now suffer from a wide variety of nasty side effects.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Passion, Alien

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Remedy, Search, Stoic Body, Survival

Blessings: Maximum Strength +2 (4), Maximum Dexterity +2 (4), Maximum Endurance +2 (4)

Curses: Surly (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert when upset)

Benefices: Assault Rifle (3), Chameleon Suit (7), Demolition Rig (5)

Afflictions: Addicted to combat drugs (+2)

Average Salary: 9 firebirds/month

The Stigmata Garrison

While these troops fulfill many of the same roles as regular army forces, their exceptional level of training and dedication to fighting one opponent (Symbiots) leaves little doubt as to their classification among the special forces. Even the cooks and maintenance workers know how to fight better than most professional soldiers — and they get plenty of opportunities to practice their skills.

The majority of the troops on Stigmata are freemen who joined up for the chance to gain their own land. Anyone who serves 10 years on the planet is rewarded with a plot of land, and the land on Stigmata is good. A huge percentage of the planet is arable, and significant mineral

deposits still exist. Owning land on this world, however, has a huge risk attached.

Symbiot attacks can happen at any time, usually hitting without warning and trying to do as much damage as possible. Most of these assaults take the form of simple raids, though at least a few of these have provided cover for deeper infiltrations, where the initial raid served as a feint to allow other Symbiots to infect the grounds, food supply or whatever, eventually turning living creatures on the base into Symbiots.

Of course, not all these attacks are raids. The Stigmata Garrison has no way of knowing which attack might turn into the real thing, a full-scale invasion aimed at driving them off the planet. All they know is that at some point the sky will fill with Symbiot blowships and grapplers, dropping hordes of reavers, butchers, arcers and new creations never before encountered. Then the entire Stigmata Garrison goes to war, with every man, woman and child grabbing a gun.

The last time this happened was years ago, when then-Garrison Commander Carmetha Decados took the Garrison off-planet to attack Istakhr and other al-Malik worlds, as well as to cement her own power among the Decados. The gateway to the Known Worlds had almost fallen when Alexius brought his own forces (and a strong contingent of Muster troops from Bannockburn) to its relief.





Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Perception

Natural skills: Dodge, Fight, Impress, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Drive (Landcraft), Lore (Symbiots), Remedy, Stoic Body, Survival, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Blessings: Hero (2 pts: +2 Impress)

Benefices: Flamegun (7) or Blaster Pistol (7), Plate Armor (3), Demolition Rig (5)

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month

The Phoenix Guard

While the Stigmata Garrison has the reputation as the mightiest special force, the Emperor's personal bodyguards would like to contest this distinction. Hand picked from legionnaires who served under Alexius during the Emperor Wars, this legion of hardened veterans can choose from the best equipment available in the Known Worlds. These are many of the same troops who came to Stigmata's relief during the last Symbiot assault.

Now the Phoenix Guard's primary duty is protecting the Emperor, but Alexius has made no secret of the fact that he uses these legions for other roles as well. They have chased pirates, fought Vuldrok raiders and helped put down a peasant rebellion on Tethys. Other houses mutter that Alexius just likes to use the Phoenix Guard to remind other houses of the power at his disposal.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Perception

Natural skills: Fight, Impress, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Drive (Landcraft), Remedy, Search, Stoic Mind, Survival, Tracking

Benefices: Blaster Rifle (9), Powered Ceramsteel Armor (12)

Average Salary: 15 firebirds/month

Guerrillas

Guerrilla warriors may not make up part of a regular army, but they can have as much impact as a legion of soldiers in disrupting the enemy. They specialize in harassing, raiding or sabotaging an adversary's operations, attacking quickly and leaving even faster. Most guerrillas operate out of ideological reasons, though warring houses have funded such operations when it suited their purposes.

Some of the best known guerrilla operations include the anti-Li Halan rebels on Midian, the religious zealots on Malignatius, and the sympathizers of minor houses on a number of different worlds. A pro-Republic movement is growing on the recently rediscovered world of Iver, but word of this has yet to spread through the Known Worlds. Some of these movements have degenerated, losing their lofty aims and becoming little more than extortion rackets, but most have stayed true to their goals.

Most of the indigenous rebel forces which cropped up during the Emperor Wars have disappeared, either due to violent suppression or lack of dedicated followers. Some grew up during intrahouse feuds, as one branch or another tried to take over the family, and went away once the house restored order. A few disappeared after accomplishing their goals, like the pro-Alexius faction on Tethys, which threatened Hazat lands until that house recognized him as Emperor.

These groups rarely have standardized equipment, generally equipping themselves with a wide variety of weapons, and these weapons generally determine what kind of operations the guerrillas can carry out. Groups with melee weapons and only a few firearms will generally try to waylay lone soldiers or enemy sympathizers. Guerrillas with access to heavy weapons and explosives will target supply trains, communication facilities and may even engage regular soldiers in combat.

Freedom Fighter

This guerrilla has dedicated himself to some cause, and will do everything he can to bring it to fruition. He has probably severed ties with his family and old occupation, and now lives off the land and contributions from sympathizers.

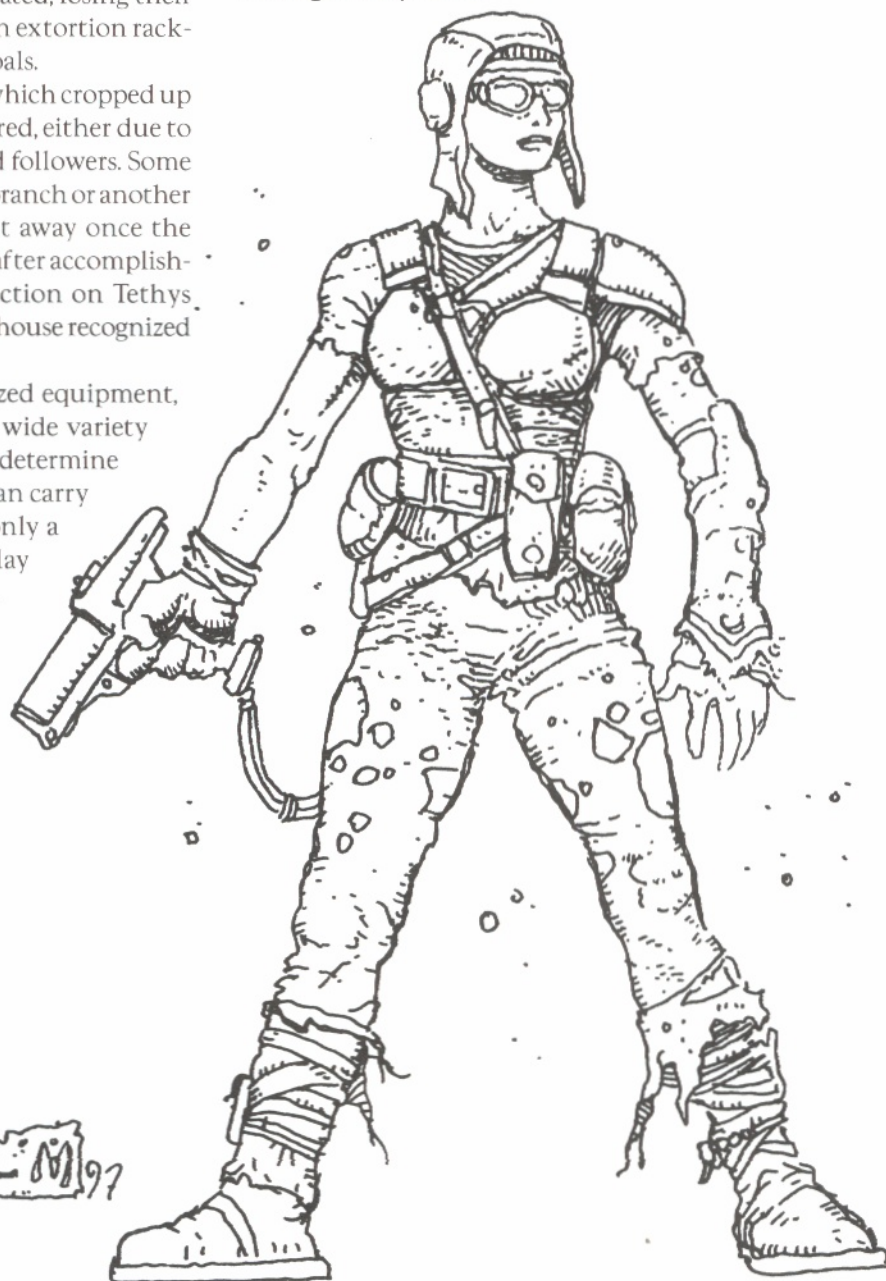
Characteristics: Dexterity, Extrovert

Natural skills: Fight, Impress, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Knavery, Lore (one planet), Remedy, Survival

Benefices: Assault Rifle (3), Grenade, Knife, Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: none



Air Force

Air power varies dramatically from planet to planet. On some worlds it makes up the bulk of military spending, while on others it has almost no role. Still, most legions view only a posting in space as more prestigious. Some of the most famous air legions are the Sky Drakes of Severus, who protect House Decados's homeworld, and the Birds of Prey, which Emperor Alexius commands on Byzantium Secundus, Delphi and wherever else they are needed. Four main kinds of troops make up most air legions: pilots, gunners/bombardiers, mechanics and air traffic controllers/radar specialists.

Pilot

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Perception, Tech

Natural skills: Observe, Shoot

Learned skills: Drive Aircraft, Lore (Regional), Read Urthtech, Science (Astronomy, Meteorology), Think Machine, Warfare (Gunnery)

Benefices: Medium Autofeed (2), Knife, Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 10 firebirds/month

Gunner/Bombardier

Characteristics: Dexterity, Perception, Tech

Natural skills: Shoot

Learned skills: Lore (Terrain), Read Urthtech, Warfare (Artillery), Warfare (Gunnery)

Benefices: Medium Autofeed (2), Knife, Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 9 firebirds/month

Aircraft Mechanic

Characteristics: Wits, Tech

Natural skills: Observe

Learned skills: Read Urthtech, Redemption (High Tech, Mech, Volt), Science (Physics)

Benefices: High Tech Tools (5), Mech Tools (1), Volt Tools (1)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Air Traffic Control / Radar Specialist

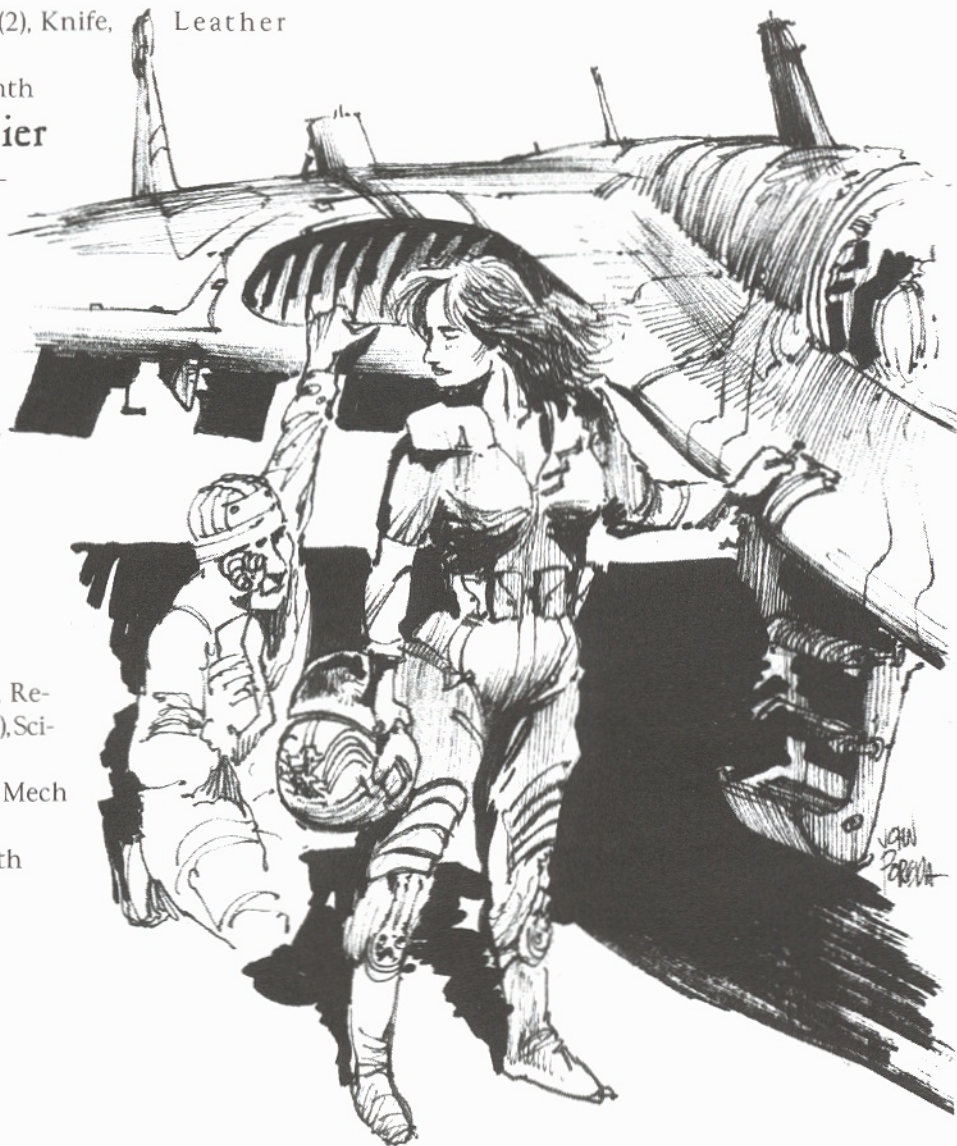
Characteristics: Wits, Perception, Tech, Calm

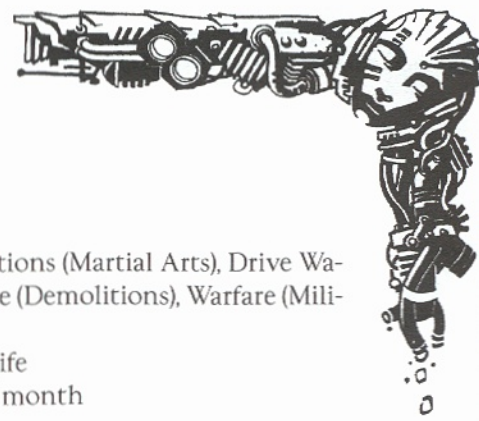
Natural skills: Observe

Learned skills: Lore (Regional), Read Urthtech, Science (Astronomy, Meteorology), Think Machine, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Benefices: High Tech Tools (5), Volt Tools (1)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month





Sea Navy

On planets with significant bodies of water the navy plays as much (if not more) of a role than does the air force. Several sea navies have gained renown, including the massive Seven Fleets Navy on Byzantium Secundus, the Hazat's Aragon fleets and House Decados's Severus navy. The League has a naval contingent (or several depending on who you believe) on the water planet Madoc, but the chain of authority there is somewhat unclear. Naval troops are, in general, adventurous types always seeking the next port of call and having little understanding of "landlubbers" or being tied down to any one location.

There are four main types of naval troops, including technicians, frogmen, gunners and helmsmen. Two associated groups are the coast guards and the sea marines.

Technicians

Characteristics: Wits, Perception, Tech

Natural skills: Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Read Urthtech, Redemption (Mech, Volt), Science (Physics)

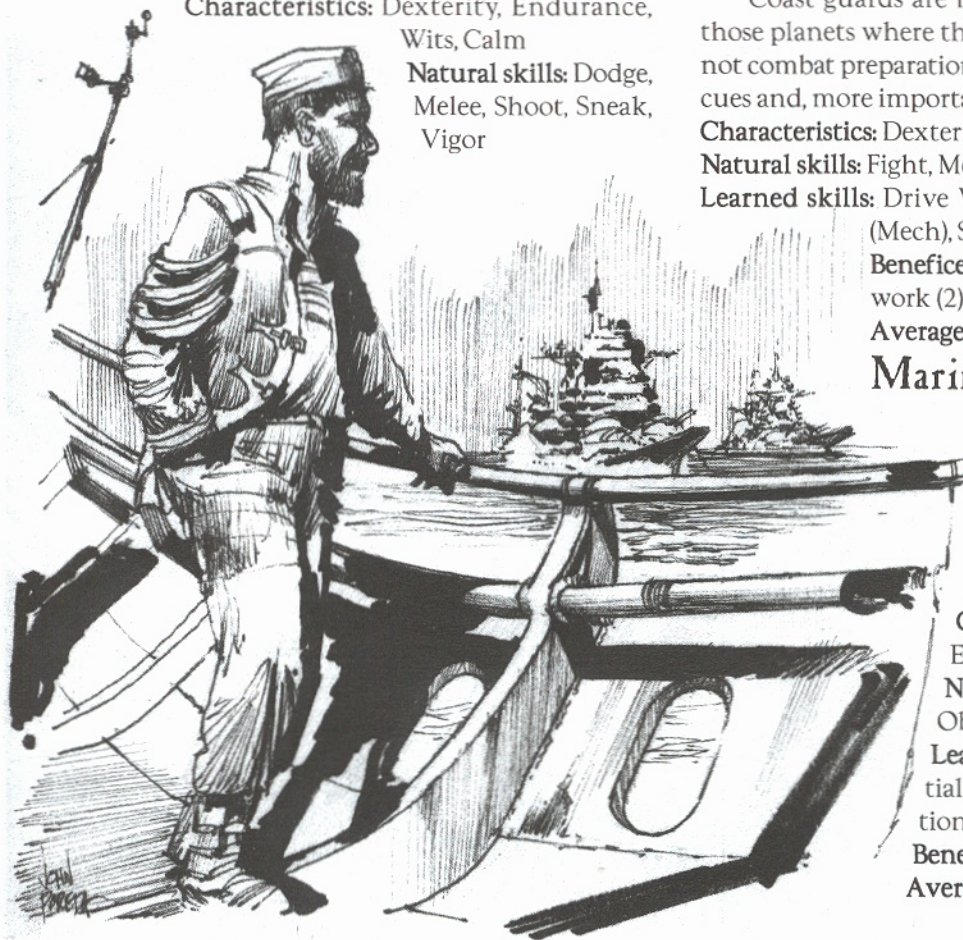
Benefices: High Tech Tools (3), Mech Tools (2), Volt Tools (1)

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month

Frogmen

Characteristics: Dexterity, Endurance, Wits, Calm

Natural skills: Dodge, Melee, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor



Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Drive Watercraft, Stoic Body, Warfare (Demolitions), Warfare (Military Tactics)

Benefices: Speargun (3), Knife

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Gunners

Characteristics: Dexterity, Perception, Tech, Passion

Natural skills: Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Mech Redemption, Warfare (Artillery), Warfare (Gunnery)

Benefices: Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 5 firebirds/month

Helmsmen

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Tech

Natural skills: Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Drive Watercraft, Lore (Regional), Read Urthtech, Science (Meteorology), Think Machine, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Benefices: Leather Jerkin

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Coast Guard Tradewatchmen

Coast guards are not found on all planets, and on those planets where they do exist their main objective is not combat preparation. Instead they train to handle rescues and, more importantly, prevent smuggling.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Perception, Wits

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Drive Watercraft, Inquiry, Redemption (Mech), Search

Benefices: Submachine Gun (3), Gossip Network (2)

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month

Marines

The marines' main duty is to repel enemy boarders and seize other people's ships. On some worlds they also handle amphibious assaults and special operations.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Perception

Natural skills: Dodge, Fight, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Tracking, Warfare (Demolitions, Military Tactics)

Benefices: Assault Rifle (7), Synthsilk (7)

Average Salary: 4 firebirds/month



Space Legions

Probably the most glamorous post in the legions of the Known Worlds is space, on board a warship cruising between the stars. This is the recruiting patter that the houses use to get freemen to sign up for these duties, which generally consist of months of growing boredom punctuated by moments of extreme danger. If something goes seriously wrong on a spaceship, it is unlikely anyone will survive.

Most of the legionnaires on a spaceship carry out a variety of different jobs. Specialization is not a desirable trait, for there are not enough trained spacers to handle every role. This kind of training and experience does not come easily. Effective spacers must know how to read, work with tools and deal with technology. Few freemen have these skills and almost no adult peasants can learn them. Thus spacers have to know how to do a little bit of everything.

The most important spacer duties involve maintenance. Most spaceships have sailed between the stars for generations, and something invariably goes wrong with them after every jump. These bugs range from relatively small things like the shipboard entertainment systems shorting out to more important problems, like the air purifiers shutting down. Since usually more than one sys-

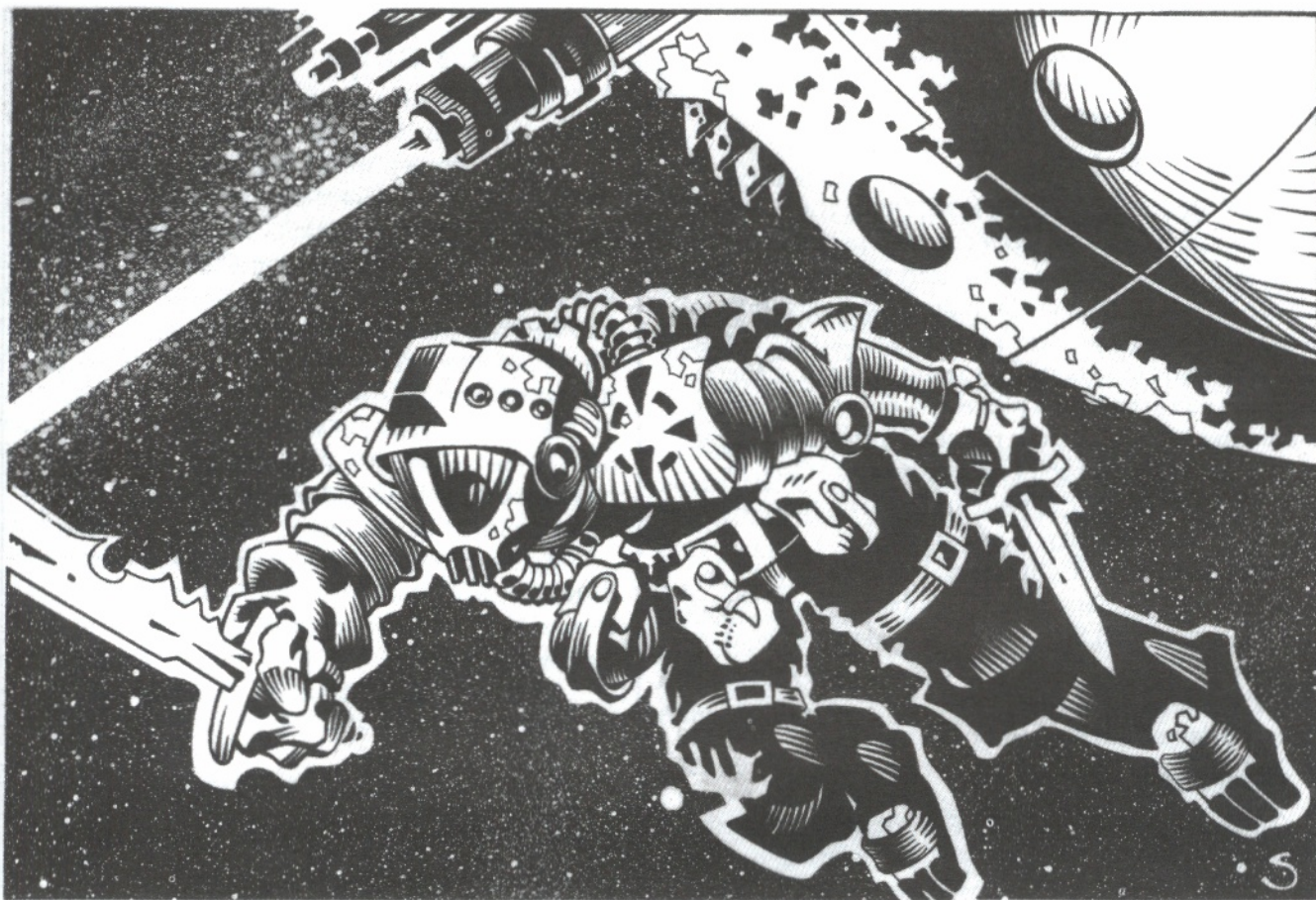
tem will break down at a time, almost the entire crew will be on maintenance duties. Of course, this assumes that player characters have not gotten into fights on board ship and shot up the life support.

Flying the ship is the next most important duty. Some people have the false notion that all a spacer has to do is aim his vessel at a jumpgate and then sit back to enjoy the ride. Flying a spaceship involves a lot more than that. First of all, the navigator has to calculate the angle and speed at which he has to make the jump. At the speeds these ships travel, it may have gone hundreds or even thousands of miles before completing a turn. Entering a jump at the wrong trajectory can send a ship hundreds of thousands of miles off course, and correcting this sort of error can eat through huge amounts of a ship's fuel.

The pilot's job is to keep the ship on course and constantly correct any errors in its path. Since the flight path is calculated based on a steady acceleration and deceleration, pilots constantly find themselves having to make slight adjustments. Almost no ship can maintain steady speeds any more.

Gunnery is another important spacer skill, involving a knowledge of the weapons, computer targeting devices and pilot tactics. Almost all ships have guns, and while it





would seem that two ships would have a difficult time finding each other in the vastness of space, space battles are not uncommon. They usually happen near a system's main planet but have been known to happen elsewhere. The ships have usually slowed to a manageable speed by the time they near the planet.

Even when everything works on a spaceship, spacers find themselves with plenty to do. Somebody has to keep this ancient, oily barge clean. Old engines require constant maintenance to keep them from breaking down even more often. Weapons need regular cleanings to keep them at optimal performance. Uniforms need to be mended and food needs to be prepared. Somebody has to man the sensors and somebody else has to repair any damage that might come from collisions with space debris, meteors and the like.

All in all, life on a spaceship lacks much of the glamour which land-bound admirers believe it has. Spacers stay very busy, but much of the work involves repetitious drudgery. During the Emperor Wars warships maintained a constant state of alertness, because enemy vessels could come hurtling through a jump at any time. Since the Wars ended, only ships anticipating action stay always at the ready. This includes ships near the Vuldrok or Kurga borders and the Stigmata fleet.

Since it is expensive to keep ships in space, most vessels now spend most of their time docked. Others are on

patrol against pirates while a few maintain guard at a system's jumpgate. For instance, the al-Malik keep a fleet of at least five ships constantly at the Istakhr jumpgate, on the alert for smugglers, Symbiots or an even worse threat — Decados spies.

Only a few warships regularly travel between the stars. The guilds still send out their fleet, ostensibly to guard merchant ships, though nobles who owe the League money object to this show of force. Armed Church vessels occasionally accompany high-ranking priests, especially to planets where faith is somewhat lacking. Noble warships rarely leave their own hegemonies, and they risk sparking a diplomatic incident when entering other houses' territory. Warships on such missions often travel with their weapons covered, though it does not take long to uncover them.

Sailor

These are the legionnaires who make up the bulk of the space force. Most know how to handle most tasks on a ship, though they would probably be out of their depth trying to run the whole thing. They also have a basic level of combat training, mainly for repelling boarding attacks, but not much more than that.

Characteristics: Tech

Natural skills: Fight, Melee

Learned skills: Drive (Spacecraft), Gambling, Read Urthish,

Redemption (Craft or Mech or High-Tech or Volt),
Spacesuit, Think Machine, Warfare (Gunnery)

Benefices: Light Autofeed (1)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Fighter Pilot

These are the stars of the space fleets, the hot-shot Archangel pilots who maneuver their ships in and out of battle with reckless abandon. Fighters play a special role in space battles, for they are far more maneuverable than capital ships — and far more expendable. Carriers release flights of fighters and bombers to rampage against enemy fleets, and more than a few pirates rely only on fighters to ravage shipping. While these fighters have only a limited range and no jump capability, they accelerate faster than most capital ships and can twist and turn far more ably.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Tech, Extrovert

Natural skills: Charm, Fight, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Drive (Spacecraft), Gambling, Read Urthish, Science (Astronomy), Spacesuit, Think Machine, Warfare (Gunnery)

Benefices: Light Autofeed (1)

Average Salary: 10 firebirds/month

Marauder

These space legionnaires have the reputation as some of the craziest warriors in existence. They send themselves hurtling out of airlocks at enemy ships, hoping that they accurately lined themselves up with their targets. If not, they drift helplessly until (if) one of their ships comes to retrieve them. Even if they hit their targets they have to blow a hole in the ship and charge in against what usually turn out to be vastly superior numbers. Still, the houses seem to have little difficulty recruiting new Marauders. The post gives uneducated peasants the chance to leave their old existences behind and live new ones of excitement and danger. All it could cost them are their lives.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Passion

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Gambling, Lockpicking, Spacesuit, Warfare (Demolitions)

Benefices: Splinter Rifle (7), Axe, NAS Suit (5), Demolition Rig (5)

Average Salary: 8 firebirds/month

Famous Ships

Spaceships of the Emperor Wars often obtained a legendary status, with tales of their exploits passing through the Known Worlds. Sailors who could claim to have served on one of these found themselves the objects of attention and admiration, and positions on the most famous ships are the most sought after. Unlike navies of the twentieth century, the houses do not use a consistent naming structure for the vessels. Their names are usually left up to the noble who commissioned their construction.

Darius: Imperial Dreadnought. The most common name for Alexius's Imperial flagship.

Theodisia: Al-Malik dreadnought. Said to be the most beautiful warship ever.

Diamond Gaze: Al-Malik carrier. Its fighters have distinguished themselves against Vuldrok raiders, House Hawkwood, Decados, Li Halan and the Symbiots.

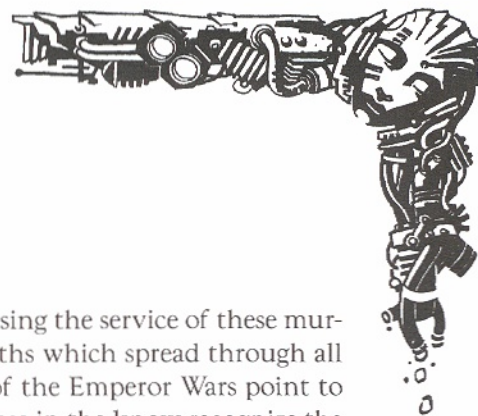
Arabian Stallion: Hazat Dreadnought. Survived the Siege of Jericho and is now engaged in the Kurga system.

Last Breath: Decados Raider. This stealth ship has struck without warning in at least a dozen systems, and may have caused even more damage than has been reported. Hawkwoods always seem to blame this vessel when one of their ships goes missing.

Honjo: Missing Li Halan destroyer. Went on a trip to a fabled lost world but never came back. Believed destroyed by al-Malik.

Michalengelo: Charioteer cruiser for hire. Fought for every one of the houses during the Emperor Wars.

Phlogiston V: Church dreadnought. Flagship of the Patriarch's fleet.



Intelligence

The intelligence-gathering organizations of the Known Worlds have nowhere near the structure of those that existed before and during the Diaspora, but they are still very effective. Every house has its own agents, though they may be split up in any of a variety of ways. For instance, while the Decados share a house intelligence agency, the Jakovian Agency, every Decados of any merit has her own operatives as well. Most Li Halan have a relative involved with the Hidden Martyrs. Many Hawkwoods insist that they have no involvement with such underhanded dealings, all the while trying to pump the Imperial Eye for information.

Of course, intelligence gathering is not the only duty of these groups. They also spread misinformation and propaganda, keep tabs on the local populace, carry out counter-intelligence duties and handle occasional assassinations.

Spy

These spooks make up the heart of any intelligence agency. The use of machines to collect data has declined dramatically and human intel is the mainstay. A good agent can use bribes, force, stealth and more to find out what he needs to know. A bad agent is dead.

Characteristics: Wits, Perception, Calm

Natural skills: Observe, Sneak

Learned skills: Bureaucracy, Inquiry, Knavery, Lockpicking, Read Urthish, Search, Sleight of Hand, Social (Acting), Streetwise

Benefices: Derringer (1), Whisper Pin (2), Thieves' Keys (1)

Average Salary: 10 firebirds/month

Assassin

Few nobles admit to using the service of these murderers, but the rash of deaths which spread through all the houses at the height of the Emperor Wars point to their popularity. While those in the know recognize the Slayers guild as the premier source of killers, all the noble houses have at least a few people on staff to handle such important jobs.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Perception

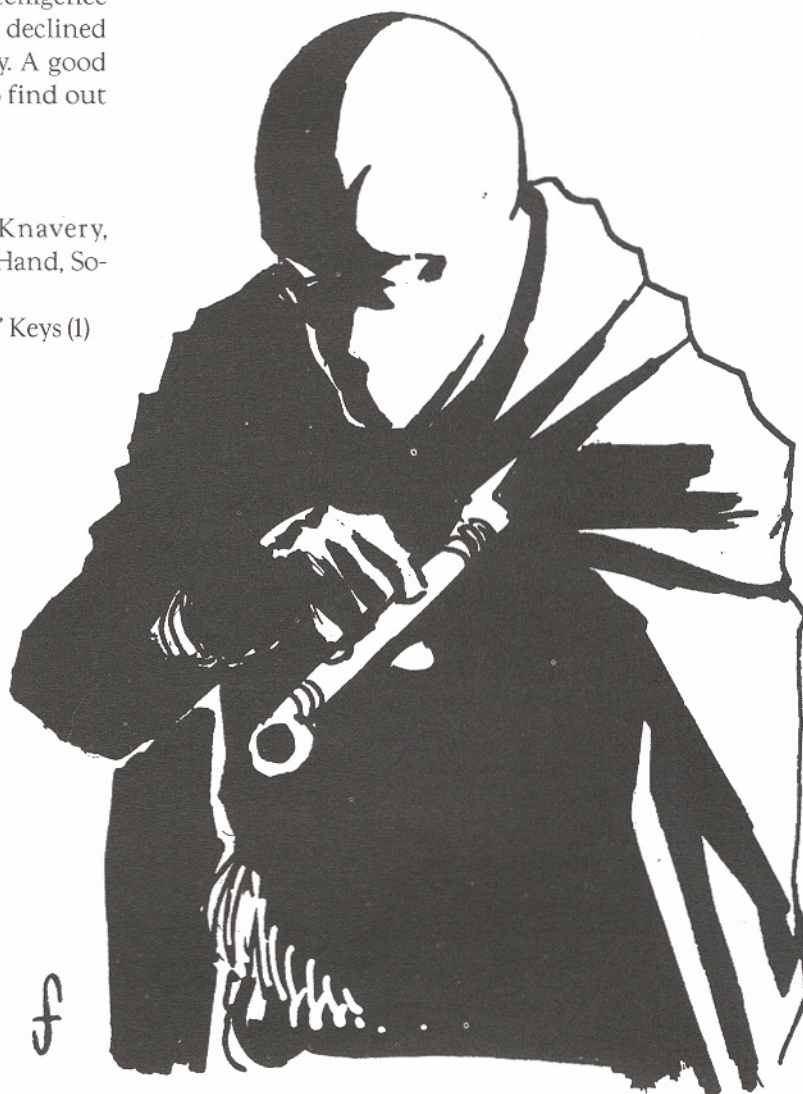
Natural skills: Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak

Learned skills: Archery, Crossbow, Disguise, Knavery, Lockpicking, Lore (Poisons), Sleight of Hand, Streetwise, Tracking, Warfare (Demolitions)

Benefices: Sniper Rifle (3), Palm Laser (3), Spring Knife (1), Chameleon Suit (7), Demolition Rig (5), Secrets (1)

Afflictions: Vendetta (3)

Average Salary: 20 firebirds/month



Weird Forces

While the previously listed units make up the vast bulk of the Known Worlds legionnaires, more than a few other legions do not fit into any of the above categories. These are the many weird forces of the fiftieth century. They range from alien forces to special high-tech units to theurgists to psychics to the fearsome Grimsons. The only thing these units have in common is their uniqueness and special requirements to join.

They all have special uses as well, and most operate independently or in association with only a few other legions. For instance, few Li Halan units would willingly have anything to do with the notorious Vorox Commandos, while the Manifest Light prefers to work with the best troops on Stigmata. On the other hand, while the Grimsons' power and unpredictability scare other legions, their mere appearance in battle can inspire other soldiers to all new heroics. Then again, doppleganger assassins almost always work alone.

Vorox Commandos

The Li Halan have long sought ways to use their Vorox underlings in war. After all, with the plethora of physical advantages, they could run roughshod over almost anyone. Unfortunately, things have not turned out as well as expected. First of all, few humans want anything to do with Vorox, and finding troops to work with these furred monstrosities is a problem. Secondly, even fewer Vorox take to the discipline of military life. Finally, the Li Halan are unwilling to give the Vorox the equipment which would make them truly formidable in combat. At one point the Li Halan even tried to use feral Vorox in special units with all their claws still attached. Needless to say, these Vorox ended up causing more damage to the Li Halan than their enemies, and were either destroyed or released back onto Vorox, though at least a few escaped during the chaos of battle.

The end result is that many Li Halan include Vorox in their households but not in their armies. The exception to this is the Vorox Commandos, several small forces of civilized Vorox under the command of one of their own nobles. These nobles receive a fair amount of money from the Li Halan to use their own troops for the good of the house, and these troops usually carry out special missions. They are especially effective in pacifying areas threatened by rebellion. For instance, Duchess Kim Khao Li Halan of Rampart recently requested two small troops of commandos, each numbering under 100 Vorox, to help subdue unhappy natives. The Vorox have just arrived, but the Li Halan have high hopes for them. The Duchess also hopes they might be able to destroy some Xyll Warbeasts which plague the planet.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance
Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Impress, Shoot, Vigor
Learned skills: Speak Urthish, Survival, Tracking
Blessings: Predatory (0), Giant (5), Bite (3), Extra Limbs (5), Sensitive Smell (1)
Curses: Uncouth (+2), Scary (+2)
Benefices: Assault Rifle (3), Glankesh (2), Half Plate (2)
Average Salary: 4 firebirds/month

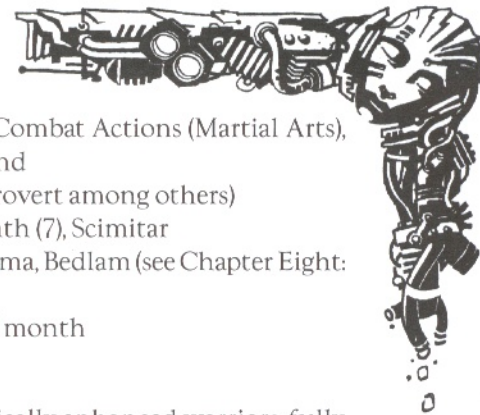
Manifest Light

Stigmata's Manifest Light grew out of Friar (now Saint) Berthold's original disciples, who he trained in theurgical ways to defeat the Symbiots. Still primarily consisting of Eskatonics seeking enlightenment amongst the evil of the Symbiots, this group has also attracted Orthodox priests, Avestite laymen, Amalthean healers and even a few Hesychast theurgists.

This group's main role has changed over the years. Berthold's first followers fought in the front lines, leading charges against Symbiot hordes. Now they tend to hang back more, supporting attacks by Brother Battle knights or the Stigmata Garrison. They call down blessings, attempt to disrupt Symbiot attacks and cast group rituals of awesome power. They have a great deal of leeway to act as they see fit, but have little problem coordinating with other elite units. Occasionally they use their powers on themselves and leap into battle, but this is becoming rarer and rarer.

Almost all of the Manifest Light's followers have developed their theurgical abilities. While many come from other planets seeking learning and a chance to do good, a growing number come from Stigmata natives who show a true dedication to their faith. Some priests wonder whether these natives are truly loyal to the Church, since the only ones they meet are dedicated primarily to fighting the Symbiots. Some Orthodox leaders wonder if these theurgists are beginning to veer from their original faith and developing a new, possibly heretical one.

Characteristics: Wits, Faith, Theurgy
Natural skills: Dodge, Impress, Melee, Shoot, Vigor
Learned skills: Academia, Focus, Inquiry, Lore (Symbiots), Remedy, Speak Latin, Stoic Mind, Survival, Warfare (Military Tactics)
Blessings: Disciplined (2 pts: +2 Calm in combat situations)
Benefices: Flamegun (7), Standard Shield (5)
Rituals: The Prophet's Holy Blessing, The Devotional Liturgy, The Laying on of Hands, The Prophet's Censure, Shield of Faith, Consecration, Armor of the Pancreator, Faithful Heart, Dispersal of Darkness, Second Sight, All-Seeing Eye, Scent of Evil, Tortures of the Damned, Cleansing, Healing Hand of Saint Amalthea, Sanctuary
Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month



Dervishes

All the houses have sought to use psychic warriors at one time or another, and some have had more success than others. The Decados make little pretense of hiding their psychic units and the al-Malik tell stories of the successes their psychic warriors had. Houses Hawkwood and Li Halan never had particular success with these legions, but the same cannot be said of the Hazat. The Hazat have done their best to keep their program quiet, but the name they gave their psychic warriors has become applied to all of this type — the dervishes.

Dervishes do especially well on assignments no one else can handle. Their wide range of powers, and the fact that most of their opponents have no idea what these powers are, means they can accomplish a wide variety of feats. The Hazat have managed to put together dervish legions of almost 1,000 troops (most of whom had only a limited gift for psi talents), but use these forces extremely sparingly.

More disturbing is the rumor that the Hazat's training program drew inspiration from the teachings of Zegai, a heretical prophet from Grail. Her disciples, rumored to be flagellants and child-killers, had a great deal of power on that planet more than a century ago, before the Inquisition finally destroyed them.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Ego, Psi

Natural skills: Dodge, Fight, Melee, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Academia, Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Focus, Stoic Body, Stoic Mind

Curse: Weird (+1 pts: -1 Extrovert among others)

Benefices: SMG (3), Stiffsynth (7), Scimitar

Psychic Paths: Far Hand, Soma, Bedlam (see Chapter Eight: Rules)

Average Salary: 6 firebirds/month

Grimsons

Chemically and genetically enhanced warriors, fully armed and armored Grimsos can go hand-to-tread with a tank and have a fair chance of victory. These super soldiers have boosted their strength, reactions, damage resistance, speed and more, and even added in other improvements like organic weaponry, heightened senses and more.

By the same token, most Grimsos and ex-Grimsons have no hope of passing in normal society. Most are huge, averaging over seven-feet tall and 400-500 pounds, with massively oversized muscles and freakish biological implants. Since many of their changes have taken place on a genetic and chromosomal level, they are likely to pass their mutations on to their offspring, and this often happens in weird and unexpected ways. Their only home is among others of their kind, and the noble houses have made it harder for them to associate with their own kind. Under pressure from the Church, the houses have officially eliminated their Grimson programs and begun to phase out Grimson legions. Some Grimsos have joined the Muster



or become bodyguards, but most people with whom they deal feel exceptionally uncomfortable in their presence.

Gamemasters should only let players take the role of a Grimson after careful consideration. These aberrations have a great deal of raw power at their disposal, as well as a huge burden. Feared by peasants, condemned by priests, used as scapegoats for the excesses of the Emperor Wars, lacking the secret communities which the Changed have formed, these outcasts only find peace in battle.

Characteristics: Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Alien

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Impress, Shoot, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Survival, Tracking, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Blessings: Giant (5), Maximum Strength +5 (10), Maximum Dexterity +5 (10), Maximum Endurance +5 (10), any other Changed Blessings (see Chapter Seven: The Changed)

Curses: Monstrous (+3), Scary (+2), Unnerving (+2)

Benefices: Dreskel Grenade Launcher (5), Chainmail (2), Two-handed sword, variety of grenades

Afflictions: Cloistered (+1)

Average Salary: 12 firebirds/month

Doppelganger Assassins

Doppelgangers, or metonyms, have extremely fluid muscular systems. Some have developed enough control of their bodies that they can take whatever shape they so desire. The noble houses have no problem seeing the value of this ability and turning it to their own purposes — primarily spying and assassinations. Doppelgangers assassins are included as members of the Changed, however, and the discovery that a noble has employed their services could be grounds for excommunication. The Slayers guild claims to forbid membership to such assassins, though more than a few people doubt the veracity of that claim.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Perception, Alien

Natural skills: Charm, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak

Learned skills: Disguise, Knavery, Lockpicking, Lore (Poisons), Sleight of Hand, Streetwise, Tracking, Warfare (Demolitions)

Blessings: Shape Change (5)

Benefices: Palm Laser (3), Spring Knife (1), Demolition Rig (5), Makeup Kit (1)

Afflictions: Dark Secret (+3), Vendetta (+3)

Average Salary: 25 firebirds/month

League Tech Forces

The League lacks the sheer manpower of the noble houses and Church legions but likes to brag about the quality of its troops. Much of this bragging is unfounded, and for the most part barely trained peasants fill its legions, but some of its forces have no equal in the Known Worlds. The tech legions are one such group. These legions have no common form, coming equipped with whatever odd equipment they acquire or their patrons give them.

Each guild in the League has an obligation to supply troops for the common good, and they often vie to spon-

sor the most effective tech forces. The most famous come from the Charioteers and Engineers, who go out of their way to find the most unique (some say craziest) equipment they can. Taffy guns, grapplers, blasters, electricity channelers, neural disrupters and more all find their place in these small legions. The diversity of equipment means that while these legions can fill a wide variety of functions, there is no telling exactly how effective they might be.

Gamemasters should keep in mind that guilds other than the five leading ones sponsor tech legions, though not as extensively. No one should discount the troops supplied by the Courtesans; expect them to have their own special combat techniques.

The troops themselves are often highly talented, with a strong *esprit de corps*, but still extremely individualistic. Soldiers can choose their own equipment, and no two squads will have the same equipment. Tech legionnaires have a reputations for bizarreness, and are usually most happy trying out some new piece of untested equipment.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Tech, Wits

Natural skills: Fight, Melee, Observe, Shoot, Sneak, Vigor

Learned skills: Combat Actions (Martial Arts), Redemption (Mech, High-Tech), Spacesuit, Warfare (Military Tactics)

Benefices: Extremely variable, but characters should be ready to spend at least 15 points on weapons and armor

Average Salary: 20 firebirds/month

Think Machine Warriors

The title "think machine warriors" covers a wide range of tech specialists capable of severely disrupting an enemy's technological infrastructure or protecting their own. Often specialists in the entourage of a powerful noble or guildsman, these troops know how to interfere with communications, corrupt think machines and cause an enemy's equipment to work against him.

The League is the main home of these troops, and is also the faction most vulnerable to their attacks. The League prides itself on the lines of communications it has set up to facilitate its own activities, and these lines often become the battlefields during internal power struggles. For instant, many guilds share information over their think machines, especially on Leagueheim, but have certain information that should only be accessible to properly ranked individuals. Think machine warriors have the duty of trying to access their enemy's information while protecting their own. They also strive to monitor enemy communications.

Think machine warriors generally wage war from the monitors of their own think machines, and rarely place themselves in physical danger. Casualties in their battles are usually their own think machines, victims to enemy corruptions. Rumors do exist of cybernetically or psychically enhanced think machine warriors who can access think machines without need of their own, and whose battles put their own lives at risk, but most intelligent

beings scoff at such stories.

Characteristics: Wits, Perception, Tech

Natural skills: Observe, Sneak

Learned skills: Cryptography, Inquiry, Knavery, Read Urthtech, Redemption (Mech, High-Tech, Volt), Science (Think Machines), Search, Think Machines

Benefices: Think Machine (2-5), High Tech Tools (3), Mech Tools (2), Volt Tools (1)

Average Salary: 30 firebirds/month

Thought Police

Often a part of a house's intelligence service, thought police are included here because of the methods they often employ. Charged with ensuring a populace's loyalty and weeding out traitors, they become experts in propaganda, interrogation, spying and other traditional areas of intelligence work. They also make no bones about employing psychics or, in the case of House Li Halan, theurgists.

Since most people only have those rights which their overlords permit them to have, they rarely have legal protection against someone studying their aura for indications of disloyalty. They have even less protection against someone using occult means to try to compel loyalty. Characters who go up against thought police should try to get out of their clutches. The longer they stay in their possession, the more likely the brainwashing is to stick.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Perception, Extrovert, Psi or Theurgy

Natural skills: Fight, Impress, Melee, Observe, Remedy, Shoot, Sneak

Learned skills: Bureaucracy, Inquiry, Knavery, Lockpicking, Read Urthish, Search, Social (Debate), Streetwise, Torture

Benefices: Heavy Revolver (3), Squawker (1), Leather Jerkin

Psychic Paths: Bonding, Psyche, Sixth Sense

Theurgical Rituals: Orthodox, Avestite

Average Salary: 20 firebirds/month





BRIDGES-97



Chapter Six: Aliens

As evidenced by the Children of the Ur, Vorox, Vau and Symbiots, sentience is by no means a unique gift to humans. Although certain intolerant priests like to believe that humans are the only truly intelligent beings and that aliens only mimic sentience — thanks to demonic powers — the number and character of sentient races proves otherwise.

Indeed, humanity's first contact with a sentient race passed unnoticed for a long while. Few accorded the Shantor sentience until tool-use hinted otherwise; subsequent studies showed that these aliens had their own culture and philosophy — hallmarks of sentience. But years passed between first contact and final acceptance of a fellow sentient race.

Contrary to most idealists' visions of such a momentous event, it actually changed human consciousness very little. If anything, it only increased a competitive streak, as if humans unconsciously did not want to accept that they were not the unique beings they thought they were. After years of fearing that they were alone in the void, when siblings finally arrived, they tried to ignore them — like a single child in a family with a newborn, humanity grew jealous rather than loving.

This was not the case with all humans, of course. But the few, powerful and often intolerant who governed the course of human nations — in this case, the zaibatsu of the First Republic — wrote the pages of history. The result was that most aliens encountered during the Diaspora suffered from the meeting. It seems that no creature (with the possible exception of the Symbiots) is so territorial as humankind, who grabbed all the land they could on any planet available — even if it meant relocating native sentients.

While the Second Republic saw the rise of a more enlightened view, it was slow in changing the realities of alien existence. Although many rights were accorded and some land returned, it was too little, too late. When the Fall came, most of these reforms were stripped away within decades.

Today, most alien sentients live in the shadow of human culture. Despite the propaganda from the more hateful or radical elements in human society, most of these aliens bear only mild resentment: if given power and freedom, many would strive to fit into human society rather than try to tear it down. Of course, there are the radical few whose terrorist tactics against the ruling powers either raise awareness of wrongs committed against the aliens or cause deeper fear and misunderstanding among humans.

The only sure thing is that each alien, like each human, is an individual, not a stereotype.

Traits

Each alien begins with a primary Alien characteristic (3), and a base Human of 1. Natural abilities (claws, prehensile tails, etc.) do not count against an alien's Alien trait when buying cybernetics or Changed traits.

Curse

Alien Nature (+2 pts): Like the Changed, aliens get a bonus because they HAVE to take their racial package of Blessings and Curses, whether they like it or not. This has its advantages and disadvantages, but the lack of freedom in such matters entitles such characters to a few extra points.

Affliction

Ostracized (2 or 4 pts): The character is a member of a minority within the Known Worlds, one which is not wanted or liked by the majority population, either for racial or social reasons. The character is snubbed by society and may even be denied certain rights of self-determination and free travel. While individual exceptions exist, for the most part, the character suffers under these burdens whenever she goes outside her own culture.

2 = Moderate. Character's race or society is marginally accepted and is allowed a degree of freedom.

4 = Major. Character's race or society has few freedoms; members are practically serfs.



Shantor

The runner felt the warm smooth hands of his accomplices massaging his limbs, rubbing herbed oil into them. He had only one chance to get his message heard, one chance to attract attention. He felt the weight of his people, the tremendous heaviness of each and every one of them weighing on his shoulders. He turned into the light of the Sun. The ever-present Sun would guide him. It did not matter that this particular star was foreign, for the light of the Sun was omnipresent.

He stood in that light and then vaulted forward, his tremendous legs pounding the marble walkway as he ran into the main thoroughfare. He raced after the Imperial convoy, running as fast as he possibly could, listening for the sounds of weapons being drawn and trained upon him. He approached the Imperial landcraft and saw Emperor Alexius inside the plastic bubble.

The Emperor turned to look at him, shocked to see the huge, dappled Shantor galloping alongside him. His bodyguard raised a weapon, but Alexius waved it down. The Phoenix Ruler turned to his alien citizen and for a moment locked eyes with the Shantor. There was an eternity in that moment, one that bespoke ancient traditions lost and the memory of a thousand years wasted. It seemed to Alexius that the Shantor was trying to say something, speaking through a box affixed to his neck, yet the sound failed to penetrate the car's domed roof.

Then blood splattered across the bubble, and Alexius felt a sickening lurch as the Shantor was crushed under the wheels. The Emperor fell forward, covering his face with his hands. He looked back at the bloodied corpse receding on the white marble. A guard posted on a nearby roof proudly claimed over the radio: "I dropped the Shant."

He ordered the car stopped and turned around.

"Obviously some kind of revolutionary maniac, Majesty," his aide said. "No need to..."

Alexius shocked his retinue when he jumped from the car and rushed to the dead Shantor. He bent over and picked up the voice-box. He shuddered as he keyed the replay button on its side, listening to the Shantor's last recorded words. The sound echoed loud in the plaza, a voice from beyond death: "Free my people, Son of the Sun. You are Great Runner. Free my people..."

First among the fallen alien races, the Shantor were once a nomadic people who moved across the lush fields of Shaprut, following the fair weather and good grazing. Their religion was based on Shaprut's single star; as it raced across the sky, they felt that it somehow told them to follow, to plunge forward with their destiny.

When humanity discovered the Shantor, there was a tremendous — if not predictable — reaction on the part of the alien sentients once communication was established. A cultural revolution washed through the quadrupeds. Shantor everywhere abandoned the old ways to embrace the ways of the "People from behind the Sun."

Their trust was their undoing. Like many proud, noble and trusting primitive human cultures, they were corrupted, exploited and eventually enslaved. No longer the proud beings who chased the light of the sun, running until their hearts nearly burst, they became sycophants, addicts, criminals, slaves and outlaws. They who had built their entire lives around their families and their warrior roles were often surgically altered, genetically manipulated and thoroughly perverted. No longer were they supported by thousands of years of non-verbal wisdom once carefully hoarded throughout the ages.

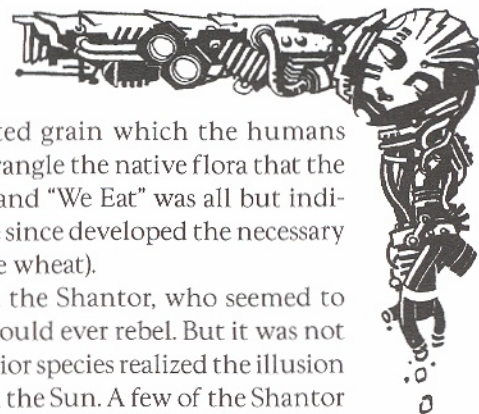
While they gained some measure of respect during the Second Republic, it was swept away after the Fall. The noble warriors now labor for their noble masters, their lot worse than that of most human serfs. But their sheer physical size and powerful forelimbs make them formidable opponents. If the Shantor were to someday receive the great liberator their prophecies speak of — the Great Runner — they might just be able to rescue themselves from bondage.

History

The first sentient alien race which humanity encountered was something of a tremendous disappointment to the xeno-anthropologists who made first contact with them, if for no other reason than that the Shantor had never heard of the Annunaki and had no legends about them. At first, the scouts and surveyors who mapped Shaprut did not consider the Shantor to be sentient. They noted the ungulates' opposable dewclaws on their forelimbs, but did not believe that the Shantor had used this advantage to make tools. Then they observed a Shantor battle. Ranks of Shantor gripped spears in their mouths, whipping their necks to fling the spears with tremendous strength and accuracy at each other. This prompted the scouts to call in a team of xeno-anthropologists. Until then, the field of xeno-anthropology was concerned exclusively with the Annunaki, for they were the only known, non-human sentients.

The problem of initially identifying the Shantor as animals (perhaps because they resembled horses) contaminated human-Shantor relations. Shaprut colonists pushed the Shantor out of the way to make room for new housing, commerce centers and industry. Even recognizing their sentience, few viewed the Shantor as highly evolved, believing them to be clever horses. They had no recognizable art to speak of, and thus, as far as humanity as a whole was concerned, no culture.

The Shantor had believed that they were the only sentients in the universe, followers of the Great Sun which



ran across the sky. They were astounded to understand that the two-legs came from beyond the Sun. This very fact alone, coupled with humanity's tremendous facility with tools, at first humbled and amazed the Shantor (tool use was long one of the three areas of Shantor virtue, the other two being individual speed and fierceness in battle).

Eventually, the Shantor-human language barrier was broken by the "man/spirit/box," or *dolomei*. These small computers are made to fit around a Shantor's neck and translate high-pitched whines and whistles into a human language, for Shantor cannot pronounce many of the hard sounds in human speech. The first *dolomei* were a bit tinny sounding and incapable of representing many deeper shades of meaning; later models improved communication but have never fully captured windspeech's full range. So much more can be said in windspeech that speaking to humans through a *dolomei* is like talking to a Shantor child. *Dolomei* are pitiful at translating human language into windspeech; most Shantor learn to understand a human language even though they cannot speak it without the aid of a *dolomei*.

The Great Families moved through the seasons, changing course when they encountered mining operations and human settlements. Soon, however, it became impossible for them to follow their normal migratory patterns. Paths that the Shantor had followed for millennia were blocked and fenced off. Water holes were poisoned

by industry. A transplanted grain which the humans called "We Eat" began to strangle the native flora that the Shantor traditionally ate, and "We Eat" was all but indigestible to them (they have since developed the necessary stomach bacteria to handle wheat).

No one expected that the Shantor, who seemed to nearly worship humans, would ever rebel. But it was not long before the proud warrior species realized the illusion of affiliating humans with the Sun. A few of the Shantor families revolted, running down colonists, utilizing human-supplied weaponry to great effect. Their sheer size, endurance and strength were formidable. They could coordinate their attacks with high-frequency whines and whistles which conveyed intricate battle information.

The governor of Shaprut received a rude awakening — the severed heads of several mining-supervisors were left on his doorstep, their eyes staring sightlessly from atop Shantor battle-spears. He immediately called in military support. Troops landed and, within a season, beat back the initial rebellion. A guerrilla war ensued. Entire Families (the ignorant called them "herds," although none of the Shantor had ever allowed themselves to be herded or ridden) were split up, their traditional ties broken and scattered across the stars.

During the Ukar War, the Shantor were targeted by Ur-Ukar psychics who telepathically manipulated a Shantor reservation, driving the residents into a state of





battle-frenzy. Many human colonists and Shantor were killed. Only Church missionaries listened to the Shantors' story of a "great, piercing light from the Sun, telling us to run and fight." Investigating the claims, the Church revealed the Ur-Ukar's psychic manipulations.

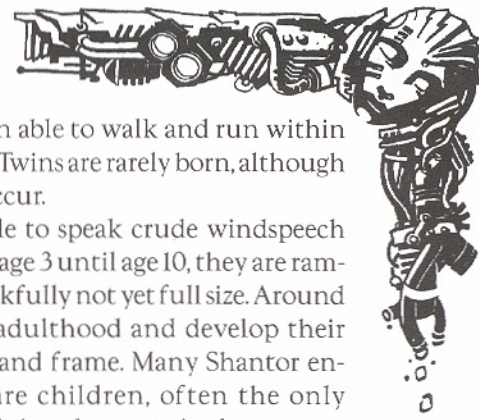
Despite the explanation by the Church, a wave of anti-Shantor prejudice washed over Shaprut. The planetary governors sentenced the Shantor rebels to virtual slavery, forcing them to perform hard labor to pay for their "crimes." While this custom was abolished during the Second Republic, it returned after the Fall. Suffering enslavement and the scattering of their Families to other worlds, many Shantor became criminals, some of them becoming addicted to various drugs potent enough to intoxicate even their large frames.

The youngest free Shantor are called "Darkwalkers," an Urthish translation from the Shantor word/phrase which means: "He who walks in the shadow of the Sun." These Shantor have neglected the Prayer of Running and other Shantor religious traditions. They don't even speak Shantor very well, instead speaking Urthish through their dolomei to each other. These young, witnessing the fading suns phenomenon, believe that the Sun has turned his flank upon them. They have taken to body modification, tattooing, scarification and hair-dying to differentiate themselves from other Shantor.

The Church has had some influence over Shantor reservations. Sanctuary Aeon ministers to them and intervenes politically for them from time to time. There are even a few Shantor priests who often impress the Church with their particular insights, based upon millennia of solar observation painstakingly passed down through a complex oral tradition. There is a Hesychast monastery on Shaprut whose monks chronicle the wisdom of Shantor elders, those who have memorized their oral tradition and now struggle to communicate difficult Shantor concepts through their dolomei.

The Shantor have no current central leadership. Each reservation is lead by a Runner, who often counsels peace with humanity. Although the al-Malik hold the land on which they dwell, there is no court representative from the Shantor. Despite their supposed reputation as Republican sympathizers, most al-Malik suffer the traditional Dark Ages prejudice against Shantor, viewing them as barely-sentient, culturally illiterate animals, who should feel lucky that humanity has benevolently uplifted them to civilization and provided purpose for them as draft horses. This view has been challenged in the past by some local family reformers and infamous mystic poets, but for the most part, the prejudice sticks.

A rebellious Shantor calls himself Alahad Star-Running al-Malik (a mockery of his noble masters) and is a famed Shantor advocate. His songs, stories and sculptures have made their way into even Byzantium Secundus's popular culture. He has friends all over the Known Worlds who are willing to spread his Shantor legends and stories



of exploitation. The Charioteers have even begun to market realities of his live performance, "Sun Man Fell," the story of the first Shantor revolt. Alahad also sings a song called "Great Runner Will Come," which is about the prophesied Shantor liberator who will lead the people from bondage. This song has been banned in most Shantor-populated areas by the local nobility.

During the Symbiot Wars, the regents feared that the Shantor would become contaminated and transformed into monsters. Great care has been taken since then to ensure that contact with the Shantor is watched and guarded from possible Symbiot taint.

Physiology

The Shantor are tall, quadrupedal ungulates, massively built like giant percherons (16 "hands" — or over five feet at the withers — on average). They have highly-developed dewclaws on their forelegs which act as thumbs, and their forelimbs are extremely flexible, bending at several joints and providing the Shantor with limited grasping ability.

A Shantor can walk upright and carry items in its forelimbs, but this is very difficult and requires considerable dexterity. Their teeth are made for grasping, tearing and chewing grasses, and their lips are extremely tough and flexible, allowing their mouths to perform delicate maneuvers. Their tongues are long (about 3 feet when totally extended), pointed and extremely prehensile.

Although they have a keen sense of smell, their tongues do not taste well; they smell out those foods which they should not eat. Their eyes are quite remarkable. When running, they actually recede into their sockets, allowing great wind resistance and clear sight. When they focus on something at close-range, their eyes actually swivel forward, allowing binocular vision. Shantor eyes are either yellow, purple, blue, black or pale green.

They have exceptional hearing, able to hear into the high-frequency ranges inaudible to humans. They can whine and sing at these high-frequency levels.

Xenologists gave up trying not to compare them to horses when it came to naming their skin colors. Shantor have nearly all the color variations of an Urthish horse (piebald, dappled, or all one color with a contrasting white patch on the hooves or forelock). Most of them tend toward glossy black or gray.

Shantor give live birth. It is the duty of the Family as a whole to raise children. Shantor males are not always fertile; it often takes several tries for a Shantor male to produce fertile sperm. Females enter estrus at will, becoming fertile about 15 minutes later, usually during a meditative running trance that acts as a mating ritual. The females control the size of the Family by entering estrus only when there is enough food and room for a new Shantor.

Many Shantor females engage multiple male partners in order to become fertilized, although a few only allow one male mate. Gestation takes approximately 15 months,

although children are born able to walk and run within five minutes of their birth. Twins are rarely born, although such births occasionally occur.

Shantor young are able to speak crude windspeech within days of birth. From age 3 until age 10, they are rambunctious and rowdy, thankfully not yet full size. Around age 10 they reach sexual adulthood and develop their massive muscle structure and frame. Many Shantor encountered off Shaprut are children, often the only Shantor small enough to fit into human-sized areas.

They eat grasses for the most part, supplementing their diet with insects and various fruits. They must chew and re-chew their grassy food to properly digest it, as their stomachs are not very acidic. They are tremendous natural methane producers, breaking wind in loud, trumpeting blasts.

Their brain topography is very confusing to many neurologists. They apparently have a symmetrical hemisphere system much like a human brain, but it is much more integrated, almost as though they have two separate brains working in tandem. Their memory capacity is incredible. During the Second Republic, many Shantor were studied because of their distinct lack of psi abilities and their prodigious capacity to remember information. Their brains never experience a downtime — even when their physical bodies rest in a kind of trance-sleep, their brains are just as awake as ever.

The Sathra Effect is known to scramble this memory capacity and tends to cause an instant psychosis that the Shantor rarely recovers from — although there are rumors of Darkwalkers who have experienced the Sathra Effect with no such problem (some of these are even said to have developed psychic powers!). Some theorists believe that a Shantor is capable of remembering all of the vision she experiences during the Sathra Effect, and it is this gestalt knowledge that causes their psychosis. Perhaps Darkwalkers, who are not as rooted in their mnemonic heritage, are not as self-aware and therefore immune. Most Shantor hate star travel and will frequently spend the entirety of a voyage meditating in a small stall.

A frequent cause of death in older Shantor is heart failure, as their mighty hearts literally give out when their joints and muscles turn stiff from old age and it becomes more difficult to support their massive weight. This can be alleviated through zero-g therapy, but there are few Shantor who can afford this. They tend to live, on the average, for 60 years, sometimes as long as 90, depending on their level of activity.

Society

There is a divisive split between Old Shantor and New Shantor societies. Traditional Shantor society was a warrior culture that emphasized family, honor, pride, battle skills and tool-use as well as sun reverence. New Shantor society is an amalgam of rebellion, hatred, pacifism, fear and individuation.



Old Shantor

Prior to the arrival of humanity, the Shantor dwelled together in large groups called Families. The Shantor word has more to do with a "tribe/ herd/ group" than a family, as concepts such as parents did not quite apply. To be sure, the traditional mammal link to a mother was very strong, but at any given time a Family could have one or two females in milk and able to nurse young. Children were the responsibility of everyone in the Family. The concept of fatherhood was not as important as the role of males to protect and guide, while the females kept watch and remembered.

The Shantor's entire knowledge base was distributed among the elder members of the Family, kept inter-woven through periodic "Tellings," reinforced during their body-trance time through constant repetition. There are no scholars among the Shantor; each Shantor is himself an expert on his people's history, biology, culture, society and traditions. As a result of this oral tradition, the Shantor's customs and combined knowledge are now in danger as, year after year, there are less and less Shantor to continue the amazing memorization and repetition duties necessary to preserve them.

The old traditions of the Shantor were based around their nomadic lifestyle and dealt primarily with reverence for the Sun and survival customs. For example, Shantor will not eat meat. There are parasites in many Shaprutan organisms which will give Shantor muscle convulsions should they consume them. Thus, meat-eating is taboo. Instead, grassy meals are supplemented with snacks of arachnids and fat larvae.

One interesting Shantor practice was the scorching of *claapa* bugs with sunlight focused through a crystal spear point. To avoid attracting attention, the delicate *claapa* bug stops moving whenever large organisms approach. The Shantor's patience and ability to hold the spear-point still for long periods of time takes advantage of the bug's otherwise clever survival trait. This is how Shantor cooking began. There are quite a few Shantor today who use more mainstream cooking techniques to serve up platefuls of hefty, farm-fattened insects, still steaming from the grill. Shantor hold fire to be of religious importance, deeming it almost as powerful as the Sun — they do not use it lightly, however, having seen acres and acres of fields consumed in a short time by one ill-fated lightning bolt or foolish barbecue.

For all their sense of unity, Shantor are very competitive. They frequently challenge one another to skill contests such as tool-use, running and a kind of blind hide-and-seek using only hearing and smell. Although they are not meat-eaters and traditionally had little need to hunt, their fierceness and warrior-nature was shaped primarily by such competition, and by the many predators on Shaprut eager to carry away unguarded Shantor children. But even the strongest hunter would fall before an orga-

nized herd of angry Shantor.

The Shantor spear was a sacred and powerful thing, given to them, they believed, by the rays of the Sun. The early Shantor struggled to devise the now-common spear-harness, and its making finally came to them in visions. Only once they had made tools with mouth and dewclaw could they call themselves Shantor.

Shantor spears are more like human javelins. Warcraft usually involves running at one another with spears couched in a harness (usually to shatter on impact with another Shantor) or gripped with the teeth for slashing attacks.

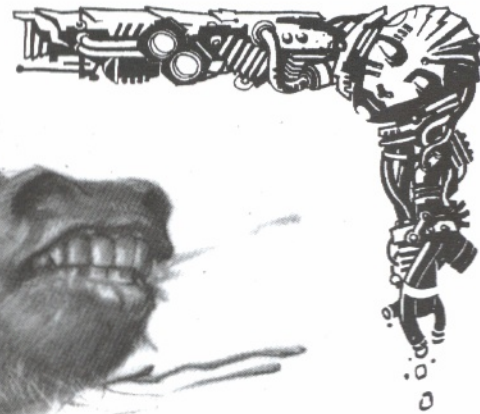
Running is seen as the most holy thing a Shantor can do. It is the relationship they share with the sun, their Creator, whose tears fell to Shaprut and from which blossomed forth the Shantor. Shantor believe that they race alongside the sun when they run. They often close their eyes and enter into a meditative trance while running, using a memorized pattern of foot placement, relying on their hearing to guide their way. Shantor who ran often enough could receive visions from the sun that would help guide their Families. Many Families had a designated Sun-Runner, who served as a kind of priest for the people.

Windspeech is the Shantor's greatest treasure. It is capable of expressing so much data that the xeno-linguists first studying it firmly believed that the Shantor possessed some sort of telepathic ability among themselves. It wasn't until a later linguist's dog began to whine and complain whenever the Shantor spoke that the high-frequency sound was discovered.

Urthish is a very simplistic language in comparison to windspeech. Some Shantor have mastered an understanding of Urthish (although they can only speak as much as their domolei allow), although few humans can even achieve a working understanding of windspeech. Translations of windspeech into Urthish are often oversimplified, since no one has yet translated a vocabulary of more than 15,000 windspeech words; many domolei do not understand more than 11,000 such words. No written language can come close to capturing its nuances. There is a legend that a Second Republic think machine of incredible capacity was given the project of creating a complete linguistic vocabulary of windspeech word-phrases. It subsequently stated that it was unable to complete the task in less than 80 years projected time. (This fable is probably apocryphal; it is more likely that data has been lost.) Xeno-linguists have conjectured that Shantor language is hard-wired at birth. Young Shantor begin speaking about a day or two after they are born.

In the old days, a Shantor's name was a long windspeech song which could take at least a minute or two to pronounce, although it was often abbreviated in informal situations. These days, however, Shantor tend to take on more Urthish names, names which humans can pronounce.

Shantor are notoriously unabashed and unashamed



about their bodies and sex. The Church has tried to help “reform” this out of them by forcing males to wear leather codpieces in public, but most Shantor refuse (male Shantor genitals rest slightly recessed in their bodies; a breeze or a stray sexual thought will cause an awesome public display to which the Shantor is seemingly oblivious). Because a Shantor female only becomes pregnant when she wishes, Shantor sex life is quite promiscuous. Pre-revolt ordinances against Shantor copulating in public were the last straw for many Shantor.

A Shantor mating ritual is quite beautiful. The female will usually engage the male by nipping at his flanks and inciting him to run after her. These “marriage runs” are a meditative precursor to the actual mating activity, wherein the mating partners search for visions in their own hearts with which to weave their lives together. In the old days, a Shantor female would offer herself as a reward to the winner of a particular competition, but in later times, human ideas of romance have begun to infect mating choices.

Shantor do not allow anyone to ride them. Riding is equated with sex. It is extremely insulting for a human to ask to ride a Shantor, no matter the gender involved. Only the most jaded Darkwalker would let a human ride him, and usually only across gender lines (a male riding a female or a female riding a male). Shantor will, if necessary, consent to pull a cart or a travois.

New Shantor

The New Shantor society has grown out of oppression and rebellion. Most Shantor females have all but refused to enter estrus until the People are freed and the Families re-united. Some slave traders, eager to have Shantor children to exploit, have forced several female into becoming fertile through the injection of a special steroid, but this is very dangerous and often causes heart attacks.

Some Shantor have found a niche as famed craftworkers. Merchants pay good money for Shantor workmanship; Shantor spears are sold as primitive art throughout Known Worlds society. Some Shantor acquire tools which fit onto their muzzles and allow for delicate control of workmanship. These “Muzzle Manipulators” are operated by their sinuous tongues and strong lips. Such crafters often achieve reputations as incredible artisans — a few Shantor have even advanced this skill into human surgery, as their ability to stay absolutely focused and still enables them to make incisions with incredible precision.

Darkwalkers, because they are young and able to move through human society with little difficulty, have taken up human activities — some eat meat (hard to digest but possible), drink liquor, take recreational drugs and indulge in bizarre, interspecies sexual activity. For a while, the Decados secretly scouted Shaprut for Shantor bed partners to satiate their jaded appetites.



It is these Darkwalkers who provide the most public image of the Shantor — addicted, violent, perverse, lost. Many of them are unable to speak without their voice-boxes and are lost in a world foreign to them, full of anger and hatred against humans. The last thing you want to see in a dark alley on Shaprut is a Shantor with a gut full of happy-juice and a diamond-sharp spear gripped between his jaws.

Despite their fondness for public intoxication and passion for instant violence, Darkwalkers have made a reputation as good bodyguards and sentries. Because of their high-frequency hearing, they frequently detect intruders before tech sensors can. Their lack of Psi abilities only makes them more trustworthy. Darkwalkers can handle the claustrophobic nature of space travel and human cities better than their more traditional cousins.

On those worlds with Shantor reservations, there are young Darkwalkers moving through human society. The Church, nobility and guilds have all turned a blind eye to them. But there is hope that the new Emperor may one day cede them rights of sovereignty once again.

Habitat

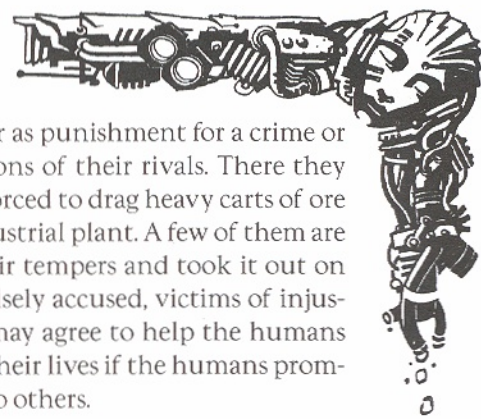
Because of their large size, most Shantor live in large, sprawling areas. Most reservations are built on large stretches of land — a far cry, however, from the entire continent which the Shantor used to enjoy. The Shantor have reservations on Shaprut, Criticorum, and Istakhr. Each reservation has a human embassy/dwelling, surrounded by fencing on all sides. A crude village with a cathedral is nearby, but there are no other buildings or obstructions on the reservation. Humans on the reservation must wear an identity badge at all times and are frequently checked for Symbiot infestation before they are allowed in.

When Shantor must go into human cities, they do so carefully and usually sleep on the street or in a barn with beasts. They feel claustrophobic in all but the most open of buildings. During the later Second Republic, all new building designs on Shantor-inhabited worlds were mandated by law to accommodate Shantor. Since then, these codes have fallen by the wayside.

Roleplaying Playing Shantor

Players should decide whether they want to play new Shantor or traditional Shantor, and act accordingly. Most peaceful Shantor speak Urthish in a kind of haiku-like poetic fashion, one that tries to somehow convey windspeech. The more violent Shantor bark Urthish words through their dolomei in a kind of crude "baby talk," filled with Urthish slang, such as: "We go Temple now. You follow!" or "Put down gun or I kick teeth." or "This way best for running."

Realize that even small Shantor are very big; playing Shantor in urban or space-bound situations may be prob-



Names

Naming a Shantor can be challenging. Most names are translated out of windspeech, which is a beautifully fluent language but does not translate well. They can either have human-style names, or strange sounds like "Alooooraloraaa" or (whistle descending to a stop). Musical names are perfectly reasonable, if not practical. Humans will frequently give a Shantor a nickname that sticks, so be careful.

lematic. Most Shantor will be encountered on Shaprut; they tend to stay on their homeworlds and do not wander far. Darkwalkers are the most willing and/or able to travel with others, making them viable characters or rogues. Of course, Darkwalkers are the most cynical, sly and cunning of Shantor — a common player character trait.

Shantor make excellent guides, sages and advisors. They also make formidable enemies. In many ways, they are like people from primitive earth cultures, close to their ecosystem and knowledgeable of local traditions.

Most Shantor will not trust a human implicitly. Humans must undergo tests to gain their trust, either by participating in a ritual with them or otherwise presenting some kind of bona fide from a Shantor ally.

Some stereotypes are:

Traditional warrior: From a Shaprut reservation, this warrior follows the traditional ways of his people, including the memorization of lore. What brings him from the reservation?

Darkwalker: This jaded, urban Shantor comes from a human city, where he sells his self-respect everyday for firebirds. He resents reservation Shantor because they remind him of a past stolen from him.

Offworld mercenary: Shantor willing to join human armies are sought after as strong shock troops. This one hires herself out as a mercenary to the highest bidder (perhaps she is of the Muster).

Sun Runner: This priest of traditional Shantor religion is now a member of the Church, following his vision offworld.

Rebel: This angry Shantor, born and bred on the res but now well-trained in modern culture by Ukari terrorists, intends to either free his people or enact revenge for them.

Gamemastering Shantor

Crash: The characters crash-land on a Shantor reservation, far from civilization. Unsure when help may arrive — if ever — they must travel themselves to the nearest city. On the way, they'll meet many types of Shantor, from traditional Families who want little to do with them to rebels seeking to use them for their own purposes.

Escape from Gaol: The characters are thrown into an

al-Malik labor camp, either as punishment for a crime or because of the machinations of their rivals. There they meet some Shantor who forced to drag heavy carts of ore from the quarry to an industrial plant. A few of them are here because they lost their tempers and took it out on humans, but others are falsely accused, victims of injustice. If treated well, they may agree to help the humans escape, even at the risk of their lives if the humans promise to carry their message to others.

Traits

Suggested Species Traits

Characteristics: Strength (base 5, max 14; cost: 10), Endurance (base 4, max 13; cost: 7), Perception

Natural skills: Dodge, Impress, Melee, Vigor

Learned skills: Artisan, Focus, Performance, Speak Windspeech (base 3)

Blessings: Alert (1 pt: +1 Perception while sleeping), Four-legged (3 pts: +6 meters base run), Huge (6 pts: +3 Vitality, base run: 16 meters, requires a lot of space), Receptive Ears (1 pt: can hear in higher ranges)

Curses: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Awkward (+3 pts: -3 Dex in cramped quarters), Cannot Speak Urthish (+1 pt), No Fine Manipulation (+4 pts), No Psi or Theurgy (+6 pts: cannot purchase psychic powers or theurgy rites)

Affliction: Ostracized (+4 pts)

Total cost: 8 pts

Old Shantor

Learned skills: Survival, Tracking

Blessings: Mnemonic (2 pts: +2 Introvert to remember things)

Curses: Claustrophobic (+2 pts: -2 Calm in cramped areas)

Benefices: Dolomei (1 pt: Speak Urthish 2; 2 pts: Speak Urthish 4)

Darkwalker

Learned skills: Read Urthish

Curses: Neurotic (2 pts: -2 Extrovert when nervous)

Benefices: Dolomei (1 pt: Speak Urthish 2; 2 pts: Speak Urthish 4), Muzzle Manipulator (3 pts)

Equipment

Gun Mounts

Shantor cannot use normal guns; they don't have the fingers or arms to fire them. Instead, humans long ago developed harnesses for them, allowing for heavily armed warriors. These come in many different models, from the early Ukari fixed-shoulder mounts to later Muster remote-control swivel mounts.

Fixed Mounts

TL 4+

Goal: -2 penalty

Cost: +1 Benefice pt, x1.5 firebird cost



Most guns can be adapted to such a mount. Most have cords which a Shantor holds in his mouth; a yank fires the weapon (which faces forward). Such weapons subtract two from goal rolls, but any size weapon can be mounted (even heavy machineguns). However, weapons which normally require a tripod or heavier mounting require Strength 7 or more; otherwise, the Shantor suffers an additional -2 penalty due to the weight and recoil.

Remote-Fired

TL 5+

Goal: -2 penalty

Cost: +2 Benefice pts, x2 firebird cost

A more expensive model allows the Shantor to hold a remote-control trigger in his mouth, firing at will (the device will operate within 10 meters of the gun harness). Add two Benefice points and double the firebird cost.

Swivel Mount

TL 5+

Goal: -2 penalty

Cost: +3 Benefice pts, x3 firebird cost

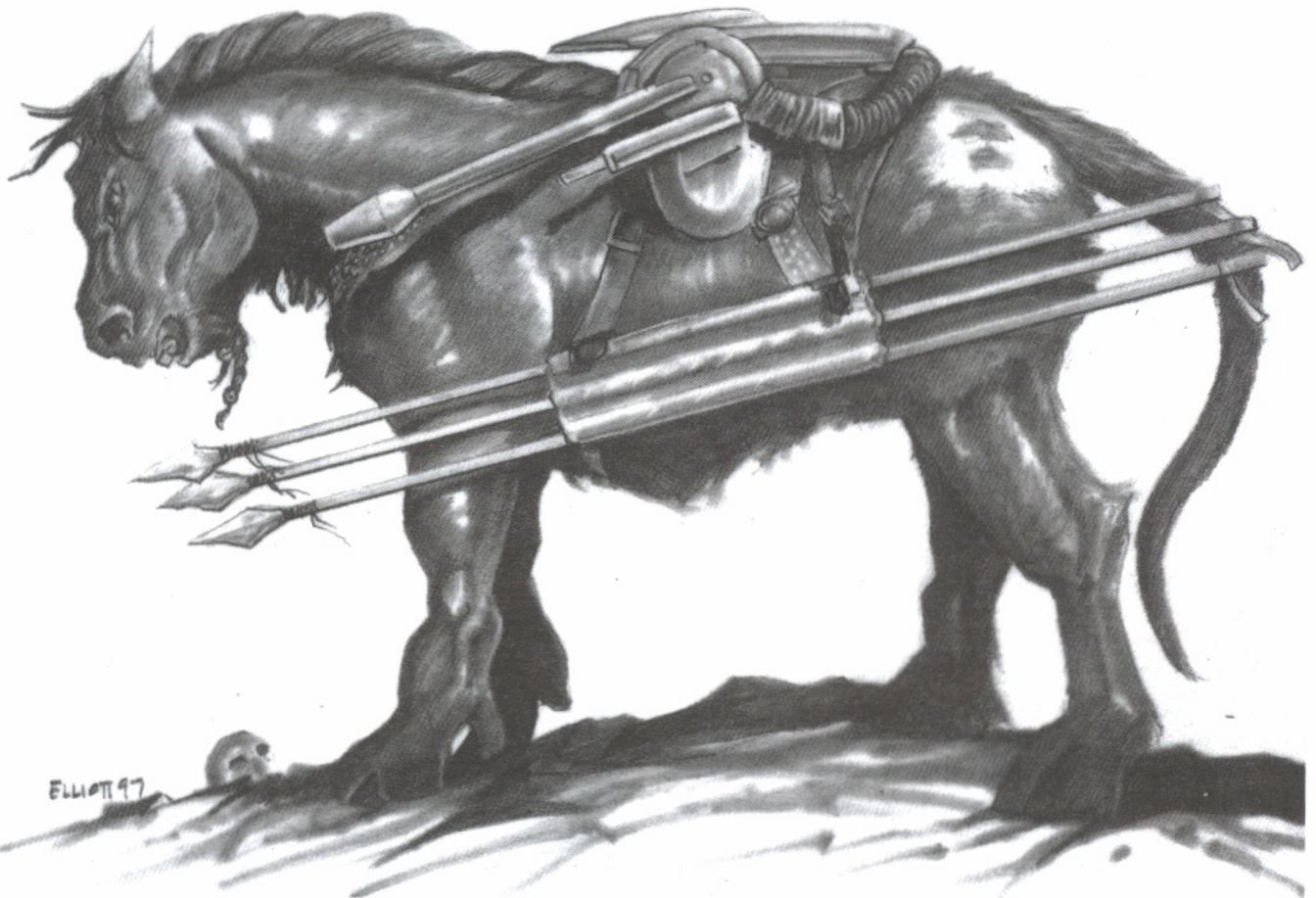
Some advanced models have swivel mounts, allowing the Shantor to fire in any direction, regardless of which way his forward flank faces. Swivel mounts are usually remote-controlled. Add three Benefice points and triple the firebird cost.

Targeting Helmet

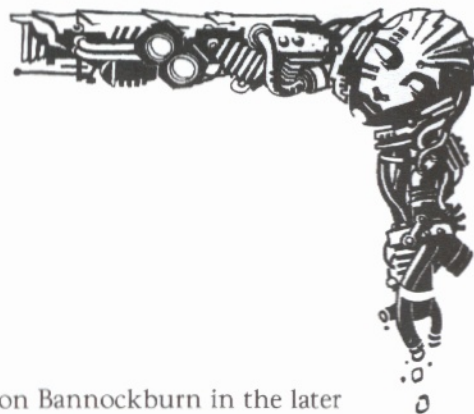
TL 6

Cost: 2 Benefice, 200 firebirds

A targeting helmet is also available, allowing the Shantor to fire the gun without suffering the goal penalty listed above.



ELUOT 97



Gannok

Count Shezel Haroun al-Malik glared at his fellow conspirator. Director Ludovico was unperturbed and sat back to exhale a large cloud of cigar smoke.

"I can't help it if you can't control your family's troops," Ludovico said. "The deal was, you ensure that the troops mop up a riot in the Fondue. That didn't happen. Thus, the Vautech was not offloaded and still sits where I put it: in the hold."

"I paid good money for that tech!" Shezel growled. "I want it!"

"Heh. Good luck getting to it now. In case you haven't noticed, a retinue of priests climbed on board before we took off. They'll have eyes and ears open for any sort of unholy activity, even if it's just me voiding by bowels too loudly."

Shezel grimaced at his partner's crudity. "Ah, but it was not my idea to choose a commercial liner upon which to store the goods! If you had chartered a private yacht from the beginning, none of this would have been a problem!"

"Hey, I asked for money up front for just that! Did you let go of one stinkin' firebird? Noo! Wait and see, you said. Well, now we see!"

Both men shut up and stared at the air vent and the clanking sounds coming from it.

"Damn hull rats..." muttered Ludovico.

Then the grill popped open and a simian face appeared. "Hello!"

Shezel and Ludovico sat gape-jawed, staring at the intruder.

The Gannok climbed down from the tight passage and dusted off his overalls. He ambled over to the table and sat down. "Delphian ale. Good choice!" he said as he uncorked the decanter and poured himself a drink in Ludovico's mug.

"By the thousand firmaments, what is this?" Shezel said.

"Yer that engineer, ain't ya?" Ludovico said. "The Charioteer Gannok."

"That's me!"

Shezel began to sweat. "Oh? And what were you doing in the air shaft?"

"Routine maintenance. Gotta keep the passages clear, you know. But boy! What you hear in a place like that!"

Ludovico began to draw his slug gun, but the Gannok waved him down. "Don't worry, I'm not a squealer!"

"Then what do you want?" Ludovico said, chomping down hard on his cigar.

"A piece of the action. I know where your package is and I've already moved it. Mess with me and you'll never find it — it's already in pieces stashed in select spots known only to me and my comrades. Play the game right and you'll get it back... for a price."

"Outrageous!" Shezel said. "This is blackmail!"

"Oh no it's not," the Gannok said. "Let's just call it a little game to relieve the tedium of a long flight. More ale, partners?"

History

Humans first set foot on Bannockburn in the later years of the Second Republic. The world was rich with Anunnaki artifacts, a large amount of which were soon taken from the world by artifact hunters, scientists and corporate technicians. Xenoarchaeologists had a hard time studying the ruins without suffering disturbances from unwanted visitors. Some of these visitors were natives.

Indigenous primates watched the explorers and scientists from the trees and from their own "nests" amid the ruins. At first, they simply watched, but their innate curiosity eventually drove them closer and closer to the expedition camps. Eventually, they would sneak into the camps and take things. Most often, this was harmless, but sometimes a valuable instrument went missing, delaying a study for weeks. And sometimes the stolen devices wreaked havoc among the primates, such as when a carelessly-handled blaster went off and ignited a few acres of forest.

An early xenologist dubbed the primates Gannok, based off a noise they often uttered. The beings were considered non-sentient, for they showed no signs of organized speech or culture. But as more and more xenologists began to observe them, they noticed a remarkable activity: the Gannok were mimicking human culture. They began wearing scientists' stolen clothes and housed themselves in huts built — like the expedition camps — from the local trees. This never-before exhibited tool use amazed the scientists. It was even more amazing when the Gannok finally spoke.

Professor Harney De Montrose was spending the afternoon observing Gannok and doodling images of their play in his sketchbook. One curious Gannok ambled over to him and looked at his pictures, looked at the Gannok they were supposed to represent, and then said: "No."

De Montrose nearly had a heart attack, and then almost had another when the Gannok continued: "Clok has longer beard. Draw it longer."

The talking monkeys of Bannockburn became the rage of Second Republic society. Xenologists descended on the world in droves, desperate to study the newly discovered sentients.

Gannok were now deemed sentient, although considered to be of a low intelligence. They mimicked well and had amazing mechanical aptitude, but little imagination for culture, art or language.

As barely intelligent monkeys, they were accorded some rights of self-determination, but not as many as other races had gained by the time of the late Republic. Nonetheless, they were too friendly (for the most part) to be treated as badly as other sentients had.

Pet Gannoks became a fad among the elite. It was not uncommon for starships to adopt a Gannok as its mascot. It was soon discovered that the agile primates could easily fit into small maintenance tubes. Their mechanical aptitude made it easy to teach them basic repair skills, and thus many Gannok became repair technicians on starships.

Over the coming decades, it was realized that the Gannok learned very fast. Children picked up their parents' skills even quicker. Within a few generations, Gannok had their own culture and learning — although it was an imitation of Known Worlds' society and manners.

By the time of the Fall, xenologists realized that the initial assessment of the Gannok as barely sentient was way off base. The modern Gannok, a mere four or five generations removed from the initial contactees, behaved and thought just as well as any contemporary human. Indeed, Gannok seemed to possess as great a range of native intelligence as did humans. They had even produced a few geniuses, such as Doctor Brock Brock Markham, inventor of an efficient starship singularity drive.

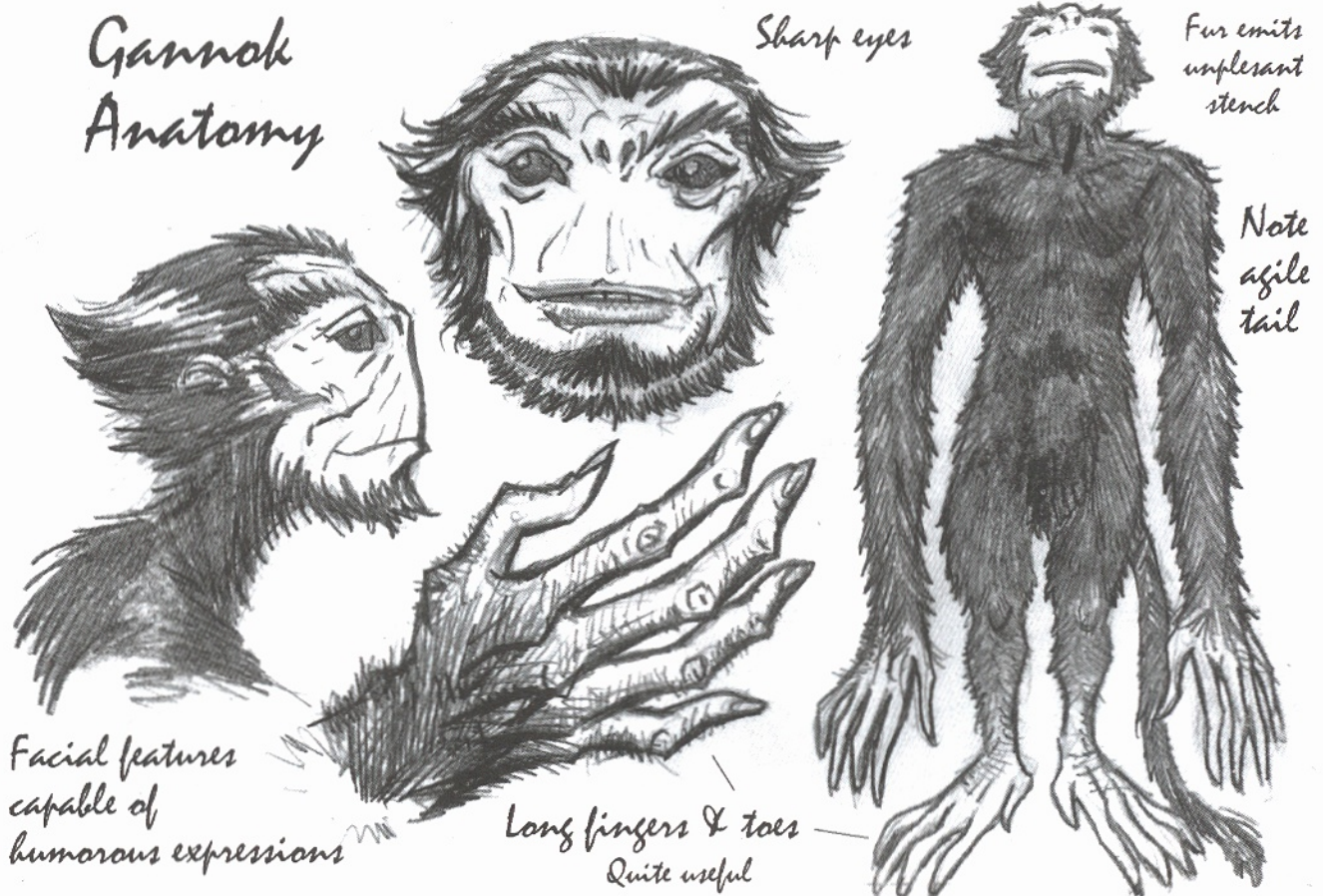
Scientists also realized that the Gannok possessed their own spoken language before human contact, an ex-

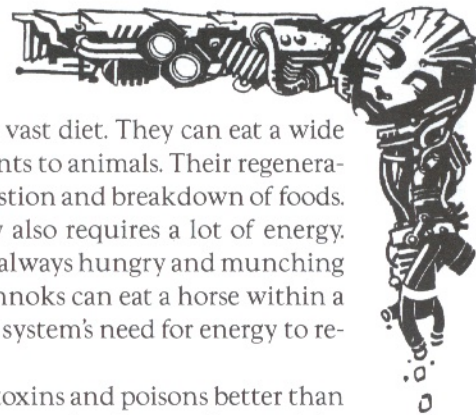
pressive language of gestures and tongue clicks and tocks. Early xenologists, unable to establish a phonetics or vocabulary for the sounds, assumed they were just expressive animal noises. But precise concepts can be communicated in Tok Tok, the human name for the Gannok tongue.

It was eventually discovered that the word Gannock means "hungry." Gannok were attracted to humans who uttered the word to them because they thought they were going to be fed (which was often the case). The Gannok have no natural word for themselves as a race, although they have names for their families. It is theorized that they had no consciousness of themselves as a species separate from others until after human contact.

Some believed that their intelligence had evolved since First Contact, that the initial Gannok contactees had not been as intelligent as their descendants. This theory of super-accelerated evolution shocked many in the scientific establishment, who instead insisted that the early Gannok had simply not displayed to the early xenologists their native intelligence, as they lacked cultural artifacts of their own.

This latter view is given some proof by vague Anunnaki carvings discovered in various sites on Bannockburn. These appear to depict Gannok in robes bearing staffs or short rods. One even shows a Gannok in a spacesuit! This "evidence" is used to support theories of Anunnaki tampering with Gannok evolution. Others,





however, claim that the carvings do not depict Gannok, but instead show another race, perhaps distantly related to Gannok in the same manner that humans are related to other Urth apes. However, there is no fossil evidence of such Gannok ancestors or relatives.

The possibility of further research into the answer was closed off with the Fall and subsequent Dark Ages. Gannok weathered this time better than most aliens, for they possessed technical skills important to many hi-tech operations. Retained by noble houses and guilds, they helped keep the engines running. Some were even given guild rank status, a tradition that continues into the present era.

But even Gannok could not keep the tide of ignorance back for long. They suffered a loss of learning similar to their human neighbors. The Church, which admits Gannok to the leity and to the priesthood in exceptional cases, admonished them for their technical leanings and was instrumental in weaning this trait out of many Bannockburn communities.

Today, the Gannok live mostly on Bannockburn. Many still live in the forests, returning to their "primitive" ways, while others seek work with the Muster or other League operations on the planet, such as the Scraver's artifact salvaging operations. There is a small community on Leagueheim from which many technicians still come.

Physiology

Gannoks are primatelike mammals with prehensile tails and long fingers and toes. They range from three to four and a half feet in height, with most being in the smaller range. They are usually thin but some have exhibited obesity (although the factors determining this are unknown).

Their bones are unusually flexible and tough to break. While they do not bend to any appreciable degree, they have more give than human bones. Xenologists likened them more to keratin fiber than calcium.

The most amazing thing about Gannok physiology is its regenerative capability. The Gannok nervous systems seems especially devoted to tissue and bone replenishment. While Gannok cannot regrow lost limbs or organs, they can heal damage at an incredible rate.

One of the factors xenologists were able to isolate in this activity is an enzyme-rich oil exuded through their skin (and apparently in their internal organs through osmosis). While this oil is the culprit behind their famed stench, it helps to quickly seal any cut or soothe any bruise. Xenologists theorized that the Gannok circulatory system consists of numerous information transmitters and receptors which greatly facilitate the immune and endocrine systems. However, they were never able to fully solve the biological riddle of Gannok regeneration before the Dark Ages put an end to their experiments.

The stench given off by the constant sweating of this oil can be covered by perfumes or other oils.

The Gannok possess a vast diet. They can eat a wide variety of things, from plants to animals. Their regenerative ability also aids in digestion and breakdown of foods. However, this same ability also requires a lot of energy. Thus, Gannoks are almost always hungry and munching on something. Injured Gannoks can eat a horse within a day or two, so great is their system's need for energy to replenish damaged flesh.

While they deal with toxins and poisons better than humans, they are by no means as hardy as residents of the planet Vorox. In fact, some deadly poisons are more painful as the Gannok's system fights a losing battle for a much longer time. Their system is adept at dealing with injury and trauma, but not as efficient against toxins or disease.

Since so little is understood today about Gannok physiology, medicine for them is rather primitive. Few Gannok become physicians, as there is little need for such a calling among their kind. Nonetheless, they do suffer disease. The Amaltheans have realized that the best method of healing a Gannok is to aid his body's own healing system. They have been able to identify some herbal supplements for certain ailments that seem to work.

Among known Gannok diseases are splinter bone and the clot. In splinter bone cases, bone mass regeneration goes haywire, causing excessive bone growths with painful spurs. It is mainly an old age disease, sort of a Gannok arthritis, that brings with it decreased mobility as the Gannok ages. There is no known cure, although some miraculous theurgic healings are rumored. The clot comes when a Gannok's blood clots too easily, clotting internally, causing circulation blockages and sometimes aneurysms. The only known cure for the clot is a disciplined herbal therapy and exercise.

During the Symbiot Wars, a few Gannok exhibited psychic ability, although it is by no means widespread throughout the species. A few of them even seem capable of practicing theurgy, as witnessed by Groklo Winemaker, a Gannok who joined the Eskatonic Order.

So far, no Gannok is known to have succumbed to Symbiot taint, although they have suffered disease from bacterial invasions caused by Symbiot weaponry. Their immune systems seem capable of dealing with these infections, however, especially with the aid of antibiotics.

Society

Gannok are crafty tool-users, mechanically inclined but possessing no more high-tech innovation than most humans.

They are very family oriented and seem to work best in groups; most of them seem indecisive when alone. Their efficiency increases when working among others, especially with fellow Gannok. They love parties, and are usually quite gregarious in a crowd.

They are also vicious practical jokers. Just where or why this chaotic streak developed is unknown, but most Gannok cannot resist planning and acting out elaborate



pranks. (For this reason, they are rarely invited to become Mercurians — they are too obvious.)

While they are good mimics and can usually adapt to change very well, some seem incapable of processing rapid social change. Without aid in adjusting, these few often become dangerous psychopaths, inexplicably angry with the world for its chaos.

Societal hierarchy consists of respected families on top with others jockeying for importance in various areas. Old and respected families are known for their wise elders, usually those who are canniest in dealing with outsiders and offworlders for Gannok betterment. Scions of these families are expected to take up the family business of mentoring and diplomacy. Well-known is the Chak Yaga family, members of which can be found in the Muster; the Wog Wog family, with connections to the Hawkwoods; and the Ook Ook Kung, one of whom is a priest in the Universal Church.

Other families are known for expertise in a particular skill or knowledge, and usually gain their social kudos (invites to parties, free meals, etc.) through accepting apprentices from other families. In this way, some families have become more like guilds than bloodlines. There is the Kuklo family, noted for its members' skill in mechanical engineering; the Bak Bak Bo family, known for its paintings; and the Mung Mongo family, famous for its culinary arts.

Gannok clothing is largely based on human styles (shirts, pants, hats, gloves, etc.) but it is rare to see Gannok shoes. Some Gannok are known for their fashion sense but their designers rarely affect human styles.

Their language, called Tok Tok by xenologists, is capable of precise communication in groups, using a shorthand of gestures and a series of clicks with the tongue in the back of the throat. Vocabulary has grown since contact with human culture and technology, but most Gannok prefer to speak Urthish. (Humans can learn Tok Tok up to level 7.)

Habitat

The only substantial Gannok population is on Bannockburn, spread throughout its continents. Most are centered around Tikta, a bustling city built in imitation of human cities. The terrain of Bannockburn is largely made up of old growth deciduous forests, mountains and moors (similar to a pre-bronze age Scotland), with jungles in the temperate regions around the equator. Many areas host ruins of what appear to be Anunnaki cities, burnt and blasted in some ancient conflagration.

A small community of Gannok exists on Leagueheim, many of them members of the League. One famous Gannok family here is that of Zebo Chombo, a famed weaponsmith who is training a lineage of weaponsmiths.

Roleplaying Playing a Gannok

Gannok are perhaps easier to play than most alien races, since their culture differs little from that of humans, being basically a mimicry of many elements of different human cultures. Humor can arise when Gannoks may not fully realize the ironic implications of certain customs they adopt, but more often they seem to have a better perspective on humanity than humans hold themselves.

Below are a number of Gannok stereotypes:

Can-do Engineer: The character is a mechanic on a starship or starport, helping to maintain incoming ships. She does all the dirty work when someone wants a new blaster mount or armor plating to replace the plates torn up by lasers. She is probably a member of one of the League guilds (perhaps a Charioteer).

Wild One: The character lives wild in the forests or jungles of Bannockburn and prefers life this way, without the complications and silly dictates of society. While he may not be as educated as his fellows, he knows his way around the wilderness and the Anunnaki ruins.

Holy Roller: The character is a priest of the Universal Church (from any sect) and wishes to convert his fellows. Most Gannok are ambivalent about religion and may join the Church just to keep this character off their backs.

Prankster: The character lives for a really good prank or trick, regardless of how dangerous it is.

Artifact Hound: The character has realized how much money humans and other will pay for the artifacts left lying around her homeworld for the taking. She hunts these things out or hires herself out to lead others to them.

Gamemastering Gannok

Below are some story ideas involving Gannok:

• **Tampering with God:** During a slow starship journey to a jumpgate, a resident Gannok engineer offers to "cut the Sathra Damper" for a hefty bribe. He claims to know how to shut the damper on and off in such a way that nobody will notice. What's more, he says the effect can be confined to a single cabin — the pilot need not know about it. What do the characters do? Accept his offer and experience some forbidden Sathra ecstasy? What if the engineer is simply testing the characters or playing a prank? What's to stop him from telling the Inquisition that the characters forced him into the act? Who is he working for, and do his masters want to put the characters into a blackmail situation? Then again, it may be worth it for one mere moment of communion — especially if one of the characters is already addicted to the Effect.

• **Leggo the Family Jewels!** The characters have gotten hold of a valuable Anunnaki carving (is it a soul shard or just a carving?). Trouble arises when a prominent Gannok claims that it is a stolen family heirloom. This guy has con-

nections and uses them to try to retake what he claims is his. But is it really his? Is it a treasured relic of his grandparents or does he have a secret motive?

• **No Respect:** A wealthy Gannok merchant hires the characters as escorts. The problem is that wherever he goes humans think he's cute and want him to perform tricks. This only gets the little guy angrier and angrier. One evening, a mob descends on the characters, screaming for the Gannok's blood. He demands that they protect him — that's what they're being paid for! If the characters can disperse the crowd and ask questions, they will discover that a local fellow was the victim of a vicious joke gone wrong (make up something gruesome but funny) and that the Gannok is to blame: "They always play pranks, don't they?" Is the Gannok the true culprit or is he the victim of racial stereotyping? Even if he is guilty, the characters have a duty to protect him.

Traits

Suggested Species Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity (base 4; cost: 2 pts), Endurance (base 4; cost: 2 pts), Extrovert, Tech

Natural skills: Charm, Vigor

Learned skills: Acrobatics, Redemption (Mech), Speak Tok Tok (base 1; cost: 1 pt)

Blessings: Agile Toes (1 pt: Feet can operate as well as hands for manipulation but not combat tasks), Grease Monkey (2 pts: +1 with all Tech Redemption skills), Immunity (2 pts: Symbiot taint), Long Fingers & Toes (1 pt: +2 Dex with fine manipulation tasks), Omnidigestion (2 pt: Vast diet, but no immunity to deadly toxins), Prehensile Tail (2 pts: +2 grab, no fine manipulation), Regeneration (5 pts: heal 1 Vitality per span)

Curses: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Dwarf (+5 pts: -2 Vitality, base run: 6 meters), Hungry (+1 pt: Voracious appetite when healing wounds), Stench (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among non-Gannok)

Afflictions: Ostracized (+2 pts)

Total cost: 8 pts

Benefice

Prominent Family (1-2 pts): The character's family is well-known in Gannok society for either its political abilities or some craft or skill. One point signifies a craft family while two points signifies a political family (usually with strong ties to one or more of the Known Worlds power factions).

Swinging Through the Trees

Most Gannok learn the acrobatics skill (see Chapter Eight: Rules) at an early age. They can use this skill in heavily wooded or jungle environments to travel almost as fast through the trees as they can on the ground. In cases of heavy ground foliage, Gannok can often outdistance ground pursuers. Base movement is five meters per turn plus one per success on a Dexterity + Acrobatics roll.



Etyri

Uugroto held his fire-hardened wooden spear in his right hand, hefted his makeshift grappling net in his left hand, unfolded his wings and set himself for the charge of the snorting marsh-mammoth before him. 'Have to vault clear of those three grasping trunks and serrated tusks,' he thought, 'and jab at the brain through the soft spot at the base of the skull.'

The slime-caked behemoth dug three of its hoof-pods into the shallow mud, poised to heave its monumental bulk forward. There came a faint distant snapping noise from a direction Uugroto could not determine. A short moment later, the marsh-mammoth convulsed once and dived face-first into the muck. The triangular space between its massive shoulders and head welled up with viscous dark purple which trickled down its wilting finned ears.

Uugroto looked up. In the patches of sky streaming through the green twilit swamp canopy, he made out a tiny dark speck, wheeling about and growing larger as it spiraled in toward him. And then she was through the trees, a mottle of darts and rays smearing her belly like underbrush seen through the eye's corner at a dead run, gliding overhead to alight picturesquely on the upturned rump of the beast. Black and silver she was, sporting steel-gray eyes and an '86 model boltlocking Sumpter 9mm octagonal longbarrel with neutrino scope, polished walnut skeleton stock and floral inlay in the Kurgan style. Damn fine sniping piece that, or Uugroto was no judge of thunderstaves.

"Coulda taken 'im!" he barked.

"Well, you sure were taking your own sweet time, weren't you?" she fluted at him. "I guess I was just hungrier than you were." She cocked her head sharply. "But you are welcome to share in my kill. Come. Blow your horn for your comrades by the river, and we shall camp in its ribs, feasting and telling tales of the hunt on into the night!"

The avian Etyri of Grail are the most exotic and colorful (in most senses of the word) sentient race in the Known Worlds. Few others have such a striking appearance, and none can claim such a wide variety of subspecies. Rarely seen away from their homeworld, they tend to keep to themselves, leading other races to believe that they are extremely antisocial. Among each other, and anyone who takes the time to understand them, however, they are perhaps the most overwhelmingly gregarious of all sentients.

Resembling to some degree the griffins found in ancient Urthish and other mythologies, Etyri are highly idealized and romanticized when depicted in popular entertainments. Most Known Worlders have a stereotypical image of the Etyri derived from Church-sponsored passion plays, in which they are depicted as aloof and somewhat aristocratic in bearing, with a dark, and even morbid, attitude. Usually the token role of an Etyri character (originally restricted to human actors in feathered cos-

tumes) was that of doomsayer, a messenger who delivers ominous portents and predictions of death.

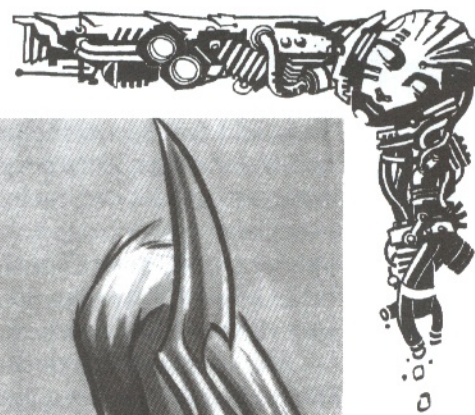
Accurate information concerning the Etyri is seldom found outside of Grail or the surviving accounts of Second Republic xenologists. Since those who travel away from their homeworld are loners and individualists with extreme idiosyncrasies, few encounters with migrant Etyri ever conform to anyone's expectations.

History

"Etyri prehistory" is considered a misnomer, both by the Etyri and by those who have studied them closely, because the songs which they sing have their roots in a time when the Etyri were no more self-aware or intelligent than the avians of other planets. The most primitive songs are still sung by chicks and have remained unchanged since the time when they were little more than crude signals conveying information about feeding, breeding or danger. As the consciousness of the race developed, these signals were elaborated, and began to compound themselves into narratives that served as instructional stories for the young and as histories for families, flocks and tribes. A human equivalent of this kind of "living history" would be an unbroken oral tradition dating back to the late hominid apes of ancient Urth.

Early proto-Etyri faced fierce competition from the Zhuil'hishtu, a species of six-legged egg-stealing reptiles that had attained the first glimmering of self-consciousness on the planet now known as Grail. The Zhuil'hishtu, land-based hunters with a spare set of forelimbs, were the first tool-users on their world, and quickly developed into a very successful race of predators at the unchallenged top of their food chain. Although they learned to hunt and kill larger land beasts, their food of choice remained the large, highly nutritious eggs laid by the ancestors of the Etyri. As a result, the proto-Etyri took to scavenging their competitors' larger kills, and were forced to adopt increasingly complex social and nest-building behavior to keep their eggs and hatchlings (few enough of which survived to maturity anyway) from being eaten into extinction.

As the Zhuil'hishtu became more cunning and daring thieves, bolstered with weapons that could even bring down low-flying avians, the early Etyri had to become more wary and circumspect in their daily routines, and this escalating complication of their lives forced them into the mental quantum leap called sentience. Millennia before the first humans arrived on the planet, this competitive evolution had reached a plateau, with the Zhuil'hishtu existing at a neolithic technological level and the Etyri at a paleolithic level. Such a comparison of tech-



nology is misleading, however, for the Zhuil'hishtu, despite having fire, the wheel and some nomadic herding communities, had nothing that could be construed as culture, much less civilization. Consumed by their instinctual drive to hunt and gather, the reptiles never had the leisure time required for further mental growth; the Etyri, however, did, and consequently became more intelligent despite their technological inferiority. With increasing skill, they began hunting large land animals, as well as other avians, on their own. This in turn made them more vulnerable to the lizards as they vied for the same food sources. Most of the Etyri social structure, as well as their religious beliefs, were established over the course of this period. This critical evolutionary phase is reflected in the Etyri myth of Mihanoom the Witch-Mother, the patron goddess of the Etyri people, who sacrificed a part of herself to the greater gods beyond the sky in exchange for wisdom. (Some historians suspect that these "gods beyond the sky" were actually the Anunnaki.)

When the first human explorers arrived on what would come to be known as Grail, they assumed that the Zhuil'hishtu, with their more visible technology, were the dominant race on the planet; they were not far from wrong, for the Etyri numbers were dwindling and the avians were staring into the gaping maw of extinction. Human diplomats from House Keddah were met with apathy or guarded hostility from Zhuil'hishtu elders, and settlers faced increasing attacks from reptilian raiders. After watching the newcomers from a distance for nearly a decade, the Etyri, deciding that they had little to lose and much to gain, made their first diplomatic overtures to the immigrants from beyond the sky.

This was one of the smoothest "first contact" events in the history of the Known Worlds, mainly because the Etyri had employed their cleverest mimics to learn the human tongue and were able to greet the newcomers in their own language. Startled by the sudden appearance of these exotic, strangely familiar (at least to those who had studied mythology), Urthish-speaking sentients, the humans were uncertain how to react, harboring some suspicions concerning the Etyri's origin and motives. Cooler heads prevailed, for once, and the human settlers accepted the presence of this odd race without undue fear or overt prejudice. To prove the purity of their motives, many Etyri aided the humans by trying to teach them some essential lessons about surviving on the planet, or alerting settlements to encroaching Zhuil'hishtu raiders. A flock of the finest Etyri warriors even served as sentries and bodyguards to the healer Amalthea when she removed the soul-darkness from the Prophet Zebulon.

Meanwhile, the Zhuil'hishtu, threatened by the emerging friendship of the two races, became more aggressive toward both, and though the heavily armed humans suffered little, whole colonies of Etyri were wiped out. Those humans who had lived in closest contact with the Etyri began, against the wishes of the Keddah, to lend the



flyers light armaments, including steel blades, small caliber rifles and lasers. Now possessed of both superior intelligence and superior technology, the Etyri embarked upon a campaign of retribution that soon escalated into full-scale genocide. House Keddah did nothing to stop them, as the Zhuil'hishtu were not only unwanted pests, but were also completely useless as cheaply exploitable labor.

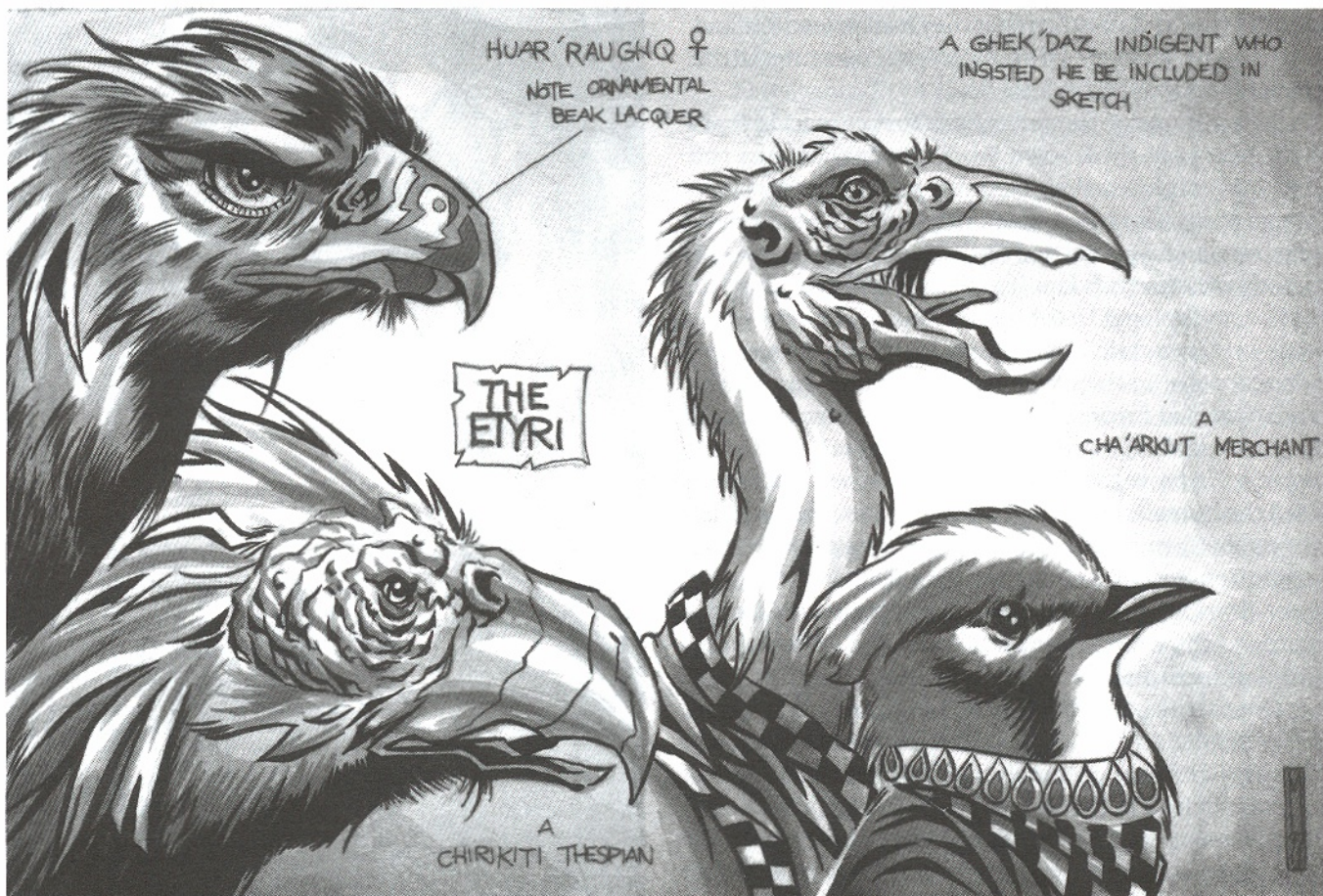
The lizard savages were believed extinct until the early Second Republic, when miners sounding for marble and Keddite discovered a vast warren living in a subterranean cavern complex beneath the Etyriani mountain range, site of the Eyrie Summit where the ruling elders of the Etyri race had convened for countless centuries. The Summit awarded House Keddah many extensive and long-requested mining rights in exchange for a pledge to carry the war against the Zhuil'hishtu underground, where the Etyri would not go.

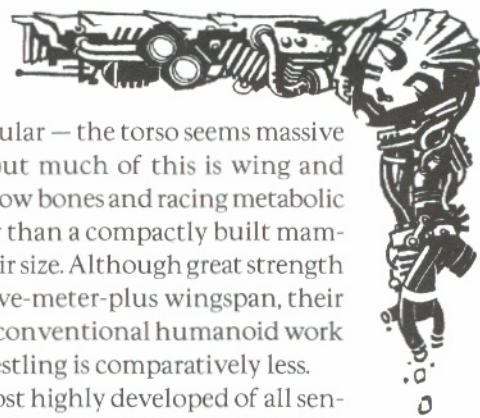
This concession had an unfortunate consequence some time later, when Baryana hardwood became highly demanded on other planets and House Keddah brought in a mass harvester to strip the Habari forests of the northern hemisphere. Logging interests "interpreted" the Etyri agreement to include the deep forests, which were an ancestral habitat as yet untouched by peasant loggers. Outraged by this apparent breach of honor by the otherwise impeccable noble house, many Etyri struck out at human settlements, but were unable to strike hard enough before being repelled. The Keddah ignored the pleas of the

Eyrie Summit until the Etyri made a more decisive move.

Elite teams of warriors infiltrated the homes of the logging industry's captains and kings, holding them at knifepoint and forcing them to view a broadcast of the mass harvester in action, a gigantic airship that swiftly mowed down square kilometers of old growth in its projected laser/tractor grid and transported it to space in its milling-bay. As the world watched, an enormous flock of warriors, several thousand strong, swarmed about the great machine and dove into the atmospheric vents in suicidal droves, until the vents were choked with bodies. The mass harvester began to list, finally crashing into the ground it had just cleared. Those Etyri who survived easily rounded up the surviving harvester crew as they fled the collapsing hulk, pelting them with guano and holding them at gun- and spear-point. Then the Eyrie Summit made it clear to the Keddah that unrestrained logging would be far more costly than either side would want.

House Keddah refused to submit to this obvious terrorism and war was waged until diplomats from House Juandaastas were called in by Sanctuary Aeon to bring the mounting interracial slaughter to a halt. Telepathic ambassadors resolved the "translation difficulties" of the original mining concessions, and a plan of organized new growth harvesting of Baryana trees was developed that would maintain a healthy balance between the planetary economy and the planetary ecology. Both Keddah and Etyri have profited from this global plan, known as the





Habari Accord.

Although suspicion and bigotry have persisted among the lower classes, rulers of the two races have come to understand each other as honorable, honest and forthright people, and Keddah-Etyri relations have only benefited from improved clarity in communication. Etyri warriors cross-train with house troops, and migrant mercenaries have distinguished themselves in military service both during the Barbarian Invasions and in the Kurga Conflict. Flying sharpshooters were rather effective in the earliest phases of the Symbiot War, but the shapeshifters quickly developed an airborne viral agent which proved particularly devastating to the Etyri's accelerated metabolism.

While the overwhelming majority of Etyri never leave Grail, those who do migrate off-world are generally the center of attention wherever they go, not only as oddities but as highly honorable, capable and intelligent individuals. Many have flocked to the magic lantern industry, where their flamboyant talents can be appreciated. True warriors, however, have joined the Questing Knights after honing their skills through many travels.

Physiology

The Etyri physique, while having much in common with the humanoid type, is nonetheless strikingly different from most other sentient races, and incorporates the greatest diversity of forms found within any species not compromised by the Symbiots. While native evolutionary trends on most of the Known Worlds follow a roughly parallel course, Grail, along with Vorox, differs in that all major land species and most of the dominant aquatic species have six limbs, rather than the four found on most planets. As a result, Grail has a higher rate of tool-using behavior by indigenous non-sentient animals than any other planet, and specialized adaptations for this extra set of limbs abound.

Which explains why the Etyri do not follow the standard pattern of avian physiology found elsewhere. Unlike other aviforms, they possess both fully developed usable wings as well as prehensile forelimbs, the lack of which prevents otherwise similar races from evolving the elaborate tool-using behavior that, as some xenonaturalists contend, is necessary for the acquisition of sentience. The arms of the Etyri look like lighter, more flexible versions of their legs, and can fold up out of sight under the wings at rest. The hand has four digits ending in tiny talons mounted on fleshy sensitive fingertips; a curious radial carpal arrangement of the wrist bones allows any digit to be in an opposable position to the others, or any pair of digits to oppose the other pair.

All Etyri have beaked faces on skulls the size of most humanoid crania; most stand just over two meters tall with their body held vertical, but are at eye level with smaller people when standing in the more relaxed forward-inclined posture. Balanced atop long legs resembling

a heron's — but more muscular — the torso seems massive compared to a human's, but much of this is wing and feather, and, with their hollow bones and racing metabolic rate, Etyri are much lighter than a compactly built mammal-like alien only half their size. Although great strength is required to work their five-meter-plus wingspan, their strength when engaged in conventional humanoid work like lifting, pushing or wrestling is comparatively less.

Etyri eyesight is the most highly developed of all sentient races. This advantage manifests itself differently for various types of Etyri: those with forward-facing eyes are better at seeing smaller details or movement at greater distances, while those with widely-set eyes can have peripheral vision extending up to a full 360 degrees around their head. Charioteers tell tales of Etyri pilots who out-manuevered superior spacecraft, anticipating the enemy's moves by watching the opposing pilots through a viewing portal as they worked the controls. (The humanoid eye can only discern this kind of detail at close docking distances.)

The details of Etyri anatomy vary widely, as tribal adaptations in different regions have, over the centuries, resulted in a wide diversity of beak shapes and plumage in response to dietary and climatic stimuli. In general, however, most Etyri fall into a handful of ethnic divisions which share common physical traits:

Huar'raughq

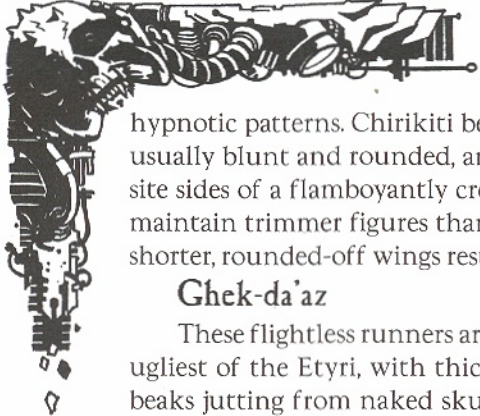
Heavier and much more powerfully built than the others, the Huar'raughq are by far the strongest fliers among the Etyri, bearing a strong resemblance to eagles and hawks of other worlds. With large eyes facing directly forward and craggy hooked beaks, they are the most dominant and imposing of the Etyri, stately presences whose piercing gaze transfixes all who meet them. Their coloring is simple but with striking contrasts, and their clan-distinctive markings tend to emphasize their size and strength.

Cha'arkut

By far the most numerous on Grail, these Etyri resemble the game and song birds of most worlds, with pointed beaks, and small eyes mounted on opposite sides of their round, usually uncrested, heads. Shorter and stockier than most, the Cha'arkut tend toward obesity in old age. Their plumage is generally the most subdued, composed mainly of mottled, muted earth tones, with notable tribes being distinguished by striking touches of bright crimson or iridescent green. In recent centuries, more and more Cha'arkut have begun to show the distinctive aquiline profile and stately markings of the Huar'raughq, as a result of both intermarriage and cosmetic feather-dyeing.

Chirikiti

The esthetic opposite of the tastefully restrained Cha'arkut, the Chirikiti encompass a greater variety of body types and the wildest plumages displays found on Grail, dazzling the eye with brilliant vibrating colors and



hypnotic patterns. Chirikiti beaks are more massive but usually blunt and rounded, and their eyes are on opposite sides of a flamboyantly crested head. Most Chirikiti maintain trimmer figures than the Cha'arkut, but their shorter, rounded-off wings restrict their flying abilities.

Ghek-da'az

These flightless runners are generally considered the ugliest of the Etyri, with thicker bones and enormous beaks jutting from naked skulls, resembling somewhat the ancient Urthish diatryma. Their plumage, when it can be seen through its habitual coat of dust, is patchy and indistinct, and in permanent disarray.


Other exotic types of Etyri were known to exist in the distant past, but most were believed extinct by the end of the Second Republic. Still, one sometimes hears spurious and unproved traveler's tales in which the paralyzing cry of the snowy white owl-like Dhuwalluth rings out over the arctic plains, or a graceful long-necked H'lansendenang is glimpsed bathing in a secluded pond. (The latter image is a recurrent motif in the fairy tales of Grail.)

Clothing

The Etyri rarely don clothing except for ritual occasions or when trying to fit in with humanoids. Necklaces, armbands and anklets did appear before human contact, and decorative headdresses and aprons have since been incorporated into religious festivals when the wearer is not required to fly. Cha'arkut who regularly do business with humans on Grail often wear dickeys and leggings that imitate human garb, topped with a conventional hat secured by an elastic chinstrap or ribbon. Chirikiti entertainers are very inventive with fashions that enhance their plumage displays, but which usually must be discarded before taking flight.

Normally Etyri are seen wearing a small or medium-sized pouch slung across the abdomen, and most warriors have bandoleers and holstered harnesses especially tailored to avoid entangling flight feathers or deforming the air-control surfaces of the body.

Society



The social structure of the Etyri is essentially similar to the feudal order of the Known Worlds. The Huar'raughq are the acknowledged nobility, and have taken on the title designations of human society. A hereditary queen rules the race with the aid of an august council of earls composing the Eyrie Summit. Any Huar'raughq presiding uncontested over a defined hunting territory is accorded the respect due a baron, and high-ranking extended families claim the great mountain ranges. The Cha'arkut and Chirikiti are effectively peasants, but the concept of serfdom is unknown since the Etyri's ties to their ancestral lands are deeper than law, being both religious and ecological. Thus every Etyri essentially has the status of freeman.

Beyond this, the Etyri community is matriarchal, with brood-mothers holding authority over close-knit families. The Huar'raughq, who mate for life, are very concerned with the history and status of their family, and keep detailed pedigrees which they proudly sing when displaying the natural heraldic devices of their plumage markings. Huar'raughq young are groomed for greatness like the scions of any other noble house. The young of the Cha'arkut are raised communally, an outgrowth of their mothers' practice of taking turns in shifts when hatching eggs. The Chirikiti are an exception to the family pattern; their mating behavior tends toward brief volatile relationships, often with bitter partings, leaving most chicks to be raised by single mothers or the occasional female collective.

The religion of the Etyri is dark, primal and so richly detailed that few humans have ever grasped more than its major points. A warrior's code of honor, policed by the Huar'raughq, is followed by all; honesty in speech and adhering to one's word is especially valued. The warrior's code instructs one to live honestly and die well for a good cause, so that, through successive incarnations, the soul can be freed to expand into a higher plane.

Etyri theology reflects much of their evolution, with the Witch-Mother Mihanoom occupying a kind of Promethean role as the bringer of the light of awareness, the first sentient Etyri. Another major figure is the Law-Singer Aabvap-Wadahp, who was said to have lived around the time of the first human explorations and codified much of Etyri law following the Zhuil'hishtu wars. All forces of nature on Grail have been personified in the Etyri pantheon, with a particularly wide-ranging host governing meteorological phenomena. Most of the Etyri mythos concerns itself with death and what lies beyond. Mihanoom's grand vision describes a many-tiered progression starting with non-life, or total death, at the bottom and graduating up through mineral, vegetable and animal consciousness. Flying creatures like the Etyri represent the highest mode of consciousness attainable before one passes beyond into higher dimensions of evolutionary existence.

The ground is considered the land of the dead, and everything living upon it is regarded as "dead," whether it is moving or not. (Early human visitors were shocked to hear Etyri refer to them as "walking dead.") Etyri confront their own mortality when they are forced to descend to the ground, to sleep, feed or breed. This is not to equate the ground with evil, however, for it gives life as well as taking it away. The elemental "undergods" of earth include Ouwuo Mountain-Mother, hailed by the Huar'raughq as the Gate of Life and Death, and Habar-Yan Tree-Father, protector and provider to the Cha'arkut tribes.

Etyri perceptions of humanity mingle two contradictory attitudes: as gravity-bound land creatures, humans are less evolved, "walking dead" like the Zhuil'hishtu; but, as spacefarers, humans have physically inhabited the



Language

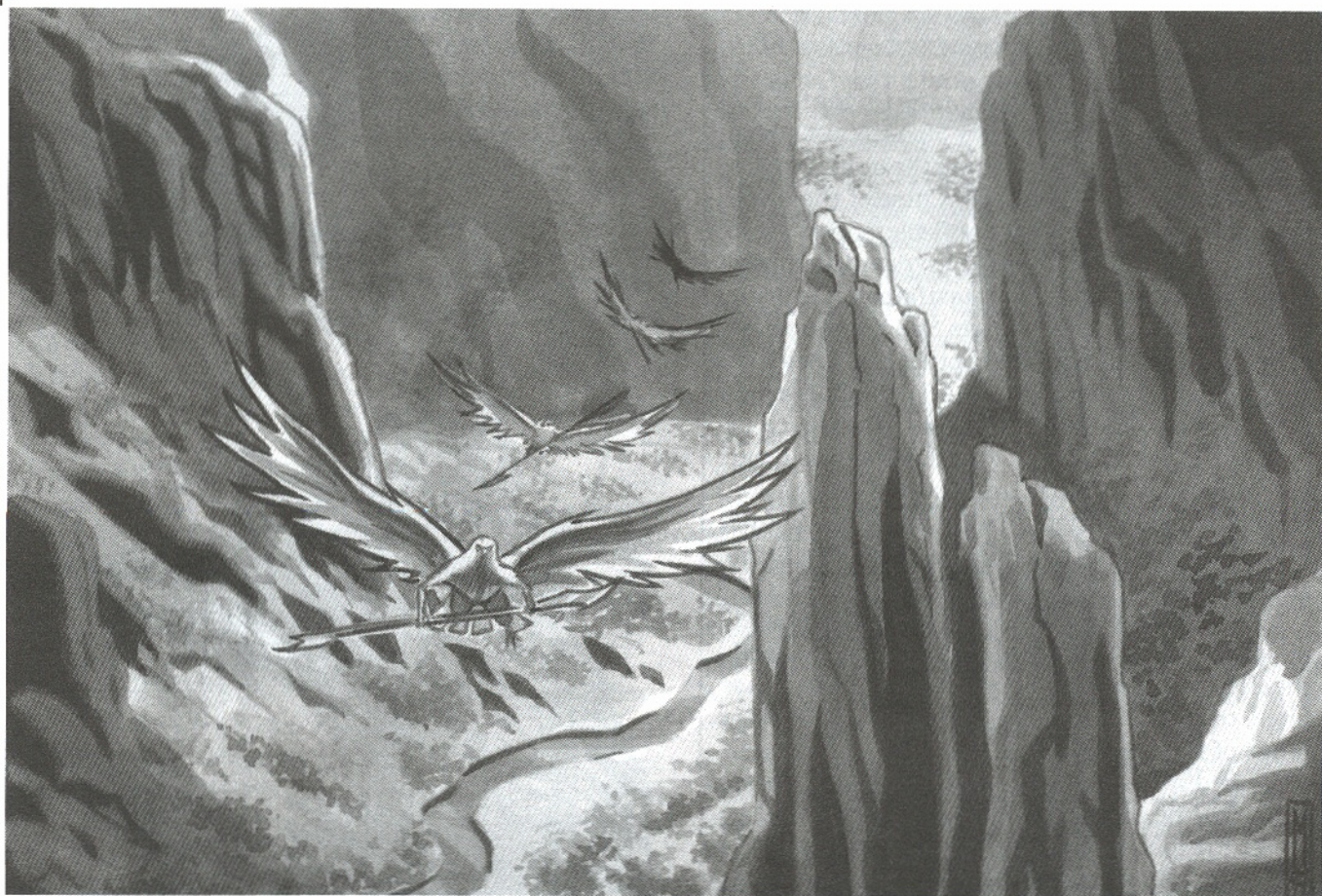
In his seventeen-volume *Etyri Studies*, the Second Republic xeno-anthropologist Shamus al-Dubhai claimed that the Etyri tongue was the most complex living language in use, and spent nine of those volumes proving it. In purely quantifiable terms of speed and clarity of communication, Etyrian (when used between native speakers) compared favorably to many Republican computer languages. Speed alone proves to be the greatest hindrance to other humanoids attempting to learn the tongue; some of the longest and most eloquent pronouncements in Urthish or Latin, such as the Beatific Rolls from the Compassionate Teachings or Vladimir's undelivered coronation speech, when translated fully and literally into Etyrian emerge only as a brief handful of indistinguishable chirps.

Al-Dubhai's breakdown of the Etyri "alphabet" recognizes over two hundred distinct phonemes, with the effective number compounded by such factors as pitch, trilling and context, and an equally diverse range of body language — postures, gestures and plumage displays — used in direct face-to-face conversation. Furthermore, most Etyri are capable of generating up to four different sounds simultaneously. Labial sounds, however, are impossible for the lipless Etyri; the Urthish letters B, F, M, P, V and W were used by al-Dubhai to transliterate certain groups of compound phonemes found exclusively in proper names from Etyri mythology. The name "Mihanoom," for example, starts and ends with two very different sounds; the first letter is a deep laryngeal hum and the final a low buzzing created by vibrating the two halves of the beak together at slightly different frequencies.

Over half of the phonemes that compose Etyrian cannot be reproduced by humanoid vocal apparatus, so the language cannot be effectively spoken outside of the species. Over the centuries, many of Grail's inhabitants have developed a kind of "pidgin Etyri" consisting of a phonetically simplified list of stock phrases.

Most Etyri have little trouble learning and speaking Urthish, although the reverse is not true. Etyri were provided with dolomei (think machine translators; see the Shantor), but they hate them, claiming that they "rob speech of its soul." In fact, all but the most sophisticated sound communication devices are simply incapable of capturing even a tenth of the nuances of the Etyri voice.





higher realms of the gods beyond the sky. Part of the Law-Singer's reform of spiritual thought involved a less literal interpretation of Mihanoom's vision, in which souls were granted to non-avians and the realms beyond were identified as abstract dimensions rather than outer space.

Habitat

The Etyri have a deep respect for their environment, and the tribal associations with their respective ancestral territories figure prominently in their mythology. Humans have given the avians' name to the Etyriani mountain range, home to most of the Huar'raughq nobility, which includes the Eyrie Summit and the highest peak on the planet, Mount Chur'reesh, where the Rites of Mihanoom are held amid Anunnaki ruins. In fact, the Huar'raughq live on mountain peaks all over Grail, in extended family eyries which overlook the hunting grounds that they rule as would any feudal lord. Their hereditary claim to these homes has given them some slight leverage in the Imperial economy, as these mountains are the only places in the Known Worlds where the luxurious blue-veined Grail marble and the precious metal Keddite, useful in Republican tech for its metaconductive properties, may be found.

The vast forests which stretch across the temperate zones of the planet are home to the Cha'arkut, as well as the hardwood Baryana trees, another of Grail's most val-

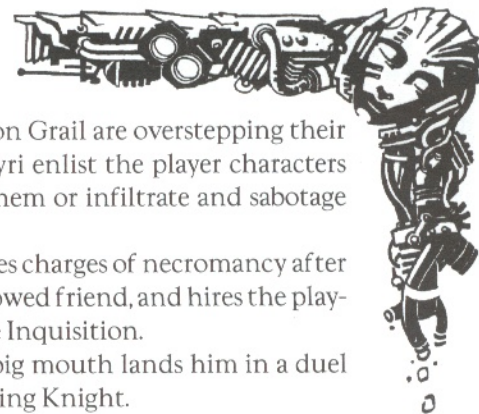
ued exports. The Cha'arkut, natural-born businessmen (mythically credited with starting the Etyri's pre-human economy using hoarded nuts as currency), take care to keep the lucrative logging industry from destroying their homes and breeding grounds.

Archipelagos of scenic islands occupy Grail's tropical zones and are home to the Chirikiti, whose only real wealth comes from the vacationing Cha'arkut and Huar'raughq, who have migrated to the warmer climes every winter since time immemorial. With the ever-growing human population buying up island territories for resorts and winter homes, the Chirikiti have been gradually crowded out of their lush rainforest paradises. Much friction has resulted, setting the Chirikiti against the humans and the other Etyri, as they face each spring with their best fruit trees picked clean, their favored roosting spots caked with guano, and much of the ground beneath their five-tiered canopied jungles cleared, paved and poisoned with insecticides. The increased emigration of Chirikiti from their homeworld has been a result of this.

The equatorial stretches of the archipelagos are arid, sun-baked desert wastes, where the unwanted Ghek-da'az pursue their solitary existences.

Diet

All Etyri are omnivorous, but generally stick to a diet determined by the most plentiful food sources in their area. All are capable hunters and different tribes habitu-



ally resort to methods favored for millennia. The Cha'arkut tend to be pack hunters, hounding large game in teams before running it into the ground. The Chirikiti are generally trappers, snaring small game with clever ploys or driving fat bushboar into staked pits. Huar'raughq attack their prey one-on-one, when possible using only their viciously hooked beaks and talons.

The Cha'arkut are obsessive nut-hoarders, and the Habari forests are rich in a wide variety of seeds and nuts, many of which can be graded in value and used as currency in Etyri business transactions. Some nuts have medicinal properties, prized by Cha'arkut prone to intestinal disorders after wintering in the tropics. The Chirikiti jungles are dotted with an abundance of fruits, some of which are likewise possessed of curative powers, but many of which are poisonous. Cha'arkut and Chirikiti alike have a number of variations for preparing cakes and baked goods from the sweet meal composed of the soft-bodied, four-legged aphid grubs, a staple item found in the undergrowth of both Habari forest and tropical jungle.

Scavenging is denied by religious law, but spacefaring Etyri must usually ignore this restriction, which basically prohibits them from eating any food that they have not killed or gathered themselves, or that has not been provided for them by their family.

Roleplaying

Playing Etyri

The Etyri of Grail fall into fairly distinct and easily identifiable types, but those who emigrate to the stars tend to be the exception to all the rules of their race. Precocious and meticulous, they are often perfectionists who pursue their life's work with obsessive fervor, and are generally honest to a fault, though not usually at the expense of tact. Though emigrants are considered insane by their peers, they nonetheless acquire a certain mystique on Grail for having traveled the "realms beyond." (According to traditional theology, they must be considered dead the moment they leave the planet, and are always referred to as "ex-Etyri.") As human medical science has lowered the infant mortality rate for the Etyri, more and more are moving offworld to escape their crowded lands.

Etyri stereotypes: Keddah-employed courier/spy/assassin; Sanctuary Aeon guardian; Huar'raughq Questing Knight; Cha'arkut merchant; Chirikiti singer/dancer/cosmetician/has-been; Ghek-da'az thug

Gamemastering Etyri

The most stereotypical use for an Etyri character in an ongoing game would be as doomsaying fortune teller, warning of the players' impending mortality and foreshadowing challenges to come. When presenting aspects of Etyri culture to players, emphasize the complexity and nuance in all its expressions.

Here are some story ideas involving the Etyri:

- Loggers and miners on Grail are overstepping their bounds again, and the Etyri enlist the player characters either to negotiate with them or infiltrate and sabotage them.

- A Chirikiti singer faces charges of necromancy after holding a seance for a widowed friend, and hires the players to protect her from the Inquisition.

- A player character's big mouth lands him in a duel with a Huar'raughq Questing Knight.

Traits

Suggested Species Traits

Etyri characters begin the game with some considerable advantages, with self-powered flight being the most obvious. The senses of these airborne predators are much sharper than those of most land-bound races, and talons and beaks are good natural weapons. Offsetting this is their lighter build, with the fast metabolism and hollow bones common to most avians.

Characteristics: Strength (base 2, max 8; cost: +5 pts), Dexterity (base 4, max 11; cost: 3 pts), Perception (base 4, max 12; cost: 5 pts)

Natural skills: Fly, Observe

Learned skills: Speak Etyri (base: 3), Speak Urthish (base 1; cost: 1 pt)

Blessings: Claws (2 pts: 3 DMG), Beak (1 pt: 2 DMG), Flight (5 pts), Keen Eyes (3 pts: +3 Perception with sight only)

Curses: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Claustrophobia (+2 pts: -2 Calm in close quarters), Hollow Bones (+6 pts: Vitality is figured by adding 3+ Endurance)

Affliction: Ostracized (+2 pts)

Total cost: 3 pts

Huar'raughq

Characteristics: Strength

Natural skills: Impress, Melee, Vigor

Blessing: Hawkeye (2 pts; +2 Shoot or Throw when self or target is in motion)

Benefices: Spear or broadsword, and/or rifle or pistol

Cha'arkut

Characteristics: Extrovert

Natural skills: Charm

Curses: Short (+3 pts: -1 Vitality, base run = 8 meters)

Chirikiti

Characteristics: Extrovert, Passion

Natural skills: Charm

Curses: Short (+3 pts: -1 Vitality, base run = 8 meters)

Ghek-da'az

Characteristics: Strength, Endurance

Natural skills: Vigor

Affliction: Flightless (+5 pts)

New Natural Skill: Fly

All Etyri characters, except for Ghek-da'az or the lame, begin with Fly, a natural skill, at base 3. Level flight can be



maintained at a relative ground speed of 12 meters per turn plus 2 meters per point of Vigor. Powered flight is twice as fast, but can only be maintained for a number of turns equal to the flier's Endurance plus Vigor. During takeoff and powered flight, an Etyri can carry up to 30 pounds per point of Strength, but only with extreme effort; twice this amount may be carried through an unpowered glide. To take flight from a standing position, an Etyri needs a clear area of about two and a half meters on either side to flap her wings.

Flight Maneuvers

The Fly skill has a variety of applications beyond simple reconnaissance or quick escapes. The Etyri take great pride in their aerial prowess, and nearly all their time in the air is spent practicing sharp turns, barrel rolls, loops and spirals.

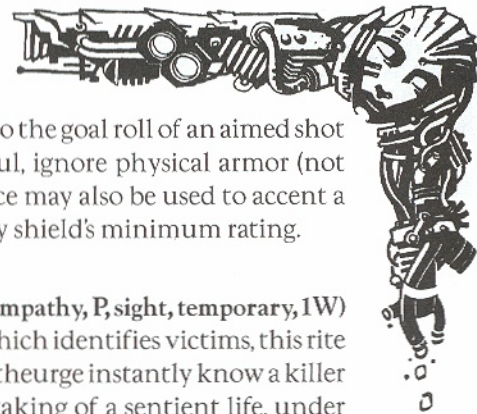
General maneuvers: Dexterity + Fly should be rolled for precision maneuvers, like in-flight combat actions, flips, rolls, intercepting flying objects, and taking off from a confined area.

Powered maneuvers: Strength + Fly should be rolled for powered maneuvers, like pulling out of a steep dive, or taking off in, and flying against, high winds. On occasion the gamemaster may require an Endurance + Fly roll for prolonged maneuvers, like carrying another character through a long glide or keeping oneself perfectly angled to ride an updraft or crosscurrent.

Stooping (diving): Stooping, or diving to attack, can be an extremely powerful, albeit risky, maneuver used to augment hand-to-hand or melee weapon attacks; treat a simple dive like a controlled fall, converting the direct damage points the faller would normally receive into additional damage dice for the diver's attack (see page 175 in the **Fading Suns** rulebook for falling distances and damages).

For a powered dive, add the effect dice from an initial Strength + Fly roll, and the falling damage, to the attack's damage dice. Remember that the goal roll for an attack must still be made as usual, and in the case of the power dive, a -2 penalty is incurred for every 10 meters of diving.

In some cases, the gamemaster may require a separate roll to pull out of a dive; this is generally determined by the available space around the target. If the diving attacker has room to level out and approach the target horizontally, or if the target is airborne, no roll is necessary. A critically fumble dive directly toward a ground target can result in the attacker taking all the extra falling damage (and Strength damage, when used) as a normal fall. Devoted Etyri warriors have been known to make suicidal, high-altitude power dives that are incredibly destructive even when the attacker is unarmed.



Theurgy

Death Gaze

An occult capacity native to certain Etyri, the Death Gaze seems to be an atavistic echo of the scavenger phase of this race's evolution. This path cultivates such an intimate affinity not only with organisms already dead but with still-living mortals that many believe all Etyri can predict one's exact time of death. While this is hardly the case, this superstition has plagued migrants from Grail for centuries, and no few Etyri have been fried by the Avesti after facing charges of necromancy.

As a type of theurgy, the DeathGaze can be taught to non-Etyri, but a much longer training period is required for aliens, who must be extensively schooled in the Etyri religion and world-view. Some considerable knowledge of their mythology is required, as is a rigorous initiation into the Etyri warrior's code.

Horuspication

(Level 1, Perception + Inquiry, LG, touch, temporary, 1W)

This rite can take up to a span to perform, but enables the theurge to determine the cause of death for any targeted corpse, sometimes with a degree of detail and accuracy rivaling early Second Republic forensic medicine. In addition, the theurge can scrutinize any aspect of the deceased's physical life, including diet, habitual activities and environment.

Death Scent

(Level 2, Faith + Observe, P, sight, temporary, 1W)

This power enables an Etyri to "smell" imminent death. According to Etyri metaphysics, any ending of life sends out a ripple of dissipating energies which expands in time as well as space, and lingers in the consciousness of anyone involved, whether they were actually present or just personally close to the deceased. At this level, only the closest future ripples will be sensed, and only in such a way as to give a vague feeling of uneasiness concerning anyone in danger of death within the next span. With three or more victory points, the doomed person(s) can be identified; otherwise, it could be anyone nearby — including the rite caster!

The nature of the coming death cannot be gleaned from this rite, only its strong possibility. The anticipated death is only a possibility, not an inevitable occurrence. Caution and right action may allow the doomed person to escape his fate, just as such "mystic hackles" alerted the primitive Etyri to nearby predators. However, even a successful rite may fail to detect a coming death, for death is sneaky and hard to predict.

End Strike

(Level 3, Perception + combat skill, LG, temporary, 1W)

The theurge can find the fatal weakness of an opponent, be it their technique, armor or equipment. Add the

victory dice from this rite to the goal roll of an aimed shot or other strike. If successful, ignore physical armor (not energy shields). Victory dice may also be used to accent a roll to slip under an energy shield's minimum rating.

Hunter Sense

(Level 4, Perception + Empathy, P, sight, temporary, 1W)

Unlike Death Scent, which identifies victims, this rite identifies killers. It lets the theurge instantly know a killer when she sees one, as the taking of a sentient life, under any condition, leaves an auric stain upon the taker. Some understanding of the target's feelings can be gleaned, as a guilt-shrouded accidental manslaughterer will have a different psychic stench than a duty-driven soldier, an euthanasiast surgeon or a cold-blooded assassin. However, the actual means used to kill cannot be gleaned, only an indication of the killer's attitude.

With three or more victory points, the time of the target's most recent killing can be estimated. With a critical roll, the theurge can predict whether (but not how) the target will kill within the next span.

Final Sight

(Level 5, Perception + Focus, GP, touch, temporary, 1W)

This rite, which requires a bright light source and at least five turns to perform, allows a theurge to read the final sight of a recently deceased target, as imprinted upon their retina at the moment of death. In the case of blindfolded or unconscious victims, the image imprinted is the last thing seen before the lights went out.

Final Song

(Level 6, Perception + Focus, GP, touch, temporary, 1W)

Similar to Final Sight, this rite requires total silence and at least three turns to perform, enabling the theurge to hear the final sounds a recently deceased target heard. Precise breath control is necessary to force minute pulses of air into the ear, causing the eardrum to echo the last impulses still cycling through the auditory nerve.

Dead Sight

(Level 7, Introvert + Focus, LGP, sight, prolonged, 1W)

The ultimate extension of Death Scent and Hunter Sense, this variety of mystic vision covers an auric spectral band slightly overlapping those used in the Sixth Sense powers Subtle Sight and Wyrd Sight. While neither the target's state of mind nor the details of occult activity may be read, all of the target's interactions with the realm of the dead, past, present and (to some degree) future, can be discerned. This includes friends and family of the target who have died, anyone the target has killed and the target's own past brushes with death. The target's future can be seen as an auric tree of branching probabilities, with certain branches ending abruptly as that course of action leads to the target's death.

Bear in mind that no specific information as to time, place or action can be read, only the feelings and impressions associated with each death: when reading the past, the loss of a loved one can be clearly distinguished from





the destruction of an enemy, as can the target's degree of involvement (i.e., "I hadn't seen Auntie for over five years before she died," as opposed to "I twisted the dagger as the spittle from his dying breath stung my cheek."); when reading the future, the type of death and how soon it may happen can be seen. (i.e., Soldiers boarding ships are usually told, "Death by drowning soon; if not then, death by fire and violence within a season; if not then, disease in old age.") Occult influences leading to a possible death can be detected.

Funerary Communion

(Level 8, Faith + Impress, LGP, prolonged, 1W)

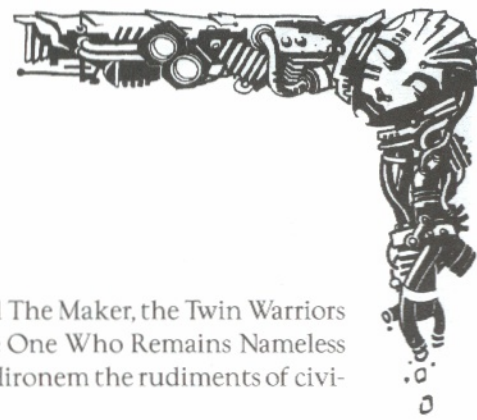
This rite must be performed within a month of the target's death, as the deceased's spirit must be called back to the corporeal world before it passes into the realms beyond. When successful, Funerary Communion allows the theurge and all present to converse with the spirit of the deceased; with three or more victory points, a visual apparition may manifest as well. The deceased target is under no particular constraint to answer any questions or

reveal any of the mysteries awaiting beyond death's door, and the newly dead are usually in too confused of a state to do so anyway. The theurge receives a +2 to cast this rite if it can be performed over the fresh carcass of the target within a span of the death.

Songs of Distant Heights

(Level 9, Faith + Charm, LGP, prolonged, 1W)

This rite is central to much of Etyri religious practice, as it allowed them to communicate with the spirits of long-dead ancestors. Songs of Distant Heights enables the theurge to lure someone long dead back from the realms beyond death, for conversation and, as above, possible visual manifestation. The old dead keep many forgotten secrets and can tell of supernal mysteries, but must be cajoled into doing so, or bribed with news of their descendants and events following their death. The theurge receives a +2 to cast this rite if it can be performed at the grave of the target, or a holy place or former home closely associated with him.



Hironem

Sixday, Marz 30th, 4996 (Cadiz Date)

Finally, after two months on this godforsaken world, I've had a breakthrough! I've been living in this festering cesspool the Decados call a city, avoiding Muster press gangs and worse, paying bribes for everything, waiting to meet the Hironem.

Gaining access to their reservation at Turaz is not easy. The Hironem have strict laws about foreigners entering their "sacred city." To enter requires not only a government visa but also approval of the Sibanzi. Decados bureaucrats here, when available, work slowly, so I approached the magistrate — a corrupt little man — for help. He said he'd help me through the visa "application" process, as he called it, and I paid him handsomely for his help. (I've already gone through most of the funds the university provided.) He did whatever was necessary, and apparently very well, for two days later I was granted a visa.

I sat in a dingy, bare office, waiting for whatever paperwork I'd paid for. I paced the room impatiently, half expecting the arrangement to fall apart. The door opened and in walked a Hironem carrying an ornate inlaid slug-rifle — a Warrior. He is magnificent, with golden eyes and an impressive crest display. He introduced himself as Illu Tarsi and explained the rules in clipped tones: He is to be my guide, and he must accompany me at all times. I am allowed only where he takes me. He will translate for me, but I cannot ask questions of the Sibanzi directly — he'll convey them in writing. How strange. How regimented. Dare I say it — how Vau.

I'm convinced the Hironem possess the answers I seek.

— From the journal of Professor Tai Seng Wong, University of Veridian

After the Oro'ym, the Hironem are perhaps the most free of alien races in the Known Worlds. While they no longer lay claim to their own planet, their overlords, the Decados, leave them alone. By treaty, the Hironem way of life is protected from outside influences, with contact with the Known Worlds heavily proscribed. Because their caste system bears some similarities to the Vau, a few scholars believe that Hironem hold important clues to Vau culture. Three tiers make up this society — the Maker caste (Kimmu) forms the foundation of the social order, followed by the Warrior caste (Kigaz), then the powerful Sibanzi. Less well known, though just as intriguing, is their strange belief in a magical life force called Ssu. Humans rarely meet Hironem off-world, and those they do are considered outcasts by their own people.

History

The God Times

Millennia ago, according to Hironem legends, gods walked the face of Cadiz. They refer to this period as the

God Times — when Akkad The Maker, the Twin Warriors Eresh and Tanam, and the One Who Remains Nameless fell from the sky to teach Hironem the rudiments of civilization.

They organized Hironem society and taught them the secret of Ssu, the life force that binds the universe together. The Nameless One set the God-King on his marble throne, and made him responsible for the growing crops and swirling heavens. Others he instructed in tending the God-King, and they became the Sibanzi. The Twin Warriors gathered together Hironem, teaching them to fight, thus forming the Warrior caste. Akkad organized the rest, each according to his skill — farmers, potters, basket-weavers, and others — to create the Maker caste. Those with unclean jobs — butchers, morticians and skin-tenders (those who help others shed their skin) — were left behind, without caste.

After many years, the gods fell to fighting amongst themselves, a period known as the Red Time. Hironem sacred scriptures tell many stories about these conflicts. Akkad became unhappy, increasingly disagreeing with the Nameless One over leadership, laws and prerogatives. Finally, breaking the taboo against his handling weapons, Akkad rebelled against order. Tanam sided with the Nameless One, while Eresh stood by Akkad. Hironem, too, joined in the conflict, each choosing a side. The Four Gods fought a mighty battle, "hurling thunderbolts at each other." In the end, Akkad slew Tanam, and together with Eresh smote the defenseless Nameless One.

According to the final book of scripture, the two rebels faced a day of retribution when the Gods Above All came to Cadiz. They found Akkad and Eresh, uncovered their great sin, and took them away. The God-King and those Hironem loyal to the Nameless One restored the old order, punishing those who sided with the Rebellious Gods.

The rest of Hironem history remains unknown to humans, for none have bothered to study it. For millennia, like all races and cultures, the Hironem had their wars, their triumphs, and their disasters.

Arrival of Humanity

Humanity landed on Cadiz in 2680, when House Gloucester established a colony far from Hironem habitations. Early probes had revealed the presence of indigenous sentient life in the equatorial belt, and determined that the sentients' tech level was early industrial. Having found evidence of a previous landing on Cadiz's moon, House Gloucester reasoned that the natives almost certainly possessed destructive battlefield weapons. A minor house whose fortunes always seemed tenuous, the





Gloucesters sought to avoid a conflict that could jeopardize their survival. They quietly established a beach-head, and for three years the Hironem remained unaware of humanity's presence.

In an unprecedented move, Ekman Gloucester, the colony administrator, approached the Hironem directly. When he arrived, he and his entourage were greeted with shock and amazement. The local villagers took them to the local Sibani, and early meetings focused simply on opening the lines of communication. Once the two sides could communicate, Ekman Gloucester offered to buy a parcel of land from the Hironem for a collection of gadgets. The Sibani counted himself successful — the land he "sold" had never been used by the Hironem, so it didn't matter to him; he thought he'd never see the humans again.

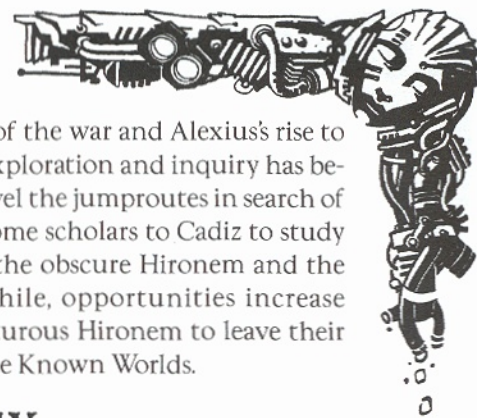
But humanity didn't go away. The next time they approached the natives, it was to purchase Hironem land and this time they met with the central authorities. According to tradition, the God-King owned all the land, the Sibani administered it on his behalf, and people occupied it at his sufferance. Some Sibani pressed for a modernization program, trading the one thing they had for human technology — land.

The original agreement between the two sides set the precedent for all future Hironem-human relations. A total of five treaties were signed by the Sibani on behalf of

the God-King. In this way, Hironem received generators, factories and farm equipment and in return the Gloucesters received land to expand their holdings.

Interaction with humanity changed Hironem society. The technology the Gloucesters brought with them created a new social hierarchy. This had a dual effect. First, this displaced the Makers and Warriors who lived on the land, creating a refugee problem. Second, Warriors and Makers, interested in acquiring technology for themselves, offered their services to the humans. House Gloucester took advantage of the offer, using eager Hironem to expand their grasp on Cadiz. Wealth, measured in gadgets, replaced caste as the standard of prestige and privilege. A Maker, sporting a personal think machine, volt tools and a flashlight was counted wealthier than the Sibani supervising the local generator.

Traditionalists and the disenfranchised banded together, rallying around the God-King. Greedy Sibani, they believed, betrayed the God-King for personal gain. They argued that, by adhering to the caste system, society would not suffer disarray and could present a united front against the human intruders. Progressives, however, advocated abandoning the hide-bound caste system, and desired to reform their society along human lines. Increasing social tensions among Hironem eventually proved disastrous.



The Decados

In 2818, House Decados (re)established itself, and in an inexplicable turn of events Davies Gloucester signed Cadiz over to them. The Decados were content to preserve the relationship with the Hironem as it stood — trading technology for land and services. Unfortunately, some Hironem no longer favored those terms. Jakovian agents learned of the growing anti-human sentiment and moved to preempt a Shantor-style revolt on Cadiz. They manufactured an insurrection.

The Jakovians identified the village of Semak as a suitable focal point. Baron Edom Decados was sent to acquire land and hire laborers to build a manor house. The local Siban was interested in trading farmland for a processing factory, but many of the tenants refused to relocate and barricaded the village, as expected. Baron Edom pressed the issue, ringing the village with his personal army. Nerves frayed and tempers hot, the Hironem Warriors manning the barricades attacked. The Decados bombarded the village from orbit.

Horried, the Hironem quickly sued for peace. In the agreement, the Decados acknowledged the divinity and sovereignty of the God-King over Hironem (angering the Church in the process), while the God-King agreed to cede all land to House Decados. The treaty established the reservation at Turaz and guaranteed Hironem autonomy. Afterwards, Edom Decados was heard to quip “what good is a God-King shut away in a cage?”

For the next two millennia, relations between the Decados and Hironem remained uneventful. The Decados ignored the reptilians and did as they pleased, while the Hironem isolated themselves from the rest of the universe. During the Second Republic some young Hironem left for the stars, but never enough to establish communities on other planets.

Selected as the initial site for negotiations with the Vau, Cadiz saw an explosion of development. The Decados and others poured money and resources into the planet, and the Hironem enjoyed a brief period of notoriety. But when the Vau rejected the site in favor of Vrill-ya, Cadiz was abandoned, development abruptly halted, and the Hironem returned to obscurity.

During the Emperor Wars, House Decados briefly attempted to recruit Hironem into their army, but few joined. They managed to form a single unit of Warriors, called Dragons, who performed extraordinarily well. Sent on a variety of suicide missions, the Hironem always managed to survive. Were they human, they would have been covered in medals and ribbons. Instead, when they mustered out of army, the Hironem unit received little reward or recognition from their Decados overlords. They returned to Turaz and discovered that their own people considered them outcasts. Bitter, well-armed and experienced, most Dragons now travel the jumpweb under Muster employ.

With the conclusion of the war and Alexius's rise to the throne, a new age of exploration and inquiry has begun. More people now travel the jump routes in search of lost knowledge, leading some scholars to Cadiz to study the connection between the obscure Hironem and the mysterious Vau. Meanwhile, opportunities increase steadily for young, adventurous Hironem to leave their reservation and explore the Known Worlds.

Physiology

The average Hironem stands two meters tall and is slightly built. Though bipedal, their evolution followed the reptilian path rather than the primate. There are several distinct “races” of Hironem — light brown desert-dwellers, deep green marsh-dwellers, and mountain-dwellers with thicker hides.

Their skin is scaly and rough, like a lizard's. Instead of hair, they sport a variety of horns, crests, or flaps. Feet have three toes, while hands have five digits. Tails are vestigial, if at all present. Hironem faces lack a pronounced nose, instead breathing through two nose holes, and lack external ears. Their eyes are colored solid gold. Hironem possess extremely long, sticky tongues, which they shoot forth to catch live prey.

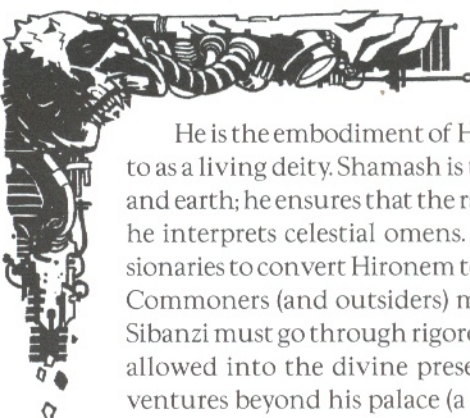
Internally, Hironem differ little from humans — one heart, two lungs, kidneys, liver, etc., although they are cold-blooded. They reproduce sexually and bear living young. For some unknown reason, Hironem have never exhibited Psi abilities and seem to be untrainable in it. Cybernetic implants, however, are possible, though difficult for them to obtain on Cadiz.

The Hironem diet consists of various birds, small rodents, fish and insects, which are eaten broiled, fried, baked and raw. A popular meal is the Idim Bug, baked in its shell until the meat turns pulpy white. Takasad, a cold fish broth drunk like coffee, is another favorite. Many find their tendency to catch meals with their tongues disconcerting.

Society

Hironem live according to a social system established by the Four Gods. The Nameless One created Sibanzi, Eresh and Tanam created the Warriors and Akkad created the Makers. The Illu, “non-people,” were shunned by the gods. A person's caste is determined by birth; the child follows the caste of their highest-placed parent — a daughter born into the Warrior caste can expect a lifetime of martial pursuits. Gender has no effect on caste. Below are the four castes in the Hironem system:

The God-King: The pinnacle of Hironem society is the God-King, called Shamash. Each God-King bears this name, assuming it when the old Shamash dies. This confuses many humans, who think it is a royal title. The reason all God-Kings go by the same name is unknown. The dynasty remains unbroken from the original Shamash.



He is the embodiment of Hironem culture, looked up to as a living deity. Shamash is the bridge between heaven and earth; he ensures that the rains fall and the crops grow; he interprets celestial omens. Attempts by Church missionaries to convert Hironem to the Pancreator always fail. Commoners (and outsiders) may not see Shamash. Even Sibanzi must go through rigorous training before they are allowed into the divine presence. When the God-King ventures beyond his palace (a rare event), Warriors travel ahead to clear the streets.

Sibanzi: Servants of the God-King, they resemble Muslim Imams or Confucian scholar-gentry on ancient Urth. At the top of the caste system, Sibanzi address both spiritual and secular needs. As temporal leaders, they carry out the God-King's directives, acting as his agents in society. Sibanzi provide moral instruction as well, often quoting Hironem myth to suit their needs. They are considered holy, and it is a sin to strike one. Warriors and Makers are expected to obey their betters unquestioningly.

Warriors (Kigazi): These Hironem serve as police and army, under the authority of the Sibanzi. Unlike martial groups on other worlds, Hironem Warriors do not belong to different units or sects (this prevents civil wars). Kigazi enjoy a number of benefits over Makers: A Maker who touches a Warrior's weapons can be killed; Makers must give way to them on the street, nor can they gainsay a Warrior; a Warrior's word outweighs that of a Maker.

Makers (Kimmu): These are the laborers, artisans and farmers that form the bulk of Hironem society. They are lowest in the social order. As such, they have few rights: a Kigaz may kill one for an offense to his honor or for disobeying a Sibanz's orders, nor do they enjoy freedom of movement. Many sub-castes exist, divided by the services they provide. All are more or less equal.

Illu: Those who produce nothing (such as merchants and moneylenders) or work in unclean professions (morticians, leather workers and butchers). Outcasts are considered beneath notice and have no status. Warriors may kill them on sight and Makers may refuse to serve them. Hironem who leave Turaz on other than diplomatic missions are considered Illu.

Marriage between castes is permitted, though frowned upon in conservative circles; this occasionally causes problems, such as a Warrior wife dominated by her Sibanz husband, or a Warrior wife forced to kill her Maker husband for touching her weapons. Marriage can be a route to moving up to a new caste as well, as a Sibanz husband instructs his wife in the necessary skills.

Unlike similar systems, such as the Japanese, Hindu or Vau, Hironem can move up or down the social ladder. Social mobility occurs through a process of apprenticeship. A Maker, for example, can become a Warrior by finding someone willing to take her under their wing. The apprentice learns the necessary skills from her master. After a certain period, caste leaders test the apprentice; if she passes, she performs an initiation ritual and becomes

an accepted member of the new caste; if not, she resumes her previous life. It is the rare Sibanz who accepts a Warrior or Maker for apprenticeship, though it has been known to happen.

A caste member who commits an unpardonable crime, fails spectacularly, or otherwise embarrasses his caste can be called to task. Found guilty, caste leaders can strip the offender of his position and rank through a ritual called the *Mahazu*. For example, a Warrior who routinely shows cowardice in battle can be summoned to answer for his crimes by his superiors. Evidence is presented and examined. If guilty, the warrior is ritually rejected — his weapons are taken, his titles stripped and he must run a gauntlet of former comrades. He is no longer a member of that caste and must make his way among the Makers. Each caste has its own *Mahazu* ritual.

The arrival of House Gloucester had a profound impact on Hironem society. The introduction of human technology shattered the old, sacred order. Some Sibanzi worked to modernize their people by trading land for useful human tech, but could not foresee the strains this placed on society. Displaced Makers and Warriors became embittered refugees; rival Sibanzi preached against alien influences; those who lacked land to trade clamored to sell their services, and garnered wealth irrespective of station.

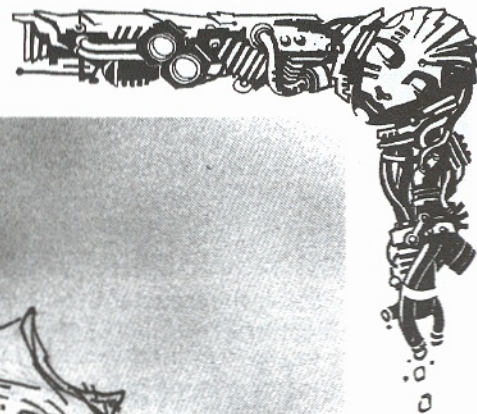
Although the Decados took most of the land, thus settling the problem of land for technology, among Hironem the schism remained. Progressives and Conservatives never clashed directly to decide the direction of Hironem society. Progressives want to make Hironem more like humans, abandoning the holy caste system. Conservatives uphold it. The two sides continue to quarrel to this day. Occasionally, Progressives try to enact reform — a fiery speech, a demonstration, a token gesture — but the Conservatives always bounce back (with their own fiery rhetoric, stonings and the occasional murder).

Language

Although Hironem can speak Urthish, humans find it difficult to speak *Salsu*. What makes *Salsu* difficult is not pronunciation but its grammar. Hironem language emphasizes the quality of things — color, size, emotional state, etc. — rather than their relationship to the speaker. Nouns are always at the end of a sentence, after adjectives, adverbs and verbs. For example, a simple sentence "I have a red ball" in *Salsu* becomes "Red have ball I." Hironem add descriptive words to sentences that in Urthish don't require them; a Hironem would not simply say "I go to the store." He'd say "Happily, big, on the hill, go store I" (I go happily to the big store on the hill). Humans who choose to speak *Salsu* stick to simple constructions.

Religion

Hironem worship the Four Gods who visited Cadiz millennia ago. Small shrines to them can be found in shops and homes across Turaz. Most venerate the entire pan-



theon, with special focus on their caste deity. Oddly, the God-King is not directly worshipped by the populace.

Hironem cosmology centers on a belief in S'su. S'su is the energy of the galaxy, the cosmic life force of which everything is part. It powers the suns. S'su does not come from the Gods, it just is, but the Gods taught Hironem the use of it. For millennia, Hironem have studied this force and developed sophisticated theories for its use. It is the basis for Hironem martial arts, medicine, architecture, technology and magic.

The greatest of all S'su masters is the God-King. Through his esoteric understanding of the nature of the universe, Shamash maintains all existence. It is his responsibility to ensure a good harvest, by practicing the proper rituals at the Temple of the Ancients. He brings good influences and propitiates bad. He determines when to plant and when to harvest. Each Shamash hands down his secrets to the next Shamash, so that they may assume their ritual duties. Hironem believe that the suns continue to fade because other races lack faith in Shamash.

Much to the consternation of Church officials, Hironem continue to worship their own gods and ignore the Pancreator. From time to time, missionaries arrive to convert the "heathens." At best, some Hironem acknowledge the Pancreator but continue worshipping at their own altars. Recently, Temple Avesti pressed for an Inquisition in Turaz, but Church leaders (perhaps with Decados pressure) rebuffed them. Meanwhile, the Eskatonics, intrigued by the concept of S'su, try to forge ties with the Sibanzi. So far, they too have been rebuffed.

Psychology

To a Hironem, the "energy" of an area is considered as important as its physical qualities. This colors all facets of Hironem society — from relationships to language. A building's location depends on the surrounding S'su fields. Its architecture is designed to enhance those fields. Interior decorating uses colors and textures to work in harmony with S'su, to create a particular mood.

All Hironem have a form of Subtle Sight. This is not Psi, but an innate ability, just as humans have eyes. Sensitive to mood, they find certain emotions unnerving and others invigorating, depending on their caste. This is a learned trait, not inborn. Makers, for example, feel uneasy around violence and dislike those with violent emotions or intent. Violence, however, captivates Warriors, who become more calm and attentive. Warriors are, however, susceptible to displays of authority. This causes some odd situations — a Maker trying to make peace while the Warrior next to him tries to prolong the fight. Sibanzi appear to be free of caste-imposed reactions.

Technology

After the Church-led data purges of the Dark Ages, little reliable information remains about Hironem technology. Some scholars believe this was based on bioenergetic principles, although that remains an unsubstanti-



ated, if intriguing, theory. The only agreed upon fact is that the Hironem traveled to their moon in a spaceship of their own design. The supposed landing site cannot be investigated, as the Decados have cordoned off Cadiz's moon. Some scientists believe the Sibanzi possess definitive proof — either the actual ship or its plans — in their temple-fortress. Little Hironem technology exists to the current day.

Habitat

Cadiz, the Hironem homeworld, is comprised of various environments — temperate, arctic, tropic, etc.; it is one of a handful of planets that did not require terraforming for humans to inhabit. Only the equatorial belt is hot enough for these cold-blooded beings to feel comfortable; the rest of the planet they left uncolonized. Today, Cadiz is covered in urban sprawl left behind after the mad speculation and development of the Second Republic.

An oasis in the midst of maxicrete and terracite, Turaz is 2000 square miles of fertile swampland surrounded by a great wall. The area is bounded by two rivers which periodically flood their banks. Here, farmers grow crops and raise livestock, living in several small villages which dot the landscape. The city, with a population of nearly one million, is a crowded warren of low, mud buildings, divided into many neighborhoods. Towering over all are the twin structures the Temple of the Ancients, a ziggurat dedicated to the Four Gods, and Bey Tal, the God-King's

palace.

Warrior patrols protect the reservation, patrolling the grounds and manning the great wall around Turaz. Those caught trespassing anywhere in the reservation are summarily executed. Having lost several members in this way, the Charioteers, Hawkwoods and Hazat have filed official protests with House Decados, who have shown little inclination to do anything about the problem. Turaz belongs to the Hironem.

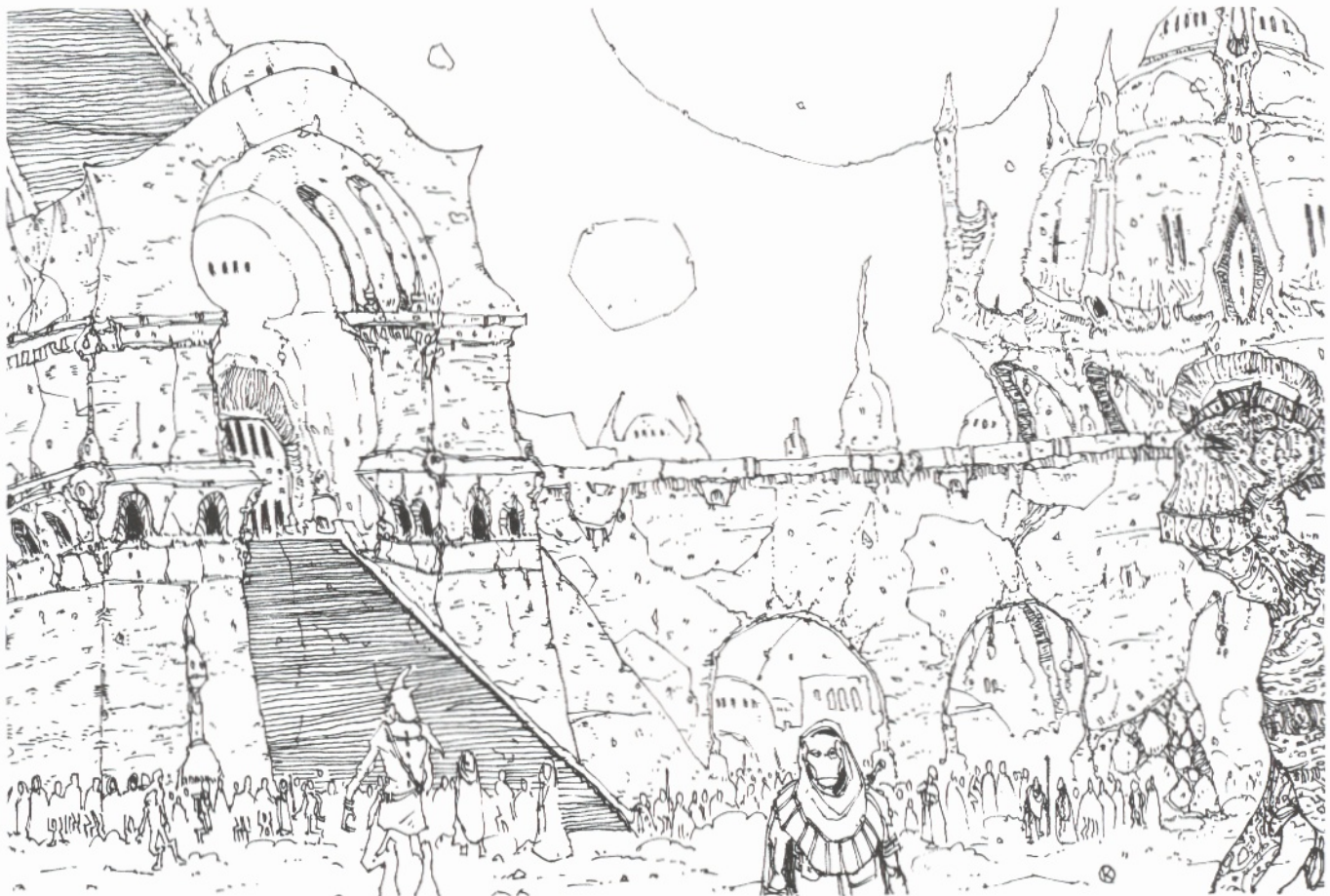
Places of Note

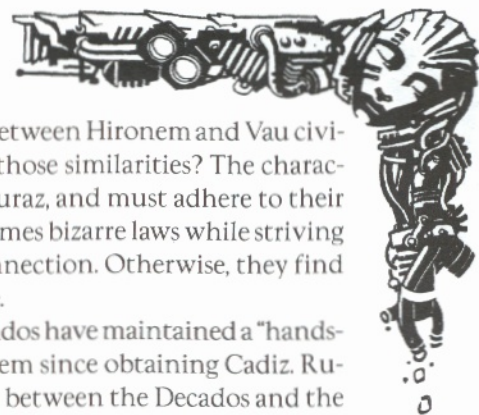
While the Hironem are limited to their reservation, the city of Turaz boasts several interesting sites:

The Temple of the Ancients: The second most important building, this towering ziggurat serves as the administrative center of Turaz. Some believe the Sibanzi keep the body of the Nameless One, or the secrets of Hironem technology, buried here. Built to absorb surrounding Ssu fields, the temple radiates energy when viewed with Wyrd Sight.

Bey Tal: The pagoda-like residence of Shamash, the God-King. It is believed the palace sits atop the spot where the Four Gods landed. Only Sibanzi may enter the castle to tend to Shamash's needs. Here, important rituals take place to ensure celestial harmony and Hironem prosperity.

The Southern Wall: A recent flood caused part of the mud wall surrounding Turaz to collapse, unearthing artifacts predating the arrival of humanity. Reports claim that





a Vau "lightsplinter" and several other trinkets, were uncovered. The site is closed to humans, and some Sibanzi want it buried.

Roleplaying Playing Hironem

Few Hironem feel the urge to leave the safe confines of Turaz, content to isolate themselves from the rest of the galaxy. Those who venture forth are seen as strange, touched by unclean influences, and become outcasts. Somehow, other Hironem can always tell one of their own who has ventured beyond Turaz. Typically, Warriors or Sibanzi leave Turaz, to make their fortunes, to escape the rigid social system, or to have adventures. Some are exiled for their crimes.

Some stereotypes for Hironem characters are:

Bodyguard or bounty hunter: You left Turaz to find adventure and sell your services as a bodyguard to whom-ever will pay. Now you find yourself in the employ of a jaded noble, to protect him or settle an old score.

Diplomat: You've been sent to serve as an ambassador to a noble court — Decados, Hawkwood, Charioteers, or even Emperor Alexius's court. You must represent your race to those who believe themselves superior while struggling to learn their ways. Political intrigue abounds.

Merchant wanna-be: Somehow, you've become a merchant, either managing to purchase your own space ship or hiring transportation. You travel the jump routes, trying to buy high and sell low, but you're hampered by your lack of understanding and experience.

Missionary: You've heard of the fading suns phenomenon and believe that you have the answer — the suns fade because few beyond Cadiz believe in the God-King. It's up to you to go out among the faithless and convert them.

Veteran: You served the Decados during the Emperor Wars and survived many suicide missions. With the war over, you've no place to go — your kinsmen consider you Illu and the Decados don't want you anymore. Now, you make your way as best you can.

Rebellious Sibani: You are a Progressive, believing that the old caste system must be swept away in favor of a new order. You either remain in Turaz, inciting rebellion or you've been exiled for your beliefs.

Gamemastering Hironem

Gamemasters running a game on Cadiz can consider the following dramas for their campaign:

In Search of... Hironem go to great lengths to limit their contact with the rest of the Known Worlds. Some people believe they are hiding something, with theories ranging from a fabulous Ur Gargoyle to a secret factory manufacturing Hironem tech. The characters are sent by interested parties — the Hawkwoods, Engineers, Avestites, etc. — to find out what the Hironem are hiding.

Study Abroad: Much has been made in the Known

Worlds of the similarities between Hironem and Vau civilization. Exactly what are those similarities? The characters obtain a visa to visit Turaz, and must adhere to their host's stringent and sometimes bizarre laws while striving to uncover the elusive connection. Otherwise, they find themselves exiled or worse.

Spies Like Us: The Decados have maintained a "hands-off" policy with the Hironem since obtaining Cadiz. Rumors of a secret agreement between the Decados and the Vau occasionally surface. And why are Jakovian agents suddenly interested in your inquiries...?

Traits

Suggested Racial Traits

Characteristics: Dexterity (base 4; cost: 1 pt)

Learned Skills: Naaram, Read Salsu (base 1; cost: 1 pt), Speak Salsu (base 3), Speak Urthish (base 1; cost: 1 pt)

Blessings: Ssu Vision (5 pts; see below)

Curses: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Cold-blooded (+3 pts: -2 Endurance for every 10 degrees below 60°F, -1 Perception for every 10 degrees over 100°F), No Psi (+3 pts: cannot purchase psychic powers)

Affliction: Ostracized (+2 pts)

Total cost: +2 pts

Suggested Caste Traits

Characters who attain a new caste should emphasize the traits associated with the new caste when spending experience points. Thus, a Warrior, upon becoming a Sibani, should spend points to increase her Impress and purchase the appropriate learned skills. On the downward slope, a Warrior relegated to the Maker caste should stop improving combat skills and concentrate on his new trade.

Sibanzi

Characteristics: Wits, Faith

Natural Skills: Impress, Observe

Learned Skills: Focus, Kanasu, Leadership, Oratory, Sirate, Stoic Mind

Blessings/Curses: Commanding (2 pts: +2 Impress when leading Hironem)/ Arrogant (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around lesser castes)

Benefices: Secrets, Gossip Network (1), Vestments (Hironem), Ordained (see below)

Warrior

Characteristics: Dexterity, Perception, Passion

Natural Skills: Dodge, Fight, Melee, Shoot

Learned Skills: Combat Actions (Anzu), Stoic Body, Survival

Blessings/Curses: Disciplined (2 pts: +2 Calm in combat situations)/ Obedient (2 pts: -2 Passion around authority)

Benefices: Scale mail (1 pt), Hironem long-rifle (sniper rifle), broadsword





Maker

Learned Skills: Artisan

Blessings/Curses: Curious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when seeing something new)/Meek (2 pts: -2 Extrovert around conflict)

Benefices: Family ties (Warrior or Sibani relative), Special Equipment (voltage tools, ground vehicle, etc.)

Benefices

Ordained (1-11): The Sibani holds a position of authority in the community. In the old days, a rank designated specific duties, such as a Prefect overseeing an entire province. Today, relegated to one city, many of the duties no longer exist but the offices remain. A Prefect Sibani might not have a province to command, but still holds a great deal of influence among Hironem.

1 = Initiate

3 = Master (parish priest)

5 = Etan (deacon/baron)

7 = Prefect (governor/earl)

9 = Shin (bishop/count)

11 = Vizier (advise the God-King directly)

S'su Vision (4 pts)

(Perception + Empathy, 1W)

Every Hironem has the ability to empathically perceive the S'su of people and places, a sort of innate psychic power (although it does not require Psi). S'su can reveal general emotions, health and well-being and states of mind, but cannot reveal specific thoughts. A very successful roll, however, can supply quite a lot of useful information. A Hironem does not see auras so much as senses emotions. Reading an area — a bar room, a ship's bridge, the Hazat nobleman's drawing room — S'su Vision provides information about the overall emotions present (happy, confused, angry, depressed, etc.). But it is more than simply reading emotions — it tells if a person or place is influenced by good or bad, positive or negative S'su. Accuracy and amount of information increases with victory points. If reading the aura of a human, roll Perception + Xeno-Empathy.

Learned Skills

Anzu (Hironem Martial Art)

Warrior Caste only

Hironem martial arts, practiced by the Warrior caste, utilize their concept of S'su. The student utilizes his internal reservoir of S'su to perform amazing feats. Teaching other castes the art of Anzu is illegal and Warriors who change castes must refrain from using it. Anzu employs the basic martial arts moves listed in the rulebook, though the techniques are known by their Hironem names, such as *Mak Paz* for Speed Fist and *Sum Paz* for Sure Fist.

Hypnotic Strike (Level 4): Beware a warrior who

weaves his body or arms. The Hironem has learned to confound his opponents through hypnotic gestures. -3 to a single target's Dodge.

Barrier of Spirit (Level 7): A defensive move, the warrior has refined her S'su to absorb the force of an attack. The practitioner spends one Wyrd point and gains protection equal to a leather jerkin. Duration is one span. A greater level of perfection is rumored to exist, protecting against bullets and beams; whether or not it exists, and at what level, is up to the gamemaster. This level can be combined with armor or energy shields.

Stinging Fist (*Ahur Lam Paz*) (Level 8): A combination of Grapple and Speed Fist, the stylist has mastered two separate moves so that he can perform them as one. A grappling action designed to hold a target fast while delivering a rapid series of stinging blows. First, roll Dexterity + Fight to close with the target (make a note of the victory dice). If successful, roll Str+Vigor vs. the target's Str+Vigor. If successful, the target is grappled and the attacker may then deliver two Fist attacks in quick succession.

No additional goal roll is required for these attacks. Roll damage twice; damage is equal to two dice plus the victory dice gained on the initial grappling roll. Total the damage of both rolls when applied against physical armor but consider each roll's damage separately when applied against an energy shield. The attacker suffers no multiple action penalty.

Sirate (Physick)

Sibanzi skill

Roll: Wits + Sirate

An ancient skill among Hironem, this is healing through the manipulation, regulation and tapping of internal S'su meridians. S'su moves through the body along set lines, similar to arteries and veins. By tapping the correct S'su line, a Hironem can perform surgery without anesthesia, cure diseases without drugs or prevent future illness. Needles or applied pressure can be used. This skill is useless on other races. The Sirate practitioner is able to perform the same tasks as Physick, but not those of Remedy.

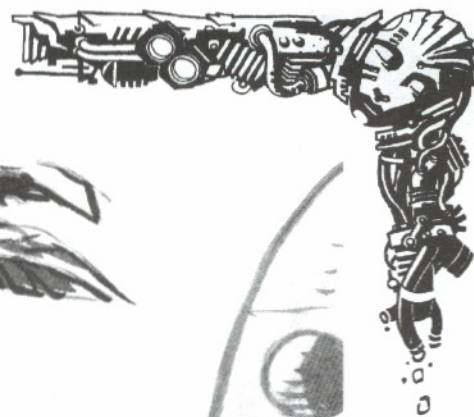
Kanasu

Sibanzi skill

Roll: Perception + Kanasu

An important skill for a Sibani, this is the ability to manipulate the vibrations present in an area, for good or ill. Attracting positive S'su brings good fortune while negative S'su augurs bad luck. This skill involves moving or placing objects to affect an area's S'su. Certain rituals can cleanse a place of bad influences or attract them to cause harm. In an area of bad S'su a Hironem fails his skill rolls more frequently and generally suffers bad luck. The gamemaster determines the energy of an area, and any goal roll penalties.

Whether or not Kanasu is effective remains debatable.



Martial Arts Actions Chart

| Action | LVL | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | Effect |
|-------------------|-----|-------------|------|------|-----|--|
| Hypnotic Strike | 4 | Dx+Fight | -2 | 3 | | If successful, target suffers -3 Dodge |
| Barrier of Spirit | 7 | Faith+Dodge | | | | Gain 2+2d armor |
| Stinging Fist | 8 | Dx+Fight | | | 0/2 | Roll Str+Vigor vs. target's Str+Vigor. If successful, target is grappled; apply damage |

It doesn't seem to affect other races, yet a Hironem in an area of negative S'su feels cold and uneasy, as though something were out of kilter. The effect may be genuine or psychological. Hironem know when the Kanasu expert has been successful, and the Sibanzi make a great deal of money from manipulating the S'su lines.

Sas Kanasu (Hironem Theurgy)

Sibanzi learn their own form of Theurgy, tied to their belief in S'su. Although known by their own, Hironem,

names, *Sas Kanasu* utilizes the rituals listed in the rulebook under Church, Orthodox and Sanctuary Aeon. The Warrior Caste can use the rituals listed under Brother Battle. All references to the Pancreator should be ignored.

Sas Kanasu derives its effectiveness from the force of which all material things take part — S'su. It requires gestures similar to Naaram or the ancient Urth practice of Tai Chi, and prayers in the form of meditation (though *not* a meditation skill roll). Hironem earn Hubris — becoming a focal point for bad S'su — as described in the rulebook. A Sibanzi or Warrior who undergoes the Mahazu ritual is not allowed to use Sas Kanasu — the penalty being death.

Ascorbites

Mant'abot looked at the softskins with unblinking eyes, remaining completely motionless as they approached. As always, he was repulsed by their appearance. They had no carapace, only soft, flabby flesh. They made him think of pupa fresh from the chrysalis. In the rising heat of the early morning, they were already "sweating," leaking fluids from their bodies and panting heavily in the moist air. Within hours, the humans would be ready to collapse from their trek through the steamy jungle.

They were Decados, he could tell by the symbol of false unity they bore on their clothes. The "Mantis" as they called it, so similar to the legendary fourth stage of life for his own race. When the softskins first came to Severus, they had been welcomed as brothers; now, they were barely tolerated. Soft and frail, their blood was a rich meal when it could be had without risk of discovery. The thought made his vestigial wings flutter with anticipation.

Mant'abot knew the softskins were out to hunt; the weapons they carried and the heavy protective gear they wore gave away their intentions. Few of the Decados dared leave the confines of their cities; the softskins understood the risks of entering the jungles, and only did so when they were hunting or trying to find more places to rip the ground apart and search for glittering stones. Their fascination with the shining rocks was a constant source of wonder to the Ascorbites.

As the humans passed beneath him, Mant'abot turned his head to follow them, and waited for the signal. Lomar'tosk gestured quickly, and the thrum of her tiny, malformed wings sent the message: Attack! Now!

Mant'abot raised his blow gun to his primary thorax and exhaled sharply. His aim was true, and the closest softskin slapped at his neck as the tiny dart sank deep into his pale flesh. Within seconds, the Decados fell unconscious. There would be feasting this day, and the pupae could finally have a nest where they could grow strong...

The Ascorbites remain a mystery to the Decados, who have claimed the insectoid's homeworld of Severus as their own. While the Ascorbites are obviously intelligent — "in their own, limited way," claim the Decados — they seem to have little interest in dealing with the humans who dwell on their homeworld. Despite the Decados' best efforts, they've yet to discover just how many of the insectoid sentients live on the planet. Though the Decados have repeatedly asked the natives just how large their population is, the insectoid race has always answered in their odd, whistling voices: "We are here." Emil Decados said about the subject: "The concept of numbers seems to be beyond their limited mental grasp."

While the Decados excel at reading the intentions of their associates and rivals, the hard faces of the Ascorbites reveal no emotion and their multifaceted eyes give away

no secrets. The Ascorbites move silently among the trees, refusing to speak to the humans around them. At times, however, they come into the human cities, dressed in elaborate finery and offering gifts meant to placate their self-proclaimed superiors.

The hard, almost metallic shells of the Ascorbites gladden darkly, and very little apparent difference exists between males and females of the species. In fact, only those members of the race which the Decados have autopsied (living and dead alike) have been positively identified for their gender.

While the Ascorbites are often used as slave labor in the Decados mines, they are not very effective as such. As often as not, the entire group will simply walk away, ignoring threats of violence. The two occasions when such deserters were attacked for their disobedience were followed by brutal, retaliatory massacres by jungle-dwelling Ascorbites. Oddly, a few days later, the insectoids returned to the mines and began working again as if nothing had occurred.

For the most part the Ascorbites seem unconcerned about the Decados's claims to Severus. But the fear that they might change their minds often occurs to the local humans, and when the Ascorbites visit the cities, few humans do anything to offend them.

History

Ascorbites seldom talk about their history to humans, blatantly refusing to speak of their past to the Decados. However, certain carvings found in one of their cities — a rare location discovered and then overwhelmed by the Decados — have been translated to reveal the much of what follows:

The Ascorbites claim that their evolution was not natural. Those Who Dwell in the Night are credited with raising the race from one of the more common insects on the planet, a species called the "iron mantis" by humans. Despite rudimentary similarities between the two native species, there is no evidence to support this claim.

That the Ascorbites are the dominant native species is a given. They feed on *amen'ta* (hull rats) and any other creature that comes too close. They have numerous cities buried deep within the rich jungles of the planet. The "Bugs," as they are commonly called, possess weapons of their own make and a societal structure, but they remain silent as to who their leaders are. When Ascorbites deign to bother with their human neighbors, their representatives are almost always covered in bright, tanned hides and have their faces painted with unusual symbols. Several attempts to translate these odd designs have met with



little success. Think Machines set to the task have only deciphered a few meanings amidst the large number of unsolvable glyphs.

The Ascorbites did nothing to resist the Decados seizure of power on Severus. When the first exploration ships landed, a large group of Ascorbites, numbering in the thousands if the ancient records are true, simply watched silently as the settlers from another world made their camp. After a few days, one of the natives stepped forward and said in stilted Urthish, "Beware the amen'ta. They will devour your soft skin and your space vessel as well." Further attempts to communicate with the natives proved fruitless.

Two nights later, the hull rats came out of the forest in a massive force, devouring the scouting party and most of their ship. The only record of the encounter was later found in the captain's journals.

When the Decados settled on Severus, the Ascorbites welcomed them, offering aid and defense against the amen'ta and other indigenous life until the settlers were properly prepared to defend themselves. During this time, the humans learned of the Ascorbites' feeding habits and were repulsed (although, of course, many Decados were intrigued).

As time passed and the Decados expanded their settlements, the Ascorbites simply watched, offering aid from time to time in moving heavy equipment and giving warnings about other natural threats. While the Ascorbites have been very close-mouthed about themselves, there is little doubt that their warnings to the Decados about the other natives of Severus made a difference in the house's ability to claim the world.

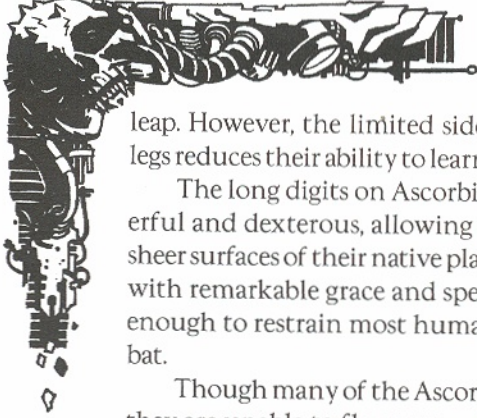
Ascorbites adapted many human weapons to their own use. The firearms they carry resemble shotguns, modified for their slightly different hand shapes. A few people claim to have seen Ascorbites with crystalline weapons capable of shattering every bone in a person's body, swords that emitted a faint wailing sound like a strong wind between close-set rocks.

Physiology

The insectoids are one of the most inhuman looking of the races encountered by humans. While they stand only a little taller than the average human, they are far from humanoid in any but the most generic of terms. The almost metallic sheen of their exoskeletons are usually dark brownish-red in tint; these carapaces are capable of withstanding substantial impacts, protecting sensitive internal organs. Their multifaceted eyes reflect almost every color of the rainbow and allow for a substantial field of vision.

Their legs greatly resemble those of an Urthish locust, though their feet are closer to humanoid. Ascorbites legs are extremely powerful, capable of propelling them over four meters straight up, or over 13 meters from a standing





leap. However, the limited side-to-side mobility of their legs reduces their ability to learn human martial arts kicks.

The long digits on Ascorbite hands and feet are powerful and dexterous, allowing them to climb the almost sheer surfaces of their native planet's trees and jutting cliffs with remarkable grace and speed. Their hand strength is enough to restrain most humans in hand-to-hand combat.

Though many of the Ascorbites retain vestigial wings, they are unable to fly or even glide with them; most prefer to remove the bothersome things once they reach adulthood. They also usually remove a rudimentary second pair of arms and legs, useless limbs never fully evolved.

Their mouths are frightening to study. Initially thought to be similar to an Urthish locust in design, several sharp, blade-like mandibles work together to form the orifice. However, when feeding, a long, flexible "tongue" with a powerful piercing edge comes out of the mouth. This tongue, designed much like an Urthish mosquito's, is an ideal drinking tube for the blood of an Ascorbite's prey. When speaking, the tongue remains firmly recessed in a niche which protects the appendage.

The mandibles are flexible enough to allow imitations of human sounds, but the actual language of the Ascorbites is not only unintelligible to humans, it also falls, in part, outside of human auditory ranges. Think Machines have been able to translate a great deal of their language, but the sentence structure is often incomplete.

There are three stages of life for the Ascorbites, each separated by a span of time spent within a cocoon. The first stage, called the *Arme'tova*, is as a parasite within the host body of the parent's recent kill. The host body is killed, enveloped in a preservative gel, and impregnated with larval eggs. These host bodies are held in special caverns and well-protected from prying eyes. Once the eggs have hatched, some seven days after being implanted, the *Arme'tova* gorge themselves on the host-flesh and then wrap themselves in cocoons.

After several weeks of metamorphosis, the second form of Ascorbite life, the *Tan'zhom* emerges. The *Tan'zhom* looks much like an adult Ascorbite, but is smaller and still uses all eight limbs for moving around. While no solid evidence exists for how long this form lasts, most xenologists have speculated a span of roughly three human years. While in the *Tan'zhom* stage, the Ascorbites are not permitted to leave the presence of their parents. They are taught virtually all they will need to know in order to survive: hunting, fighting and even religious doctrines. Few humans have ever seen the *Tan'zhom* form of an Ascorbite; they are "impressionable" at that stage, and the natives of Severus do not want their children corrupted by human influences.

The final, adult stage is simply the Ascorbite known to humans. In this adult, mature phase of life, they have trouble learning any new skills. Xenologists who have studied the Ascorbite life cycle are convinced that the

Tan'zhom is the only stage of their development where they are naturally able to mentally adapt.

While the ancient writings of the Ascorbites speak of a fourth stage of life, the native sentients of Severus refuse to discuss the matter with humans or any other race. If a fourth phase exists, it has never been seen by anyone outside the race. At least, not by anyone who lived to tell the tale. The Bugs claim the fourth stage lies dormant within them all, and will only be released when Those Who Dwell in the Night return for them.

The Ascorbites are, however, vastly adaptable physically. After one particularly brutal retaliatory attack on humans, House Decados tried killing a local Bug population with aerial poisons. Many of the insectoids died, kicking and convulsing as the toxins destroyed their nervous systems. The survivors accepted this without complaint, and when a second uprising led to a second use of the poison, the Ascorbites walked through the dangerous clouds as if they were simply light spring mists. The Decados haven't bothered to use the toxin a third time.

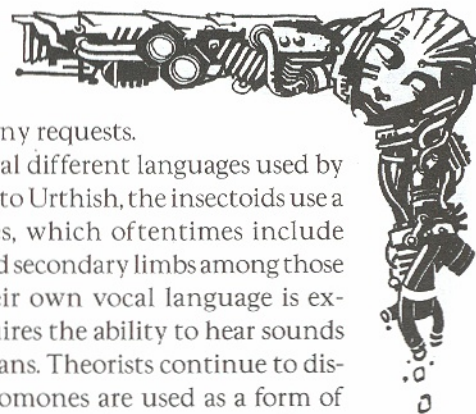
Society

Ascorbites are extremely secretive about their social structure. What little is known has been gleaned from the faded pictograms translated by House Decados.

Most of Severus remains uninhabited by the humans; not so for Ascorbites. There was no real war for dominance between the Decados and the Bugs. The insectoid Severans have never seen a reason to fight with the humans, for they know who is really in charge. If it makes the softskins feel better to issue commands and force the Ascorbites to work in their mines, that is acceptable, at least for the most part. There are times when the Ascorbites need to follow their own schemes and leave the camps. The Decados have only recently learned that it is best not to 'rile the natives,' better to lose a few days of mining production than to lose 100 soldiers when the Ascorbites come spilling out of the jungle in a retaliatory strike.

The Bugs' belief that they were artificially evolved by a superior race is the primary source of what passes for religion among them. The *Somta Vosht'i*, literally translated as Those Who Dwell in the Night, are apparently the gods they worship. Some xenologists have compared them to Ukari deities, but the resemblance seems superficial. The Church frowns on the alien belief system, but as there is little actually known about the *Somta Vosht'i*, no action has been taken against the odd belief. Several missionaries have diligently tried, without success, to convert the Ascorbites to a proper belief in the Pancreator. The response made by an Ascorbite to the missionaries was: "Why would we separate ourselves from the *Somta Vosht'i*, to follow your god, who cannot stop our gods from ruling the night?"

The pictograms found in the underground city mention that the *Somta Vosht'i* are supposed to return at some



future date, and alleges that when they do, the Ascorbites will metamorphose into a new, far superior form. Some Church officials suspect that there might be some truth in the writings, and have even speculated that the gods of the Bugs are actually demons. Ascorbites are not the most popular of races, and this fear is likely one of the main reasons for the continued dislike of this mostly inoffensive race.

Theories are continually offered about Ascorbite beliefs. The first humans to study them were initially convinced that they had a matriarchal society. This belief continued until the matter was discussed with a delegation from the jungles of Severus, who seemed to find the idea amusing. Once again, the secretive race refused to divulge any information about themselves. In truth, the Ascorbites follow a simple system of obeying their elders, regardless of gender. This system is taught to them during their second life-stage, and is virtually unchanged from centuries ago.

The most popular theory at the present time is that the Ascorbites have no real form of government at all. House Decados has used examples from the past to forward this theory, pointing out that the Bugs are really very primitive and would likely devolve into complete barbarism were it not for the Decados's civilizing influence over them. All that is known for certain is that every time a delegation comes to speak with the nobles, they spend a great deal of time conferring together before answering

any questions or making any requests.

There seem to be several different languages used by the Ascorbites. In addition to Urthish, the insectoids use a complex series of gestures, which oftentimes include movement of the wings and secondary limbs among those who still have them. Their own vocal language is extremely complex and requires the ability to hear sounds at levels inaudible to humans. Theorists continue to discuss whether or not pheromones are used as a form of communication. The iron mantis is known to use pheromones, and considering the claims of the Ascorbites' evolution, the possibility remains. Several human researchers believe the Bugs actually communicate through limited psychic communication, but if the claim is true, they have never used this method when speaking to humans.

Habitat

Severus is a brutal planet. Even in the winter, the temperatures rise rapidly towards 100 or more degrees Fahrenheit. The humidity seldom drops below 90% and the heavy rains allow numerous bacteria a lush area for growth. Were it not for the massive caches of rare gems the Decados manage to mine from the planet, most humans would not willingly live in the dangerous environment. The native flora and fauna have gained a widespread reputation for inhospitability — a completely justified reputation. From the amen'ta hull rats to the roving venom-thorn vines, there is little that is not lethal to



Ascorbite Language

The native Ascorbite language is actually a very complex system of clicks and hisses. Urthish spellings of words and names are rough approximations, devised by Paolo Devin, an early xenologist who studied the race. Humans cannot pronounce most Ascorbite sounds.

While the consonants and syllables of the language are effectively the same as for Urthish, their actual pronunciation is often different. Many words contain sounds outside human auditory range; it is conjectured that the glottal stops and pauses heard by humans are actually inaudible noises. Ascorbites have learned to accept softskin limitations in speech, and most can easily recognize mispronounced words on the rare occasions when humans attempt to speak to them in their own tongue.

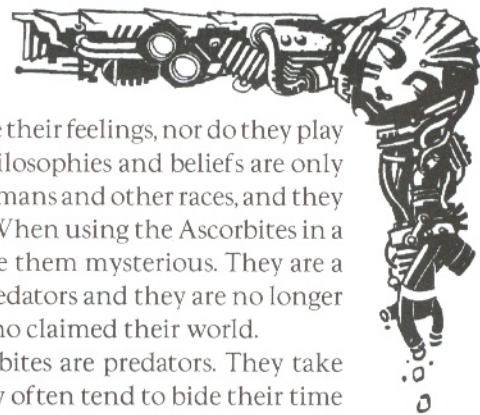
a human.

Before the humans came and claimed the world as their own, the Ascorbites were the most dangerous predators on the planet, despite their limited technology. Many claim that the honor is still theirs. There are much larger predators on Severus, but only the sentient insectoids gained the necessary reasoning skills to adapt beyond their place. No other native race ever managed to create weapons (just how the Ascorbites did so, with their limited adult mental development, remains a mystery). Humans living in the Decados cities are protected from the numerous predatory beasts on the planet, but those who leave the cities seldom do so without heavy weapons and good armor.

Some believe that the Ascorbites have a genetic adaptability, that, like hull rats, whatever they manage to survive makes them stronger, and is in turn passed on to their children as a new trait. For that reason alone, the Decados have allowed very few Ascorbites to leave their homeworld. Those who have departed for other worlds seem to suffer little despite the much cooler and drier climes to which they are sent. In fact, no one has ever seen an Ascorbite who was not in good health — even if they did, however, it is doubtful that they could tell the difference.

There are great Ascorbite cities on Severus. These cities, called *Tunos*, are established in areas where humans could not hope to survive without special gear. Most are actually underground, built like termite hives, with well-hidden and carefully guarded entrances. The Decados have actually managed to destroy two of these cities during their years as the rulers of Severus. In both cases, the effort involved and the loss of equipment was exorbitant. A few scholars learned interesting facts about the Ascorbites, but there was nothing of any real value in the





cities (except for the pictographic writings). For this reason alone, the Decados rarely bother with the Bugs' Tunos. Nonetheless, the Jakovian Agency watches over the Tunos, using their system of satellites to find out where the Ascorbites gather.

Roleplaying Playing Ascorbites

Ascorbites tend to avoid lying, though they have been gifted with the ultimate poker faces. Rather than actually telling falsehoods, they tend more toward omitting aspects of the truth. Also, it's not considered rude among the insectoids to ignore questions which are either foolish or simply don't concern the person asking. Those who insist on answers from the Bugs often find themselves with a dangerous enemy. When tortured, the average member of the race simply keeps quiet. It is more than a stubborn streak; the Ascorbites would rather die than reveal anything about themselves. They've made a point of not telling the Decados what they want to hear, often times losing large numbers of their species for it. This is more a character flaw than a sign of incredible willpower.

From the time the insectoids can reason, the need for extreme silence is drilled into them. The plans of their gods are unknown to the Ascorbites, but they prepare themselves mentally for the day those plans will be revealed. For that reason alone, they do not surrender knowledge against their will. (Certain Psi talents can pull the information from their minds, whether or not they are willing. But if the culprit is found out, the Ascorbite who has been so violated will find a way to make the psychic pay for her efforts.)

The most important thing to remember is that the Ascorbites are an emotionally cold people. They either do not feel the same sorts of passions that humans do, or they repress them from the time of their second life-cycle. While capable of showing affection for family, they are not known for caring one way or the other what happens to anyone else around them. Humans are, simply put, too alien for the Ascorbites to ever truly understand. They simply don't feel that humans are worth the trouble of comprehending. To their philosophy, the softskins are weak and foolish. The most they normally feel towards humans is the same detached affection a human might offer to a pretty fish in an aquarium. It might be pleasing to watch, but if it dies, it can always be replaced.

Severus is a harsh world, where the struggle for life has always been hard won. Some Severan megafauna are huge. The Ascorbites initially took to the trees to avoid being trampled by herds of animals fully capable of crushing them underfoot. As time passed, the Ascorbites learned to move through the trees instead of bothering with the ground. The Bugs are the winners on their homeworld, and they have come to understand that in order to win they must remain ruthless.

Ascorbites do not share their feelings, nor do they play well with others. Their philosophies and beliefs are only vaguely understood by humans and other races, and they seem to prefer it that way. When using the Ascorbites in a story, make certain to leave them mysterious. They are a cold, calculating race of predators and they are no longer amused by the humans who claimed their world.

Remember that Ascorbites are predators. They take threats poorly, though they often tend to bide their time when it comes to retaliation. The Bugs seldom give much consideration to humans, though a few of them have made a point of learning the ways of the softskins.

Gamemastering Ascorbites

Run Through the Jungle: Rumors of ancient Anunnaki treasure attract the characters to the deep jungles of Severus, far from human lands. The odd map they have which guides them leads not to an Anunnaki ruin but to a Ascorbite Tunos. The natives are not happy about their visitors.

Diplomatic Immunity: The characters are part of a human entourage with the duty of hosting a group of Ascorbite diplomats. These insectoids are on a mission of their own which they will not explain to their hosts. Perhaps the characters can discover their goal.

Traits

Suggested Species Traits

Characteristics: Perception (base 4, max 11; cost: 3 pts), Calm (always primary), Ego (always primary)

Natural skills: Dodge, Observe, Vigor

Learned skills: Speak Ascorbite (base 3; but no base Speak Urthish), Stoic Mind, Survival, Tracking

Blessings: Adaptability (3 pts: Immunity to any toxin or disease which the Ascorbite survives; this trait is passed on to offspring), Carapace (7 pts: 3+3d armor), Double-Jointed (2 pts: +2 Dex to escape tight places/bonds), Far Leap (2 pts: vertical jump: 5 feet + three per victory point, horizontal jump: 12 feet + two for every success), Obstinate (2 pts: +2 Stoic Mind to resist divulging secrets), Strong Grip (2 pts: +2 Str to grasp objects)

Curse: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Bloodsucker (+3 pts: Strict diet of blood, cannot eat meat or vegetables), Fixed Development (+7 pts: once an adult, the Ascorbite must spend 3x the current rating in experience points to learn new learned skills, 2x cost to raise learned skills), Weird (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among other races)

Affliction: Ostracized (+2 pt)

Total cost: 5 pts

Psyche Psi Power

HiveMind

(Level 2, Extrovert + Empathy, sight, temporary, 1W)

Similar to the MindSpeech power, this allows psychic Ascorbites to communicate telepathically with one an-

other, projecting thoughts and receiving the projected thoughts of others. Emotions can also be projected or felt, but this power does not allow the psychic to force others to think or feel in any particular way. It operates line-of-sight only; its range cannot be extended. This power only operates with other psychic Ascorbites; the other Psyche powers listed in the **Fading Suns** rulebook must be used to gain those effects against non-Ascorbites or non-psychic Ascorbites.

Equipment

Arbat'a (Crystal Sword)

TL 2

Cost: 9 Benefice/1000 firebirds

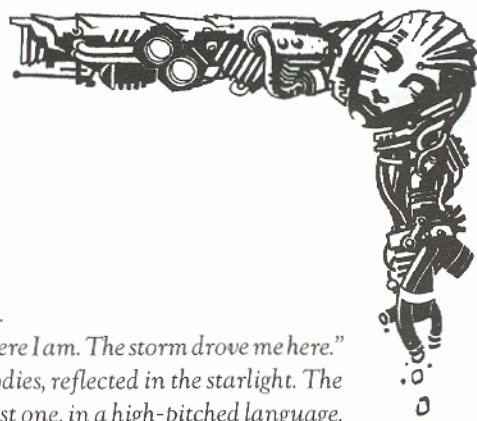
This amazing weapon is made from a unique crystal-line substance found only in deep underground grottos on Severus, places no human has ever been. The crystal flows in a near liquid form in small streams, "bleeding" from gashes chipped into hard crystal rocks by the Ascorbite swordmakers. In this form it can be shaped. Once exposed to light, it hardens to near-diamondlike consistency. Only a few, deep jungle Ascorbites are taught about the making of the swords and even about the location of the crystal streams.

Besides their sharpness, the swords have another interesting feature: when struck against a stone surface, they will briefly vibrate at a high frequency. The sound is beyond human and Ascorbite hearing range, but the vibrating crystal will cut through objects better. The effect will last for only three turns, after which the sword can be struck again for further effect.

The crystal streams are very rare; fewer and fewer swords are made these days. Old lore states that the vibrating of many such Arbat'a in unison will call forth the Somta Vosht'i.

| Status | Roll | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ |
|-----------|----------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Static | Dx+Melee | | 5 | 3 | L |
| Vibrating | Dx+Melee | -1 | 8 | 4 | L |





Oro'ym

All night the roar of the waves and taste of salt spray kept Gregor Zeeman awake, hugging his small skiff against the storm. The hurricane interfered with radio communications, but before the static garbled all language, he heard an emergency channel urging all fishers back to port. Attempting to follow the needle to Sur, he was overtaken by the heavy rain and waves. Tossed and battered, Gregor's skiff, the *Odyssey*, finally emerged into still blue skies, into the raw beauty of Madoc's vast waters, with a small island in the distance. Checking his equipment, Gregor discovered that his radio had suffered damage and that half his catch was gone. His emergency solar sails went up. Guessing the time, he figured that he had arrived at the small isle around two in the afternoon.

The isle was shaded by sasa brush and lichen-crusted *bwasqan* trees. Small insects hummed, and *zeeta* lizards scrambled on the rocks and up the tree trunks. Gregor didn't remember the isle on any map. It was less than a mile about, rising to a high point and then descending into a broad lagoon. He returned to his ship to make repairs, harboring her in the lagoon. Working into the late afternoon, Gregor managed to receive a weak radio signal. He attempted communication but, receiving no answer, he cooked some fish while watching the brilliant pink and purple sunset reflected in the clear ocean. He felt small beneath the vast canopy of colors and eternal, liquid horizon. Shortly after sunset he heard a faint noise, croaking frogs breaking the stillness of the lagoon. A gentle chorus, it reminded him of his childhood on Midian. The croaking grew louder, and the pleasant rhythm lulled the fisherman into childhood dreams.

Startled from sleep, Gregor heard someone moving on the boat. The stars were out, and only the faintest glow in the west remained of the turbulent day. He grabbed his cutting knife, but was seized by wet, elongated fingers. He looked right into the sea-dark eyes of a human-sized amphibian. Another creature boarded the ship, and approached. In the dark Gregor saw that they stood upright and carried tools. Below, in the water, he heard more of them splashing about.

"Prophet save me," he whispered. The wet hand squeezed his until he dropped his knife. The salt wind picked up, whistling off the sea. "Oro'ym," Gregor uttered. He had never seen any of the legendary sea race before.

"Jivazz ti noonta," he said, uttering the only words he knew in their speech, which translated as 'Let us share the wide sea.' Every Madoc resident knew that one.

"Dagan, eh fisherman?" asked the second Oro'ym.

Gregor had heard of the Picgnostic Dagan Brotherhood, the native fisherman guild, but shook his head no. "They only take natives," he said.

"Your boat is on Oro'ym egg nest. Young wait to be born. You tell no one, human." Below, the splashing noises ceased, but he was

aware of many eyes upon him.

"No. I don't even know where I am. The storm drove me here." Gregor looked at their scaly bodies, reflected in the starlight. The second Oro'ym spoke to the first one, in a high-pitched language. The hand left Gregor's throat and took his knife.

"I Kormal," said the speaker, the starlight glinting off the sail on his back. "Have authority to kill you, fisher man I think called Gregor. Ugly mammal, you look like sea refuge. Vomit up on land, because Mother Sea no like you, eh? Fight back to claim her respect, human." Kormal halted, then struck Gregor across the face with his tail. A sharp pain throbbed from the attack. Kormal focused his abyss-dark eyes inches from Gregor's face.

"You tough," Kormal continued. "No cry out. You not tell anyone about here, Babon's child. Look at me, young one. I save you — I like ugly small eyes Gregor. Will return you home, if you take solemn oath to Dagan Brotherhood, Fishers of the Stars."

"I can't," the man trembled. "They only take natives. I'm an offworlder who came here after the Emperor Wars."

The knife flashed down, cutting into his forehead. In swift strokes, a crude circle was carved. The blood dripped into Gregor's eyes. "Now you one of Dagan Brotherhood," the Oro'ym announced. "Tell them Kormal make you so."

They blindfolded Gregor and bound him with strong seaweed, and launched his boat into the sea. After a timeless time, he felt his bonds loosen and heard a splash off the side of the boat. Taking off the blindfold, he saw that he was alone on the vessel amidst the vast open sea.

The next day, his radio signals reached another fishing vessel, and they laughed when they saw his insignia scar. "Welcome to the Brotherhood," the captain said.

Madoc is a water planet with very few land masses. Its life is in the sea, and its history saw only limited land colonization. Although reptiles and a few minor mammals evolved, the land belonged to the amphibians. The amphibians ranged in size from small salamander type creatures (*gwine*) to the large carnivorous *Ichthyotetan*, which measured 23 feet (7m) in length. From these amphibians arose the sentient Oro'ym race.

Although their civilization reached the dizzying heights of the stars before plunging into primitive chaos, the Oro'ym survive. Now divided into seven clans, they present a mystery to other sentient races: the Oro'ym understand certain aspects of preadamite technology, but are bafflingly unfamiliar with the means to use it; it is as if they remember ancient scientific secrets through religious rote. Today, the *Scravers* use the Oro'ym's skill to find ancient tech among the ruins of underwater cities, while other guilds and local fishers look to profit from their acquaintance in other ways.



History

The Oro'ym ("People of the Clear Water Star" in their tongue) evolved from saltwater-based amphibian ancestors, not directly from fish, as had been previously thought. Colonizing the land some 100 million years ago, the ancestors of the Oro'ym resembled terran lungfish, whose fins developed into muscular legs out of evolutionary necessity. An Age of Amphibians followed on Madoc, similar to the Devonian-Permian epoch on earth. While reptiles evolved, amphibians remained the terrestrial masters of prehistoric Madoc, no doubt due to the scarcity of great land masses. Small islands dotted Madoc for the most part, although one continent, Dwagah, once existed. Dwagah suffered a gradual breakup, suffering further turmoil during an ice-age which pushed the ancestors of the Oro'ym back into the ocean depths, away from the frozen temperatures that replaced the lush, tropical forests with barren tundra. Mass extinctions occurred, except for a few reptilian creatures which evolved hair. These mammals never grew larger than otters. Dwagah sank and land grew scarce. Life returned to the seas.

Rising

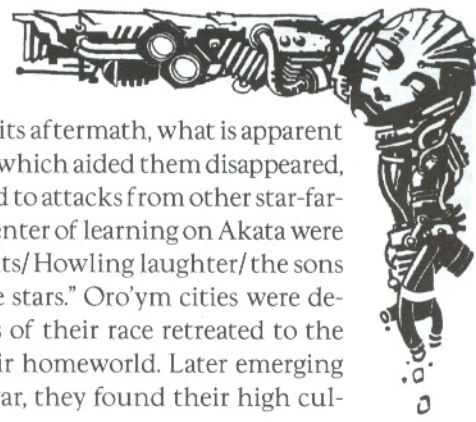
Just when the Oro'ym rose to sentience remains a mystery. They developed hands at some point before the ice pushed them again into the seas, and their half-

shrouded legends hint at a land empire called Sahgal-Sayok. Only legends recall the dim-remembered oceanic kingdoms of Thrafur, Nolagant and jewel-encrusted Sa'thal. The wars between these early Oro'ym city-states filled the seas with blood.

An older water race, the Nizdharim, resembling twelve-legged mollusks, fought the emerging amphibian race for control of the oceans. The Nizdharim had achieved sentience centuries earlier, and claimed to be the spawn of Nidderdak From Beyond the Stars. The Keddehian Records (a series of inscribed-clay writings found by Second Republic xenologists off the island of Daas) mentions Dhanalla as the King who lead the Oro'ym to weapon and tool use, and his son Zynigrion as the victor over the Nizdharim. All of this is half-glimpsed in the oldest myths preserved on the planet.

The exact time of the Oro'ym's arising to sentience can only be guessed at. Second Republic xenologists place it about 7,000,000 years ago, while extrapolation from Oro'ym mythology gives a date of 10,000,000 years ago. Their myths, recorded in the work known as the *Mworniad*, states that they were little-better than tool-bearing sea hunters when the *Dionak* arrived from the stars. Some Second Republic anthropologists speculated that the *Dionak* were an earlier, advanced star-faring race, although the Oro'ym thought of them as lesser gods. Sarah Pavarell, a noted Second Republic anthropologist, wrote: "These *Dionak* seem to correspond to similar





mythological 'founders-gods' evident in nearly every sentient culture. Similar in appearance to the amphibious Oro'ym, the Dionak were long remembered in Oro'ym story and song. Xenophanes wrote that if horses had hands they 'would draw the shapes of gods to look like horses.'

Oro'ym records state that the Dionak gave them culture, and lead them from a crude animism to a religious philosophy called *Ti'al*, the "Breathing Universe." Existence was under rule of Dewi Dralloch, Father of the Universal Ocean of Pulsating Light. His children were the gods, and their children (among whom the Dionak were numbered) took pity on the crude Oro'ym, and uplifted their culture.

What is beyond dispute is that Oro'ym culture quickly advanced to dizzying heights. Records indicate that they became a star-faring culture, supposedly utilizing the magnetic fields of stellar bodies to power their ships. The rise from ocean gathering hunters to star-traveling explorers was so fast that even xenologists who doubted the "uplift myth" remarked on its mystery.

The Rassic Records (written symbols carved with laser precision into the cliffs of Ras Isle) state that the Oro'ym traveled with older sentients, giving knowledge to more primitive sentients. The star Akata (believed to be Sirius) became a central location in their mythology. They claim to have visited Urth between 12,000 BC to 6,000 BC, and their Mworniad has the following verse:

*From the third world's waters
Oanis rose
teaching Babon's children
the laws of gods
Dagan Oanis, great among the Oro'ym*

Second Republican historians were divided as to whether the Oro'ym actually visited earth or had heard rumors of it from older star races.

The Rassic Record suggests that the Oro'ym explored primitive sentient worlds, convincing the native sentients to guard the places of magnetic power they used to fueled their ships. In exchange, they taught them laws and cultivation. Some xenologists contest that the other races represented in the Rassic Record are symbols for Oro'ym rulers, who developed a high caste system based off access to technology. A few doubted that the Oro'ym partook in these supposed star voyages at all, claiming that the Rassic Record was the remains of another vanished race, perhaps similar in physiology to the Oro'ym. Legends vaguely recall another native sentient race, seemingly cetacean, but even their name is forgotten.

Falling

"All is ruin/ War in Heaven/ The Child against the Ancient/ the unseen rises," the Mworniad recalls. Galactic disaster struck the Oro'ym. A meteor crashed into Madoc, burying their great city of Anan Annalk beneath the ocean sediment. While their records point to a mythologi-

cal war in the heavens and its aftermath, what is apparent is that the races or teachers which aided them disappeared, leaving the Oro'ym exposed to attacks from other star-faring races. The colony and center of learning on Akata were destroyed by "Dark sentients/ Howling laughter/ the sons of Krillos/ Bloody the pure stars." Oro'ym cities were destroyed, and the remnants of their race retreated to the underwater depths of their homeworld. Later emerging from the devastation of war, they found their high culture in ruins.

Some of the Oro'ym (taught either by the older sentient races or the hi-tech caste, depending on whose story is true), utilized the remaining technology and set themselves up as high priest-kings of the dwindling race. Through genetic coding, they developed a caste which could speak telepathically to one another, while "broadcasting" knowledge to the population at large. This upper caste was in constant communication with each other, and they tenaciously held onto a vestige of high culture. The majority of the Oro'ym, however, could only receive messages from their rulers. Swiftly the benign scientists became corrupt priest-kings, ruling a population of slaves. Strange transitional art reflects the regression of Oro'ym culture; the crude statue of Haflan, found on Ras Isle, testifies to a shift from beautiful proportions to iconology in sculpture, denoting a regressive trend in the arts.

Cruel wars were fought between the ruling caste and knowledge fell further, until rival clans, with telepathic leaders of their own, vied for mastery of Madoc's ocean. The race which had touched the stars now warred in the black depths of the sea with crude weapons, forgetting their former glory. The Oro'ym seem to have diversified into different breeds at this time. Scattered across the watery world were the emerald-skinned Zia'din, the purple-finned Zustar, the colorful orange and red Ri'nadan. But the majority race remained the dark, brackish-green coloring of their ancestors. "Then all was dark/ the bloody mad priests/ brought the people down/ to warring in ruins/ fighting for spawn grounds." These dark ages are believed to have lasted from 6,000 to 100 B.C.

The slow rise of the race began again when escaped slaves formed the *Ded'ym*, or "Free Warriors." Fleeing beyond the range of their masters' telepathic control, they explored the ancient cities, discovering weapons and learning old sciences. They swiftly grew in numbers, and discovered that high frequency vibrations could break the telepathic control of the priest-kings. In a series of wars these fighters brought down the despotic rulers, until the last, Mammak the Dark, fell before the sword of Mhutua. The high caste was hunted to extinction, and the Oro'ym were freed. Yet, with the fall of their former masters, the slaves wandered lost in the strange ruins of their once proud civilization.

Decimated by the wars, the remnants of the race united under Saznakaer the Lost, who gave them the *Lukabankor*, or Code of Peace. Henceforth, the Oro'ym were



forbidden to war with each other. From that time forth (c.400 AD), peace was maintained. Oro'ym numbers began to rise. When the planet was colonized during the human Diaspora, the Oro'ym were once again beginning to explore the land masses.

The Oro'ym were first dismissed as folklore by the colonists, for no definitive sighting had been made; the Oro'ym were wary of these strangers. Eventually, contact was made with settlers — to disastrous results. Earth viruses caused devastation among them, and they retreated to the depths. It is true that some Madoc diseases also wracked humans, especially the Blue Flu and Corpse Fever, but not all contact between the races was futile; some lone fishers befriended the Oro'ym. A few battles occurred near their spawning grounds, but these were isolated incidents.

After the year 3000, the Oro'ym were scarcely seen, with a last (and disputed) sighting occurring in 3125. It was presumed that earth diseases had decimated the entire race. The few who had developed immunities retreated to the depths, frightened by the human treatment of alien races following the Ukar War. A secret society of fisher-folk, "The Sons of Akata," claimed that the Oro'ym still lived, but this was thought to be economic propaganda meant to scare off competitors from prime fishing zones. During the Second Republic, the water world's secrets began to be explored. Xenologists discovered the Rassic and Keddehian Records, along with advanced ruins, gleaning that the Oro'ym were descended from a higher civilization. But the exploration of Madoc's vast waters eventually was halted due to funding shortages. Soon after, the Second Republic ceased to be.

Rising Again

In 4872 the Oro'ym were spotted again. The Oro'ym had undergone a further evolutionary change during this watery dark age. More and more females now gave live birth to their young, instead of laying eggs in shallow seas (this trend began as early as the rise of the priest-kings; evolutionary causes seemed to favor such Oro'ym after earth diseases later struck the race). Today, only a third of the population continue to lay their eggs in "nest cities," guarded by elders. Those who give live birth are now the majority. Due to this mutation, Oro'ym population, once very low, tripled over the course of 1,800 years.

In 4872, three Oro'ym were caught in the nets of a Scraver fisherman named Ishima Dajun. He let one go and attempted to communicate with the other two. Two nights later, his sea-craft was surrounded by Oro'ym. Ishima released the two in his care and gifts were exchanged. The Meeting on the Van Toch (the name of his vessel) became famous. For the next 10 years, human and Oro'ym representatives would meet at this same spot during the anniversary.

The Merchant League encouraged these meetings, and linguists among both races soon knew enough to



communicate with each other, although humans cannot master all the Oro'ym dialects. The breakthrough from this meeting was little regarded at the time, as most believed that the Oro'ym were a barely sentient race at best. Yet the Oro'ym proved their detractors wrong. Historically, the Church took a dim, if disinterested view, in them. The League saw their potential, however, and since they governed Madoc, the race was spared most of the atrocities suffered by other sentients on noble worlds. The League eyed them with an eye to profit. Exchanging tech for rare sea-gems and other underwater riches (including the harvesting of fish herds), the exchanges have been beneficial to both races.

The Oro'ym still guard their secrets. The location of their city, Dahun Derion, remains a mystery. A few Oro'ym have left their world on League ships, startling a curious humanity. They are cautious, and do not desire to colonize off-world (even if a doubting humanity would let them). Their culture is rising again, following their increasing contact with humanity. Those Oro'ym who enter human society as mercenaries or traders usually cut off the webbing between their first and second digits, so that they can easily fit their fingers through the triggers of guns. This marks them among their own kind either as warriors who deal with outsiders (*redem'ym*), or as those who travel along outsiders and thus become outsiders themselves (*anog'ym*).

Physiology

Adults range in size from 4 to 6 feet tall. Their heads are round, with large round eyes protected by heavy eyelids. The majority of Oro'ym have flat nostrils on their faces, but others instead have a blowhole on top of their heads. Their skin was once moist and scaleless, like that of earth amphibians, but scales developed upon their return to Madoc's oceans. They are cold-blooded, but can regulate their body temperature through the double row of sail-fins on their backs, as well as the colorful frills which they can extend from their necks.

Female Oro'ym possess small pouches, similar to those of marsupials, in which they can place their young tadpoles or eggs, offering mobile protection against predators. On land, these pouches can contain water needed for the youth's survival for weeks. Spawning grounds exist in shallow waters, guarded by tribal elders, but a mutation among some Oro'ym allows for live births of advanced tadpoles. Eggs usually come two to four in a group. The Oro'ym are not a numerous people, and even at their cultural height numbered only 10 million. The Oro'ym believe in a great balance to all things, and keep their population in numbers conducive to their ecosystem.

Oro'ym arms and legs are powerful, built for swimming. Their fingers are longer than humans, webbed, and can manage great dexterity. Great finned tails propel them through the deeps. On land they stand upright and can

carry their tails in the air. Their tails are powerful weapons, and can stun predators with a swift smack.

Graceful in both land and water, the Oro'ym possess colorful sail fins on their backs. A double row of fins lies flattened while swimming or when basking in sunlight. The fins store solar energy, useful for blood regulation. When unfolded, the fins bend straight back or sideways and are about a foot long. The colorful frill about the neck stays concealed unless the Oro'ym desires to display it to frighten predators or attract mates (female frills are smaller than those of males). If an Oro'ym loses a tail or limb, he will regenerate it within four months time. Warriors among them brag about how many limbs they have regenerated. Oro'ym are omnivorous, with sharp front teeth for tearing and back teeth for grinding.

The remote ancestors of the Oro'ym developed eardrums in response to early terrestrial pressures. Voices to bluff and court mates also evolved, and from that, language. When the Oro'ym returned to the oceans during the ice age, they already possessed a rudimentary language and delicate ear bones. In the waters their hearing further evolved; the Oro'ym eardrum lies concealed behind a thin membrane of skin, and their hearing range is far greater than that of humans. Their language resembles the high pitches given off by dolphins. While singing or on land, they communicate in low throaty voices; in the water, through a highly-evolved, high-pitch language that human translators know little about. Many Oro'ym have learned human speech, but very few humans have learned even rudimentary Oro'ym language (*at'ym*). The famed linguist Jyrr Tolhardy is known to have learned more than most, and is venerated by the Oro'ym as their greatest human friend.

Society

Despite their long fall from a star-faring civilization, the Oro'ym retain cultural — if not political — unity. Their belief in Dewi Dralloch and their histories, centered around the Rassic Record and the Mwormiad, point to a common mythology. The Mwormiad is a living bible; every few centuries, the wisest of the Oro'ym gather and add a chapter to the Book of the Race. Their religious center is a site known as Tuathan Zilech, where the Prophetess interprets the word of Dewi Dralloch. No Oro'ym will let an alien know the location of this most sacred site, their cultural center.

The Oro'ym are divided into seven clans or confederations. These are: the Zia'din, the Zustar, the Ri'nadan, the Tapol'ym, the Samed'ym, the Sargon'ym and R'len. The clans no longer war, and they usually dwell far apart from each other. The Tapol'ym recently replaced the Ri'nadan as the strongest confederation, due to their alliance with the Merchant League, which supplies them with weapons.

Most clans elect their leaders (*dagans*) democratically,



but the Samed'ym have a hereditary dagan, and the Sargon'ym have a ruling priest (*dew'ym*), a remnant from the days of the Priest-Kings. The R'len follow the word of the Prophetess (*ti'ym*), and she appoints their leaders. There are traditionally two chiefs in a clan, a war leader (*wersha*) and a peace leader (*dethsha*). The Oro'ym can recite their ancestors for 900 generations, and each major clan sings the *Zia'ym*, or clan ancestry song, at great gatherings. Family life is important; Oro'ym usually have three mates in a lifetime: the youth-love mate, the family mate, and old-age mate. Life-spans can reach 120 years, but most average 80.

Oro'ym religion began in animism and has returned to it. Uplifted to a monotheistic religion during their star-faring epoch, they retain vestiges of these times in their religious system. Dewi Dralloch remains the creator, who is puzzlingly distant yet near. Under Dewi Dralloch the universe is governed by a host of spirits. These spirits (*ada'ym*) can be invoked by prayer. To the Oro'ym, all the universe is alive. Each planet and star possess a guardian spirit; Sl'ian is the amphibious god of Madoc and the Oro'ym race. Also on Madoc dwells Uskiment, lord of the depths; Shfleer, spirit of shallow seas; and Tadoon, lord of the isles. Beneath these great spirits are a host of lesser attendant spirits. Each clan has a clan spirit, and every shelter has a guardian spirit (*kada'ym*).

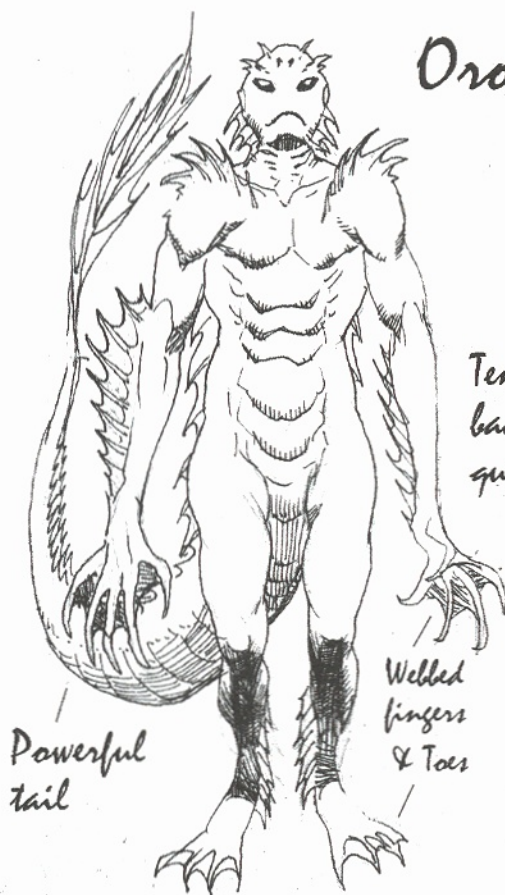
A streak of pessimism is found throughout Oro'ym thought. They state that, since the teacher races vanished,

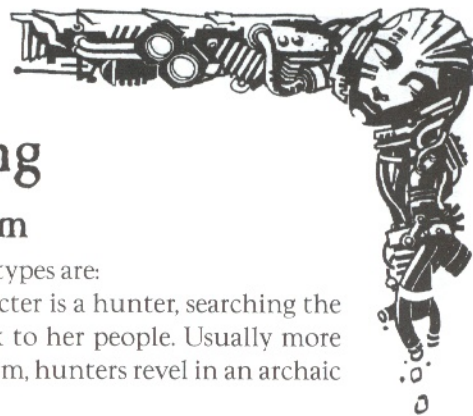
there are no longer favored races in the eyes of the greater spirits. Oro'ym and other newcomers are at best adopted orphans to these spirits, and are less cherished than the vanished elder sons and daughters. There is a place for the adopted races, but it is harder for them to reach that place (*Jadhirine*, the "Sunlit Oceans of Bliss"), due to their early orphan state. A belief in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls powerfully shapes their outlook. The believers in Ti'al (Breathing Universe) state that the chain of reincarnation can be broken by becoming purified (*ti'ym*) and contemplating perfection. Only a few follow this path.

Some blood sacrifice exists among Oro'ym worship, but this is no longer widely practiced since the time of Saznakaer. Strange societies exist in the most isolated Oro'ym communities, where the cult of Bizarg the Albino Shark and the secret worship of Nidderdak From Beyond the Stars still finds adherents. The Bizarg cult is a hunter society based off a sacrificial shark god, while the Nidderdak cult is only whispered by the Oro'ym to outsiders.

Teachers guide the young, although in smaller tribes this duty falls to the mother and father. The old are venerated. Their culture finds roles for hunters, priests, fishers-farmers, artisans, tool-makers, interpreters, warrior guardians and teachers. Priests interpret the holy texts of the race and learn history. Priests also double as scientists-explorers. Oro'ym are sensitive about ancestry and questions of honor and culture; making derisive comments

Oro'ym Anatomy





about their history and society is certain to anger them. Slow to friendship with outside races, they make extremely loyal friends after they have "tested" an outsider.

Rank is denoted by ceremonial clothing in Oro'ym society. Leaders wear elaborate ceremonial synthsuits, handed down from the days of their greatness, which cover all but the face and radiate a shifting pattern of constant colors. Priest robes, woven with rare sea gems and shells, denote symbolic spiritual journeys (the right to wear the Sea Diamond comes after journeying to the greater spirits).

Warriors wear shirts of protective shells woven into armor, although most Oro'ym wear only shell necklace heirlooms, symbolizing family history and occupation. Aside from tool belts and food/medicine pouches, most Oro'ym go about naked. On festival days, they garb themselves in sea-woven ceremonial armor and masks. Interpreters possess the right to wear human style clothes, to interact with the mammalian "other." Some Oro'ym believe that wearing human clothing infuses the individual Oro'ym with the luck and magic of the previous owner, and there is a brisk trade in noble insignia beneath Madoc's waters.

The earlier written language of the Oro'ym, "Old Oro'ym," was based off mathematical-symbolic principles, which only the most educated engineer or Oro'ym can read, and which they claim was a gift from the gods. Second Republic anthropologists deciphered it, but few of these records survived long in the New Dark Ages. "Middle Oro'ym" descended into pictographic depictions, but "Modern Oro'ym" seems to be phonetically based, and founded after contact with humanity (c.2800). The Mworniad is written in both Old Oro'ym and Middle Oro'ym, and is translated to the people by the leaders and lore-masters. Most Oro'ym are illiterate.

Note: The term Oro'ym describes the race, and is both singular and plural. Some Madoc residents call individual Oro'ym "Oryi".

Habitat

Madoc is the only planet of the Known World on which the Oro'ym dwell. Here they are masters of their environment. The seven tribes range all about the watery world, but the greatest population center of Oro'ym remains near the equatorial zone. They are also concentrated about the isles (where they lay eggs in the shallow waters), ancient ruins, and generally in all zones save the polar seas. Madoc has no alien reservations; the Oro'ym deal with humans, but most of their population remains hidden from them.

Oro'ym lore masters believe that some Oro'ym still exist on the planet Akata (in the Sirius system?). No jumproutes to Akata exist, so this cannot be proven.

Roleplaying Playing Oro'ym

Some suggested stereotypes are:

Sea Hunter: The character is a hunter, searching the seas for prey to bring back to her people. Usually more primitive than other Oro'ym, hunters revel in an archaic way of life.

Trader: The character makes a good living bartering undersea coral, iridescent shells and other Madoc wonders to land dwellers and off-worlders.

Shaman: Blessed with psychic powers, the character is a spiritual leader among her people, divining threats to health and livelihood for her tribe.

Mercenary: The character is more modern than most of his brethren, training with high-tech weapons and crafts and hiring himself out to off-worlders as a bodyguard or guide — or traveling off-world himself.

Loreseeker: The character seeks knowledge of his people's past and wishes to raise his people to the stars again — on their terms, not those dictated by humans.

Gamesmastering Oro'ym

Family Jewels: A collector for a decadent al-Malik baron has stolen some Oro'ym eggs from a guarded "hatchpool." The Oro'ym have pursued the collector to a small island on Madoc. Now the collector has radioed for help, but is surrounded by the Oro'ym with no hope of escaping himself. The characters can respond to his call. If Oro'ym characters are pursuing the collector, he and a small guard (four mercenaries) will hole up in an old abandoned human palace-estate instead.

The Unusual Suspects: The lore masters of the Oro'ym have chosen a few among them to explore the Known Worlds. The Merchant League transports them to Byzantium Secundus, where they are presented to the Emperor. Then, a murder of a minor courtesan is blamed on the Oro'ym. If the characters investigate, they will discover that Doctor Finman's genetically-engineered Gillmen are responsible, manipulated by an angry party. The Oro'ym must prove their innocence.

Traits

Suggested Oro'ym Traits

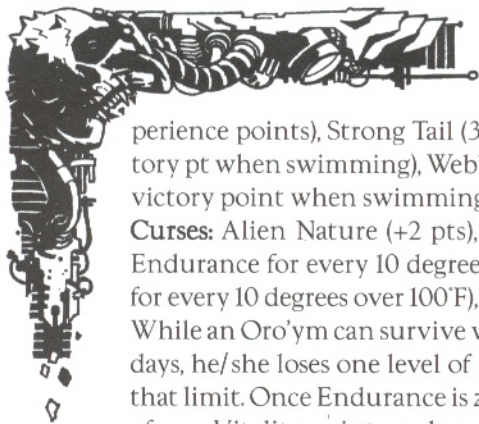
Characteristics: Strength and Endurance (max 11; cost: 4 pts), Calm

Natural Skills: Vigor (base 4; cost: 1 pt), Fight

Learned skills: Beast Lore, God Lore (see below), Speak Oro'ym (base 3; no base Speak Urthish), Survival

Blessings: Fangs (1 pt: 2 DMG), Gills (3 pts: breath underwater), Regrowth (4 pts: The Oro'ym will regrow a severed limb or tail within four months of losing it. However, each time this occurs, the Oro'ym permanently loses one level of Endurance, although this may be raised again with ex-





perience points), Strong Tail (3 pts: 3 DMG, +1 meter/ victory pt when swimming), Webbed Hands (1 pt: +2 meters/ victory point when swimming)

Curses: Alien Nature (+2 pts), Cold-blooded (+3 pts: - 2 Endurance for every 10 degrees below 60°F, -1 Perception for every 10 degrees over 100°F), Requires Moisture (+5 pts: While an Oro'ym can survive without moisture for three days, he/she loses one level of Endurance per hour after that limit. Once Endurance is zero, he/she suffers the loss of one Vitality point per hour until he/she is dead. Immersion in water at any point will reverse the effects at the rate of one point/level per minute)

Benefices: Secrets, Family Ties

Afflictions: Ostracism (+2 pts)

Total cost: 5 pts

Learned Skill

God Lore

Certain priestly Oro'ym can learn ancient Anunnaki "passwords," phrases handed down in their language from long ago. Amazingly, these words seems to activate some Ur tech. While some words can be imitated by human speech or computer synthesizers, it seems that they are only efficacious when spoken by a living Oro'ym.

The effect of these words is not always known by the Oro'ym speaker. It is up to the gamemaster to devise their effects in a drama. Some examples are: Some phrases can waken Gargoyles but provide no command over them. Other phrases can locate or activate soul shards and philosophers stones. These phrases are wild cards. The higher the skill in this lore, the more efficacious the effect — perhaps even allowing the opening of lost jumproutes when transmitted to a jumpgate.

Equipment

WET suit

TL 5

Cost: 2 Benefice/ 200 firebirds

Moisture is important for Oro'ym when they leave their watery world. The League has developed Water Environment Togs (WET suits) for them. These suits store a few gallons of water and leak this moisture from the inner layer of the suit, allowing its wearer to remain wet. The suit must be refilled weekly. A high-tech version (TL 6) is available which recycles the wearer's own bodily fluids, purifying them in the process, allowing the wearer to drink from it and still remain moist; water and filters need to be replaced only once per month (cost: 4 Benefice/ 400 firebirds).

Capek .40 Aquatic Rifle ("Newt Gun")

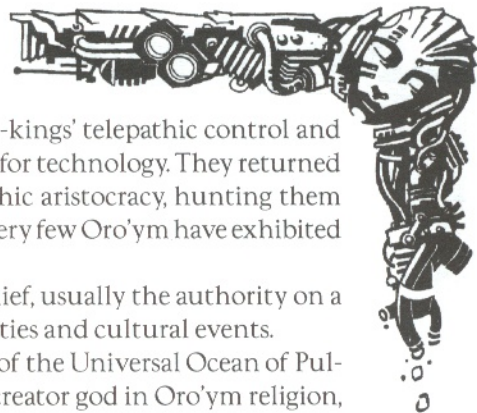
TL 5

Cost: 800 firebirds

Constructed by Engineer Povronda Capek exclusively for the Oro'ym, the Capek .40 is an aquatic rifle used for undersea hunting. It is designed for the webbed hands of the Oro'ym. The Merchant League closely monitors the guns' trade, and favors the Tapol'ym Confederation, who in return aid the Scravers and protect League fish farms. The Tapol'ym often tattoo the League sign onto their foreheads, as a symbol of good fortune and alliance.

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | | 7 | 30/40 | 5 | 2 | XL | 4/1 |





Oro'ym Glossary

Ada'ym: Those spirits below Dewi Dralloch in creation, who aid in the governing of the various physical and spiritual realms created by Dewi Dralloch; literal translation means "people of divine spirit."

Akata: A planet believed to be near Sirius, said by Oro'ym lore masters to have been the only offworld Oro'ym colony. Some Oro'ym belief that their kind still live there, although no jumpgate exists to the system.

Anan Annalk: Greatest city of the Oro'ym, destroyed when a meteor struck Madoc.

Anog'ym: Outsiders in Oro'ym society, usually denoting other sentient races, but also those who have dwelt too long among other races, becoming Anog'ym themselves.

At'ym: The Oro'ym land speech, translated by Jyrr Tolhardy with the assistance of the Reeve Linguist, Holwraft. Their water speech is a series of high pitched signals unpronounceable to humans similar to the speech of dolphins. At'ym derives from ad'ym, the tongue of the spirits, according to Oro'ym mythology.

Babon/Babon'ym: Oro'ym term for "human" and "human race" respectively, derived from the Mworniad, which mentions a sentient, biped mammal race that dwells on the third planet from the star Jaya.

Bizarg: Albino shark spirit, worshipped by hunters in the most isolated Oro'ym communities.

Dagan: Ruler in the Oro'ym tongue.

Dahun Derion: Underwater city of the Oro'ym, believed to be in the northern hemisphere and controlled by the R'len confederation. No humans know its exact location, although it is said to have been raised over Gamat Ghilliom, the last city of the Priest-Kings.

Ded'ym: The free warriors, who escaped from the

range of the Oro'ym priest-kings' telepathic control and searched the ancient ruins for technology. They returned and overthrew the telepathic aristocracy, hunting them to extinction. Since then, very few Oro'ym have exhibited psychic powers.

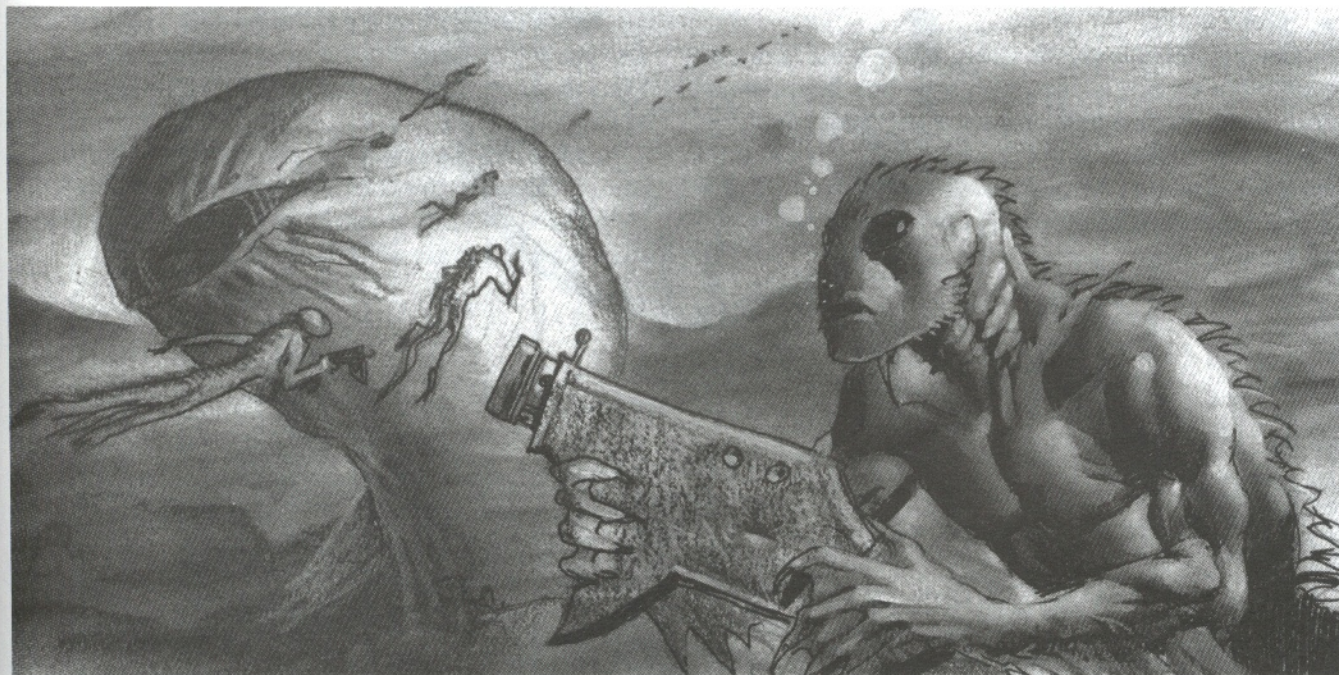
Dethsha: The Peace Chief, usually the authority on a confederation's daily activities and cultural events.

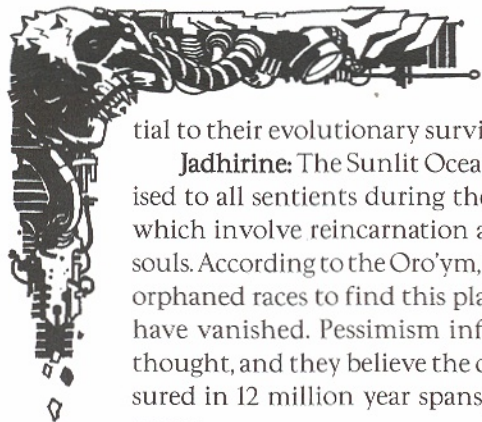
Dewi Dralloch: Father of the Universal Ocean of Pulsating Light, the supreme creator god in Oro'ym religion, once exclusively worshipped during Oro'ym history. It is said that when Dewi Dralloch contemplated self, and then sought to unite with this contemplation, all the universes were born. Once a monotheistic god, Dewi Dralloch still remains the supreme creator to the animistic Oro'ym.

Dew'ym: Oro'ym priests. The name derives from "Those people who journey and speak with Dewi Dralloch." Priests are educators and explorers in Oro'ym society. The modern Dew'ym are descended from the Ded'ym, and have no connotations to the Priest-Kings who telepathically ruled over the Oro'ym when their culture fell.

Dionak: In Oro'ym mythology, an advanced amphibious race which uplifted the Oro'ym culture and guided them in exploring the physical universe. When the Dionak disappeared, Oro'ym culture fell. Second Republic anthropologists and xenologists long debated if the Dionak were an actual advanced race or the creation of Oro'ym mythology.

Dwagah: Ancient continent on Madoc where the Oro'ym may have evolved. Xenologists believed that the Oro'ym developed opposable thumbs to scamper up low-hanging trees to escape fierce marine amphibians, and left the trees to stand upright in times of food scarcity. This is all conjecture, but small skeletons of a proto-Oro'ym race were discovered which indicated that climbing was essen-





tial to their evolutionary survival.

Jadhirine: The Sunlit Oceans of Bliss, the place promised to all sentients during their long spiritual journeys which involve reincarnation and the transmigration of souls. According to the Oro'ym, it is harder for the younger, orphaned races to find this place, since the teacher-races have vanished. Pessimism infuses all Oro'ym spiritual thought, and they believe the cycle of the Universe (measured in 12 million year spans) has taken a turn for the worse.

Kada'ym: Guardian spirit of shelters.

Keddehian Records: Series of clay inscribed writings found by Second Republic xenologists off the island of Daas, written in a language dubbed "Proto-Oro'ym", which describes Zynigron's victory over the Nizdarhim.

Lukabankor: Code of Peace, created by Saznakaer the Lost, which ended the fighting between the Oro'ym confederations. Since then, the Oro'ym confederations have been at peace, but the recent rise in power of the Tapol'ym has alarmed the other Oro'ym (save for the Sargon'ym, historically allied with the Tapol'ym).

Mammak the Dark: Last Priest-King, overthrown by the warrior Mhutua, who founded a confederation ruled by warriors.

Mworniad, The: Oro'ym holy book, which records the history of their race. Written in Old and Middle Oro'ym, it is added to every thousand years by the Loremasters.

Nidderdak From Beyond the Dark: Star-god and progenitor of the Nizdarhim race, said to be a god of darkness and wisdom. After the destruction of the Nizdarhim race, his worship seems to have continued in isolated Oro'ym communities. Nidderdak was from a pantheon of deities who claimed to have hurled time back on itself.

Nizdarhim: Mollusk-type sentient race who ruled the oceans long before the Oro'ym returned to the waters. They were destroyed in a series of savage wars between the two races.

Oro'ym: "People of the Clear Water Star." Sentient amphibious race of Madoc, with some reptilian-fish attributes (they possess scales instead of the moist, clear skin of earth amphibians) as well as recent mammalian ones (the ability among two-thirds of Oro'ym females to give live birth to their young). Sometimes referred to as "newts" by humans.

Oro'ym written records: Divided between four periods, Proto-Oro'ym, Old Oro'ym, Middle Oro'ym and New Oro'ym. Old Oro'ym was a highly symbolic language, almost mathematical in its written form, while Middle Oro'ym had descended to pictography. New Oro'ym, influenced by human contact, is an attempt at a phonetic transcribing of their tongue into symbols. Middle Oro'ym remains the most practiced form of written communication by the scribes.

Picgnostic Dagan Brotherhood: Society of Madoc fishermen who allied with the Oro'ym and who, alone of all humans, believed for long that the Oro'ym were not extinct. It is a secret brotherhood, which help the Oro'ym in exchange for aid in fishing and navigation.

Priest-Kings: Originally a group of scientist-technicians who, alarmed at the fall of Oro'ym culture, seized power to preserve a remnant of the science taught to them by the vanished Dionak. Developing genetic telepathy, they created an aristocracy of telepathic controllers, who eventually ruled as priest-Kings when the higher sciences were completely lost. They ruled Madoc until civil war broke out among them, destroying the culture they sought to save. The Priest-Kings were slain by the Ded'ym; they had become petty tyrants of small city-states, warring with each other, incapable of unity.

Rassic Record: Name given by Second Republic anthropologists to the hi-tech carved symbols on the cliffs of Ras Isle, which tell of a time when the Oro'ym visited other worlds. The language was highly mathematical-symbolic, and academic debates about the nature of the records continued throughout the Second Republic. Did the Rassic Record pertain to the Oro'ym, or another race, similar in physiology?

Redem'ym: Oro'ym who cut their finger webbing to handle human weapons, becoming "Warriors who deal with outsiders."

Sahgal-Sayok: Vanished land empire of the terrestrial Oro'ym, remembered in the most ancient myths of the Oro'ym, when they were land dwellers on the continent of Dwagah.

Saznakaer the Lost: Oro'ym Loremaster who briefly united the race after the overthrow of the Priest-Kings. He created the Lukabankor, or Code of Peace, which stopped wars between the race.

Sons of Krillos: A destructive star-faring race who attacked the Oro'ym and are similar in aspects to the Rillok of Ur-Ukar mythology. The Sons of Krillos may have battled the elder races.

Seven Confederations of the Oro'ym: The Zia'din, the Zustar, the Ri'nadan, the Tapol'ym, the Semed'ym, the Sargon'ym and the R'len. The emerald skinned Zia'din and the purple hued Zustar confederations are found in the equatorial waters, while the orange and red Ri'nadan are found in the southern hemisphere. The remaining confederations are physically dark brackish-green, although all Oro'ym are one species.

Sli'an: Amphibious god of Madoc and the Oro'ym race, one of the Ada'ym under Dewi Dralloch. Attendant to Sli'an on Madoc are Uskiment, lord of the depths, Shfleer, spirit of the shallow seas (usually depicted as a female Oro'ym guarding her eggs), and Tadoon, Lord of the Isles (sometimes depicted as a lizard god, sometimes an Oro'ym with lizard attributes).

Thrafur, Nolagant and Jewel-Encrusted Sa'thal: Ancient city-states of the Oro'ym, constructed shortly after their return to the water. These states warred with each other, and are remembered in the oldest legends.

Ti'al: "The Breathing Universe." According to the Oro'ym, the universe and all matter in it is alive; even inanimate objects have life. A teaching whose roots go back to Oro'ym antiquity.

Ti'ym: The prophetess of Tuathan Zilech, and leader of the R'len tribe. The title means "The Breathing People," denoting one who is in sync with Ti'al. Ti'ym also denotes a purified one, who has broken the cycle of reincarnation by surrendering desires and contemplating perfection. This path was started by Ziandol, an Oro'ym many thought to be a complete atheist but whose teachings later formed a religious path.

Tuathan Zilech: Religious and cultural center of the Oro'ym, whose location is unknown to humanity. Here the Prophetess speaks to Dewi Dralloch.

Wersha: War Leader, traditionally one of two chiefs in Oro'ym society. Although large wars are outlawed, skirmishes occur from time to time between the confederations.



Picgnostic Dagan
Brotherhood







Chapter Seven: The Changed

Hugo cowered in the darkest recesses of the barn, wracking his brain for some explanation for what had happened. "Think, damn it, think," he whispered. Had he ever seen that priest before? What had he ever done to such a fellow that would warrant being shot at by a flame gun? Suddenly the barn door swung open, and Hugo heard the tread of booted feet.

"Come out, Hugo," commanded a deep voice. "I've tracked you here and there can be no escape. You are the last descendant of Eliah Morgantral, demonspawn. His curse has been passed on to you and I, Father Vigoron, am here to end that taint. One way or another, that evil must be erased. If you try to avoid your fate, it will go all the harder on you."

The priest knew. Hugo had spent his entire life denying his ancestry, but it had caught up with him anyway. Experiments carried out thousands of years before his birth would mean his death. The realization brought tears of despair to Hugo's eyes. A tremor from his abdomen drove the tears away. Vigoron had said Hugo was the last. That meant he did not know about little brother!

Moments later Hugo rose from his hiding place, his hands held high in the air and his open shirt dangling loosely. "A wise choice, demonspawn," Father Vigoron said. "While your life may have been a plague, at least your death can teach your fellow villagers about the cost of sin." The priest pulled a set of Muster chains from beneath his robes and moved toward Hugo.

Suddenly a chittering, gibbering figure fell from the rafters, landing on Vigoron. It clawed at the priest's face, and the holy man shrieked when he saw it. As he tried to knock it from his shoulders, Hugo dove for a pile of farm tools and came up with a pitchfork. He charged Vigoron and drove the pitchfork deep into his chest. The priest collapsed, and his tiny attacker rolled away.

Hugo knelt down and took off his shirt. With one hand he pulled back a flap of skin from his side and motioned to the figure with his other hand. The figure crawled toward him, its stunted arms and deformed torso heaving itself forward. Hugo helped it climb into the space where it had lived its entire life, a life just as long as Hugo's own. As Hugo rebuttoned his shirt, he

considered his options. A Charioteer had brought the priest to town. Maybe that same Charioteer would take Hugo and little brother away from here.

Catmen and snake women, ten-armed monstrosities and limbless horrors, beautiful midgets and freakish giants — all of these and more came out of Second Republic genetic research. These are the most notorious of the Changed, the ones that send peasants screaming in fear and Inquisitors reaching for their flamers. These are not all of the Changed, however. Second Republic experiments were far more pervasive than that. Many of the Changed give no external appearance as such, and some do not even know their own lineage. These are the ones the Church really fears — the demons living quietly next door.

History

Records exist of humans playing with their genetic code since the twentieth century, and rumors of bizarre breeding experiments and odd alchemies predate even those earliest efforts. Needless to say, some people have always opposed such efforts, and not infrequently expressed that opposition with violence. As a result research in these areas has alternated between extremes of popularity and abhorration.

The zaibatsu funded early efforts in these directions, using them to create better products, workers and consumers. They modified people to work in non-Terran atmospheres, survive otherwise fatal pressures, be more susceptible to advertising and more. Some Second Republic scholars rated these alterations as a primary cause of concern among the unaltered and a significant factor in the unrest that eventually toppled the First Republic.

During the Diaspora, policies on genetic manipulation varied from planet to planet and even from region to region. Some leaders absolutely despised the concept while others embraced it with relish. The descendants of

those first Changed met either violent rejection or tentative acceptance, with the former being more common than the latter. Some of the Changed led the exodus which marked this era, seeking out planets that both provided security and fit their special needs.

It was during these times that legends of entire planets filled with the Changed began to spread. Such rumors fueled additional bouts of paranoia, and the small communities of the Changed which did exist became more secluded, forming as far from other people as possible.

During the Second Republic, such problems did not officially exist. All sentient descendants of humanity enjoyed the same protection under the law and the same representation in government. In practice this was often little more than wishful thinking. More than a few of the Changed found both acceptance and acclaim in high society, and most urban locations made accommodations for their odder inhabitants. But the further one went from the centers of human population, the less likely the Changed were to have any rights at all. Even at the height of the Second Republic, secluded communities of the Changed maintained their isolation.

The end of the Second Republic brought a whole new level of oppression to the Changed. As the Universal Church grew, more people began finding in its verses justification for their hatred of the Changed. Some interpreted the Prophet's condemnation of the indiscriminate way scientists manipulated the Pancreator's creations as a denunciation of whatever came from their experiments. Some fanatics attacked think machines, others went after golems and not a few sought out the Changed.

No one knows just how many of the Changed now exist. Almost every planet has its pockets of these freaks and mutants hidden away. Additionally, those whose alterations lack obvious manifestations can live alongside other humans for generations without detection. Some League scholars have theorized that the majority of humans in the Known Worlds have one or more of the Changed in their ancestry, though Church scholars dispute this vociferously.

Varieties

Brother Matus Ereska, a Preceptor who studied the Changed, groups them into categories based on how far from humanity they appear to be. He originally listed four groups — inhumans, animalized, mutations and tweaked — but recently added three more, Grimsons, Metonyms and clones. He does not include psychics among the Changed for he, like many, can prove no definite correlation between genetics and psi.

Inhumans

Some of the Changed barely resemble the genetic stock from which they came. These are the monstrosities of peasant nightmares — one-armed, one-legged oxygen eaters; men with wings and talons; women with amor-

phous, amoebalike lower halves; immense wormlike creatures with human intelligence; and more. These creatures have no hope of making their way in human society. They only survive in groups of their own or among very understanding people.

The Animalized

Among the most reviled of Second Republic genetic experiments were those that brought humans and animals (or aliens) closer together. These projects invariably gave humans animal (or alien) characteristics; animals never achieved sentience, rumors of intelligent jackalopes notwithstanding. Most of these new breeds died out after the Second Republic, either through violence or lack of breeding partners. Some survived, usually protected by powerful benefactors. Additionally, seemingly normal parents have been known to give birth to the animalized, though doctors and midwives generally destroy them at birth. Those who survive to adulthood learn to maintain a low profile despite their ram's head, cat fur or prehensile tail.

Mutations

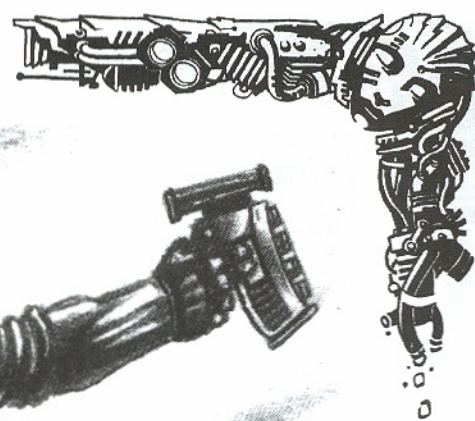
Mutations can generally pass for human with enough clothing and bad enough lighting. They may have one or two obvious manifestations of their difference, but can cover these up. Most mutations are the result of ancient experiments aimed at improving the human race, though less beneficial effects have also been noted. Stories tell of saints curing some mutation or another, but these legends do not have official sanction from the Church. Likewise, some stories tell of priests who curse sinners and their entire bloodlines, commanding them to "bear your sins on your flesh unto your tenth generation!" These stories also lack official Church sanction.

The Tweaked

This category covers what the Church considers the most insidious of the Changed, those who can walk unnoticed among humans. When the Church does discover one of these beings, its Inquisitors have been known to trace all her relatives, and may well destroy them as well as the Changed, just to ensure that this corruption spreads no further.

Grimsons

This recent addition to the lists of the Changed came from genetic experiments carried out by noble houses. As the Emperor Wars dragged out, nobles realized the value of troops born and bred for war. Their chemically enhanced troops had already proven their value in combat, and the nobles pushed their labs to create better and better troops. Finally one house (each charges that it was another) began tinkering with the basic genetic codes and created the Grimsons, legionnaires with powers far beyond the norm. Unfortunately, the scientists who created the Grimsons had nowhere near the understanding of genet-



ics that those of the Second Republic did, and Grimsons tend to have as many disadvantageous traits as superior ones. Additionally, no one knows how many of them will be able to pass their changes on to children, or whether these changes will mutate along the way.

Metonyms

The experiments which first created these shapeshifters have been lost to time, but this has not stopped scientists from trying to recreate them. Metonyms' muscles are extremely fluid, and some gain such fine control of them that they are able to change their features and, some say, even their shape. This is a muscle-related ability, however, and Metonyms cannot change their skeletal system or other organs — or so they say.

Clones

Considered one of the greatest crimes by Church, clones and their creators both face immediate destruction if discovered. Even the Decados do not admit to cloning, for there is little doubt that the Inquisition would chase down anyone who created a clone, even if that person was the Emperor himself.

Playing the Changed

The Changed are rare, but they do exist. Gamemasters should not feel obligated to let a player run one, but they

can be a lot of fun. Just remember that the only groups more reviled than the Changed are Symbiots, Antinomists and Sathraists.

Players create Changed characters just like they would any other, until they start buying Blessings and Curses. Despite the revulsion their differences cause in people, the Changed usually buy such differences as Blessings, throwing in some Curses to complete the package. Some of these Blessings require players to increase their Alien characteristic as well. Note that these, like cybernetics, allow characters to purchase more than seven points worth of Blessings. In buying these, characters are only limited by their Alien rating.

Players should also decide what category of the Changed their characters fall into. Characters can get extra points for extreme changes. After all, inhuman characters have no chance of dealing with almost any people, and the animalized had better not come out of the shadows. The Changed are not like aliens; if they appear as themselves in public, they will be attacked. Grimsons are the exception to this because they have some official status as veterans. Clones may not appear different, but they too will be destroyed if discovered for what they are and are even more rabidly hunted than other Changed.

Remember that not all the Changed have beneficial modifications. Players who want a truly interesting character might opt to take only gross cosmetic changes or ones

Categories

| | | |
|------------|-------|--------|
| Inhuman | Curse | +5 pts |
| Animalized | Curse | +3 pts |
| Mutation | Curse | +1 pt |
| Tweaked | — | 0 pts |
| Grimson | — | 0 pts |
| Metonym | — | 0 pts |
| Clone | Curse | +1 pt |

that adversely affect his ability to interact with humans (can only breathe methane).

The Changed in Society

Most of the Changed have to little to no knowledge that others of their kind exist, much less what they are like. Still, this has not stopped Church leaders and other people from worrying that a secret alliance of the Changed, perhaps working with aliens or barbarians, might try to usurp humanity's place in the Known Worlds. Thus, not only are individual Changed suspect, but groups of them are considered highly dangerous.

Thus most Changed stay far away from other humans, living quietly in remote communities where no one is likely to bother them. Those few who make their way in human society were generally born to seemingly normal parents (let's hear it for recessive genes), were kicked out of their original communities or had their communities destroyed by frightened locals.

Thus most Changed characters have little knowledge on dealing with normal humans (the Cloistered Affliction), no idea on how to handle themselves in polite society (low Etiquette and the Clueless Curse), and lack technical capabilities in addition to all their other problems.

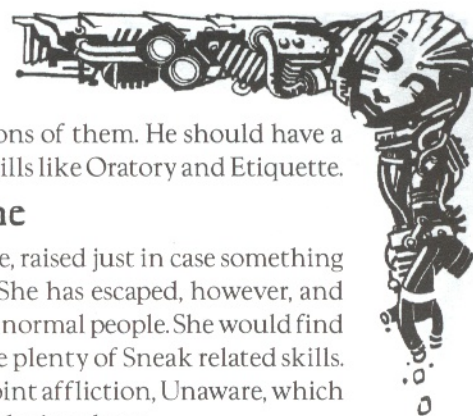
On the other hand, fears that the Changed have some sort of secret network connecting them may well be true. The Changed have much they can offer any humans willing to deal with them (isolated locations to take refuge or smuggle goods, freakish powers, ancient technologies), and who knows how many of the Tweaked have infiltrated normal society.

Thus their envoys roam the Known Worlds, seeking out lost colonies of the Changed. Rumors that the recently rediscovered world of Iver has a strong community of the Changed would attract at least some of these envoys. So would the ancient legend that somewhere there is a lost world populated solely by these genetic freaks.

Character Stereotypes

The types of Changed a player can take is limited solely by how grossly disfigured it is. Some make their way publicly, able to deal with normal humans, others move about incognito, while yet others travel with an entourage of people who can help keep them alive. What follows are only a few of the different kinds of characters





Aliens Among the Changed

Most of the Changed can trace their ancestry to humans of Urthish origin. Those descended from aliens make up a much smaller group, and find themselves ostracized in two worlds. Aliens do not accept these groups into their culture, for in many cases they represent the worst examples of their shame. For instance, most of the Vorox and Ur-Ukar Changed resulted from involuntary experiments carried out following human domination.

Those few who do exist generally live in complete isolation or spring up only when the right recessive genes connect. Some have discovered, however, that most humans do not know what aliens look like. If an alien Changed can discover humans open minded enough not to mind an alien while ignorant to recognize her changes, then more power to her.

from which players can choose. Players should consult Chapter Five: The Military for information on running ex-Grimsons and Doppelganger assassins.

Rural Bumpkin

The character has just fallen off the turnip truck (and may even look like one). He lived with an isolated group of the Changed far away from humanity. One day the wanderlust took him and off he ventured. These characters should take as many social Afflictions and Curses as physical ones.

Urban Sophisticate

This character grew up in a community far more accepting of the Changed than most, a place that celebrated her differences instead of attacking her for them. She got invited to all the best parties, hung out with the right people and rarely felt physically at risk. Of course, there were limits to how close she could become to normal people. This kind of character should not take any grotesque physical features and may want to invest in Curses like Haughty.

Freak Show Escapee

There is almost no way this character can pretend to be anything but one of the Changed. In the past a circus protected him from attack, but no longer. Now he is out on his own and must find new defenders. By the same token, he has learned to play the rubes and can probably make money off of whatever peasants are not trying to kill him. This character should invest in Knavery, Subterfuge and similar skills.

Emissary

The character left the safety of home to try and make the Known Worlds a better place for the Changed. He travels from planet to planet trying to meet other Changed

and change people's opinions of them. He should have a high Extrovert as well as skills like Oratory and Etiquette.

Renegade Clone

The character is a clone, raised just in case something happened to the original. She has escaped, however, and now makes her way among normal people. She would find it strongly advisable to take plenty of Sneak related skills. She can also take a three-point affliction, Unaware, which means she does not know she is a clone.

In Denial

The character either does not know or refuses to believe that he is of the Changed. He thinks he is a normal human, though the Inquisition should certainly feel differently. This character should also take the Unaware affliction.

Powers of the Changed

No scholar, not even Brother Matus, knows just how many different modifications scientists made or have come into existence through the years. What follows is only a brief list of possible Blessings characters can take. Players and gamemasters should feel free to come up with their own. Note that when a power ends with Alien + N, the character must spend points to increase that trait by the points listed (assuming a base rating of 1).

Enhancements

The earliest varieties of the Changed were humans modified in ways that would improve their basic abilities, and who could pass those improvements on to their children. The most common improvements came in form of making people stronger, faster and healthier. Players who want their characters affected in these ways should raise their maximum characteristics (see Blessings in Chapter Eight: Rules) and then spend points to increase them.

Air Eater (3 pts)

Some planets lack easy access to anything nourishing, and scientists have developed alternative nourishment sources. Air eaters populated several domed cities during the Second Republic, and they needed no other nourishment — nor could they digest anything else. Alien +1.

Alternative Respiration (1 pt)

Some of the earliest alterations zaibatsu scientists made were to allow workers to operate in hostile environments. Since respiratory equipment tended to be expensive, corporations with interests on inhospitable planets found it better to hire workers who could do without. The best of these operations enabled people to breathe oxygen as well as other gases, but this was not always the case. Each additional atmosphere in which a character can breathe (methane, chlorine, carbon dioxide, etc.) costs one point. Being unable to breathe in an oxygen-nitrogen atmo-

sphere is a five point Affliction. No matter how many kinds of alternative respirations a character takes, it only forces him to raise his Alien trait once. Alien +1.

Elongated Fingers (3 pts)

+6 Dexterity when doing fine manipulation. Alien +1.

Immunity (2 pt)

The character has an inborn immunity to something that can poison or kill other people. This can include cyanide, xaos gas, the plague, alcohol or whatever. Each separate immunity costs two points but does not require the character increase his Alien trait.

Omnidigestion (4 pts)

The character can gain nourishment from almost any source he can wrestle down his gullet. His body will also neutralize the toxins those foods might carry. People with this Blessing have been known to live on a diet of rocks and water. Alien +1.

Pheromones (3-4 pts)

While most people think of pheromones as chemicals which help attract the opposite sex, the term really covers an entire range of chemicals which create a variety of responses in other people. For instance, Second Republic scientists learned to enhance naturally created chemicals which can create a fear response in others. These Blessings rarely affect people more than an arm's length away from the character. Note that only a few people can consciously control these chemicals. Being able to do so increases the Blessing cost by one. Each of the following Blessings is at Alien +1.

Sexual Pheromones: 3 pts: +6 Charm against a specific gender when aroused. This Blessing can be bought twice to affect both genders.

Trust Pheromones: 3 pts: +6 Impress when trying to gain someone's trust.

Flight Pheromones: 4 pts: Other characters must succeed in an Ego + Fight roll to engage the character in hand-to-hand combat, melee combat, or to stay near him when he feels that he is in danger.

Special Senses (1-5 pts)

The character has senses other humans have not even developed. Note that just being able to see and hear better than most people should be represented by increasing the character's maximum Perception. Each one is at Alien +1.

Infrared Vision: The character can detect heat sources and their intensity. (4 pts)

Cat Eyes: The character can see normally in anything less than absolute darkness. (4 pts)

Fly Eyes: The character has multifaceted eyes and can see all around him. The bonus for attacking her from behind is halved. (2 pts)

Dog Ears: The character can hear sounds higher than those other people can. (1 pt)

Sonar: The character has bat-like sonar and can detect things in the dark by firing out high-pitched bursts

of sound. (5 pts)

Educated Nose: The character has little problem detecting the various smells around him and can easily tell people apart by their smell alone. (3 pts)

Additions

After scientists learned to improve humans, they began to modify them in new and different ways, adding features nature never provided.

Chameleon (3 or 5 pts)

The character can change colors to reflect his environment, giving her a +3 to Sneak rolls when moving and a +5 when still. It costs three points to buy this Blessing and an additional two to make it voluntary so the character is not always changing colors. Alien +2.

Claws (2 pts)

This Blessing allows the character to make a claw attack for three dice of damage. This can be a lot of fun when combined with the Poison Blessing, even though these claws are not exceptionally large (not like Vorox claws). Alien +1.

Digestive Puke (5 pts)

The character can vomit forth a stream of highly acidic bile which will damage its target for several turns. He targets the stream with a Dexterity + Shoot roll and it causes four dice of damage for the first two turns and goes down by one every two turns. Victory points from the attack roll only effect the first turn's damage. Any time the puke actually causes its victim to lose Vitality, then the gamemaster can consider it to have eaten through any armor, and that armor will no longer defend against the puke's damage. Alien +2.

Exoskeleton (3-7 pts)

The character has an external layer of armor. Energy shields can be worn over this, though finding other clothes and armor can be a chore. The following are only examples. Alien +2.

Toughskin: 1+1 armor which, though obvious, can be concealed by clothes. (3 pts)

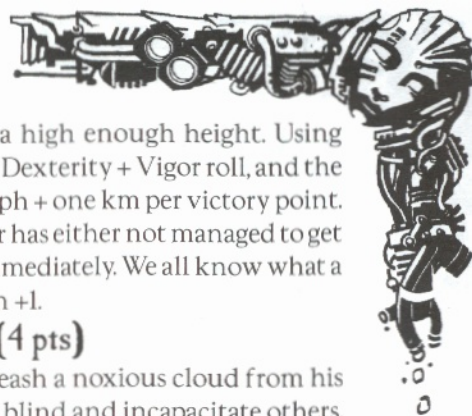
Carapace: 3+3 armor which cannot be concealed. (7 pts)

Extra Limb (3 pts)

The character has an extra arm or leg which operates just as effectively as the others. Each extra leg adds +3 to the character's base running distance. Note that this Blessing can be bought multiple times. Alien +1.

Eyestalks (1-3 pts)

The character has extendible eyestalks which allow him to peek around corners and from behind cover without exposing himself. The eyestalks cost one point per foot (1/3 meter) that they can extend, to a maximum of one meter. These eyestalks can bend as the character wants them to. Alien +1.



Fangs (2 pts)

Following a successful grapple action, the character can make a bite attack for three dice of damage without suffering a multiple action penalty. The Poison Blessing can make this an even more effective attack. Alien +1.

Foot Pads (2 pts)

The character has a layer of cushioning on his feet that allow him to move extremely quietly. He gains +4 to the goal number of any movement-related Sneak rolls he makes while barefoot. Alien +1.

Frog Tongue (2 pts)

The character's tongue is long and sticky, though this is not apparent without serious inspection. The tongue can reach out to 2 meters and grab light objects, pulling them back to the character. Grabbing a moving target requires a Dexterity + Fight roll; follow the usual grapple rules if the target resists. Alien +1.

Gills (3 pts)

The character has gills which allow him to breathe underwater. Alien +1.

Glider Wings (3-4 pts)

Even during the Second Republic scientists never could figure out a way to let humans pass the gift of flight on to their children. They did perfect a variety of gliding wings, however, ranging from small flaps under the arms (4 pts) to giant eagle-like wings (3 pts). These wings allow the characters to glide at up to 30 kph (if they have a strong

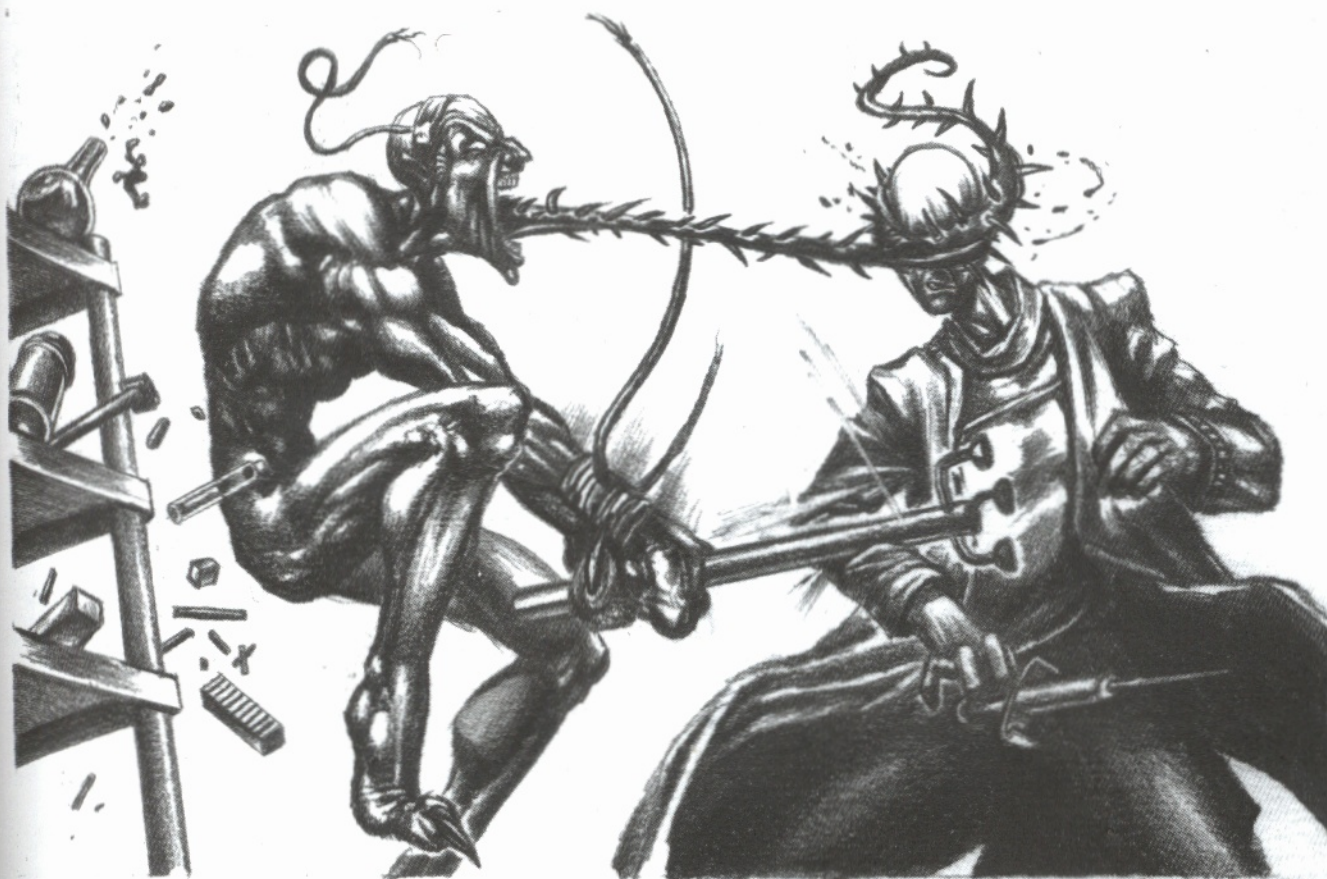
tailwind and jump from a high enough height. Using them effectively requires a Dexterity + Vigor roll, and the character can travel at 20 kph + one km per victory point. Failure means the character has either not managed to get lift off or landed almost immediately. We all know what a critical failure means. Alien +1.

Hazardous Breath (4 pts)

The character can unleash a noxious cloud from his mouth, a cloud which can blind and incapacitate others. It hits its target on a successful Dexterity + Shoot roll, has a range of three meters and lingers for a number of turns equal to the character's Endurance. Any character hit by it must make an Endurance + Vigor roll. Failure means the breath incapacitates its target until the target makes that roll. Even characters who make the roll reduce all their goal numbers by five until they have accumulated at least three victory points on Endurance + Vigor rolls (including the first). Alien +2.

Hidden Body (7 pts)

This extremely rare change requires that the player create two characters — one normal and one with half the points. The second one begins the game with only one point in all its characteristics and natural skills. The second body actually lives within the first in a pseudo-womb where it draws food and oxygen. It can move around normally, but cannot feed anywhere else. Alien +1 for the main character, +3 for the hidden one.



Non Spencer 97

Horns (3 pts)

Adding horns was a fad that came and went many times during the Second Republic. What follow are details on two of the more common kind. Alien +1.

Devil Horns: These two short, sharp horns allow the character to make a headbutt attack at -2 Initiative and four dice of damage. They also add +1 to Impress rolls related to scaring people.

Ram Horns: These giant, tough horns really hurt when they hit people. This butt is at -1 Initiative, +1 goal and six dice of damage. The character can also buy a standard Parry action he can do with the horns. These horns cannot be concealed.

Internal Respiration (5 pts)

The character no longer has to breathe, and gases that must be inhaled to take effect have no impact. The character does have to eat almost twice what other people do, however. Also, the character has to remember to fake breathing or else his difference will be apparent in many situations. Alien +2.

Poisonous Attack (4-5 pts)

The variety of poisons found among (and in) the Changed, as well as the sheer diversity of delivery methods, baffles modern researchers. No one has ever determined exactly why scientists wanted to implant so many kinds of poisons into people, though Brother Matus has theorized that they became common during the Diaspora as a form of self defense. Alien +1.

Poisoned Bite: When the character successfully grabs and bites someone, he can deliver five dice worth of venom damage. Its victim resists one point of damage for every victory point gained on an Endurance + Vigor roll. If any damage was inflicted, the poison is in the victim's system, and the victim continues to take that amount of damage per turn; she can also make the resistance roll each turn. Once she has accumulated more victory points than the damage inflicted, the poison ceases to have effect. (4 pts)

Stinger: The character delivers the above damage on a successful punch attack, though the punch must first get through whatever armor and shields its target has. (5 pts)

Skunk Spray (3 pts)

Some say that the first scientists to add this feature to a person did it as a joke, but those hit by such a spray rarely laugh about it. The foul odor leaves those who encounter

it choking and gasping for breath, and those covered by the spray find it exceptionally difficult to remove. Skunk spray is fired using Dexterity + Shoot and covers a one-meter wide area. Anyone hit by the stuff has a -1 to all goal numbers until he removes it (usually accomplished through a two-hour bath), with an additional -3 to all Charm and Impress rolls. Skunk Spray usually issues from a rear scent gland — some Changed have them attached to tails — but this is not always the case. The gland takes at least an hour to recharge and has a range of three meters.

Tentacles/Prehensile Tail (2 pts)

The character has grown a tentacle or prehensile tail in addition to whatever arms or limbs he may have. It can punch, but its best ability is to wrap around things (like necks) and grab them. Using a tentacle to grab adds +2 to the goal number, though it cannot do any fine manipulation. Alien +1.

Transformation (7 pts)

This is the Metonym power. The character can take a turn to change her features as she pleases. She can even appear as the opposite sex, though she cannot actually go through a sex change with this Blessing. Only the metonym's skin and muscles can change, allowing them to look like anyone similar to them in height and mass. Just how good their image is requires a Perception + Disguise roll. Alien +1.

Webbed Hands (1 pt)

The character has webbing between his fingers and toes which allow him to swim faster. He travels an extra two meters for every victory point achieved on his Vigor roll. Alien +1.

Curse

Unstable Mutation (+5 pts)

The character's body has never completely adapted to the odd genetic codes running around inside of it. Her Changed blessings only work if she can roll a 13 or less on a 1d20 roll before each use.

Oxygen Intolerant (+5 pts)

The character cannot breathe in a normal environment. If he is forced to breathe it, and fails to hold his breath, he will take three dice of damage per turn until he is dead. There is no way to resist this damage.



Other Options

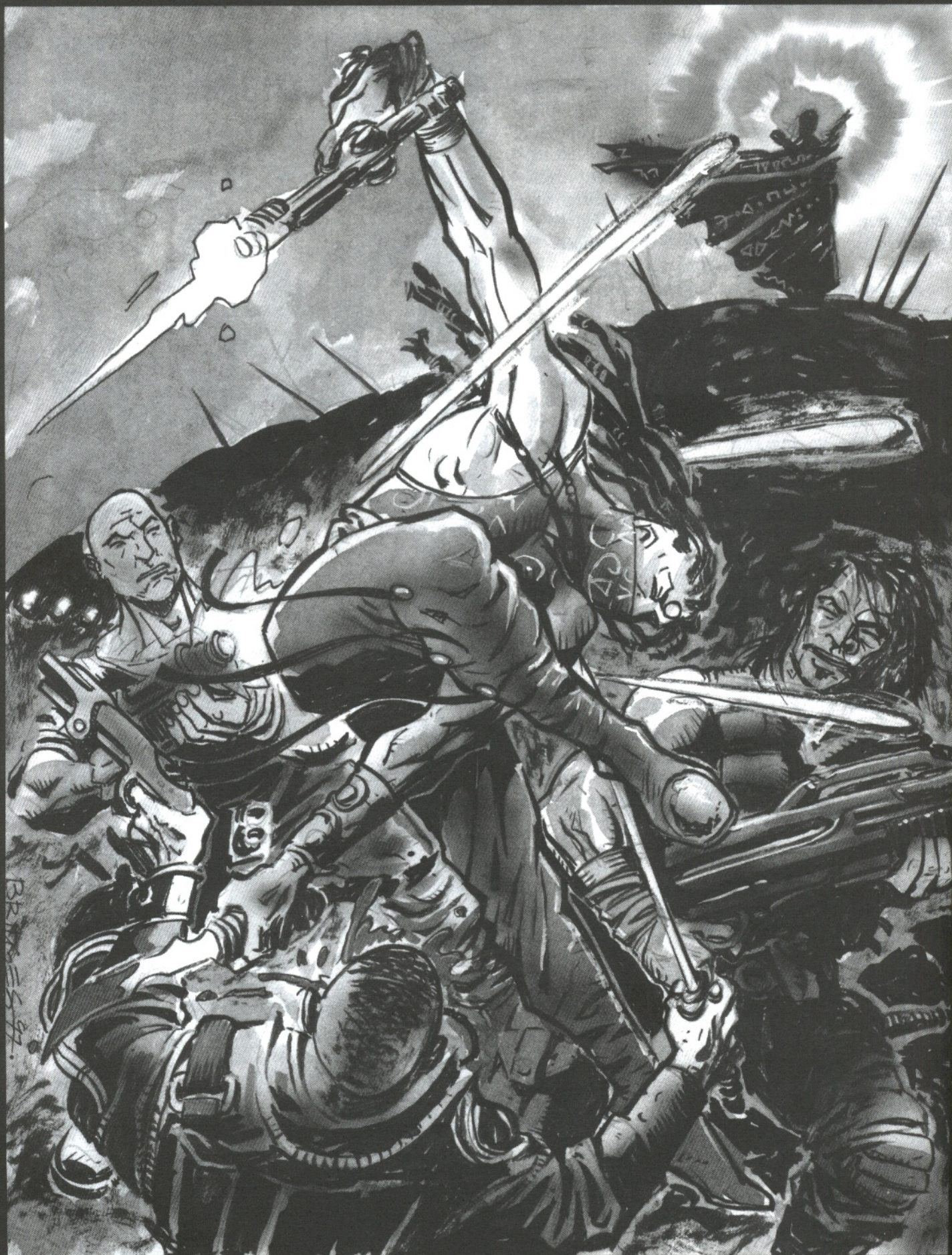
Space prevents us from listing all the possible Blessings for the Changed. What follow are some possibilities that players and gamemasters should feel free to develop on their own: hormone manipulation, multijointed, reptile body, multiple minds, scentless, no excretion, telescopic vision, immune to atmospheric pressures, and highly offensive odor. Also, some of the traits given for aliens in Chapter Six can be bought by the Changed.

Example of Character Creation

Holly has decided that it is time to run a mutant with a taste for the wandering life. She buys his initial characteristics, skills and Benefices normally, and then she starts looking for the Blessings that will really fit her concept. She has decided that her character primarily supports himself through robbery, and wants him capable of sneaking around as best he can. Diaspora-era scientists developed her ancestors as the perfect servants, able to move about without disrupting whatever function they were serving. She purchases Foot Pads (2 pts), controlled Chameleon (5 pts), Maximum Dexterity +2 (4 pts; see Chapter Eight: Rules) and Elongated Fingers (3 pts) for a total of 14 points. These require her to increase her Alien by an additional four points, using up another 12 points.

She wants some Curses to help balance this out, and gets one point for being a Mutation. She also gets two points for Unnerving, an effect she causes whenever anyone sees her fingers. Due to her background far from other people, she also takes Clueless and Uncouth. These give her back seven points, leaving her with 21 points to spend on everything else.







Chapter Eight: Rules

Rules Options

The following rules variations are optional: the gamemaster can institute whichever options he sees fit — or none of them. Roleplayers vary in their rules tastes, and no single rule can satisfy them all.

Extended Success Chart

Fading Suns allows characters whose goal numbers go over 20 to add those levels over 20 to their effect dice. An optional way to handle those excessive combat numbers is to extend the Victory Chart and encourage players to accent their rolls upwards. Thus, if Gorgo the Vorox had his kick goal number increased by Father Moley's successful Holy Blessing to the point where he hits on a 24 or less, then the player may well want to accent the roll by six, thus increasing his possible victory dice without increasing his chance of failure at all. Remember that no matter what the target number is, a character still misses when the die shows a 19 or 20.

| Goal | Victory Dice bonus |
|-------|---|
| 21-23 | +7 |
| 24-26 | +8 |
| 27-29 | +9 |
| 30-32 | +10 |
| 33-35 | You're kidding. If you let a character get this tough, then you can do the stinking math. |

In order to keep players from trying to take too much of an advantage in combat, **Fading Suns** limits goal numbers over 20 to those which occur either through a character's unmodified characteristics and skills or through supernatural and technological effects. Gamemasters who want a more superheroic epic should feel free to ignore that rule, however, and use either the excessive goal number rule or the extended Victory Chart whenever a target number exceeds 20.

Accenting

The rules for accenting a roll need a few limitations to keep them from being abused. The following rules should help:

- **No Multiple Actions:** A character cannot perform multiple actions within the same turn she accents. It simply takes too much effort for a character to throw everything she's got into an action (positive accent) or too much time to be cautious with one (negative accent).

- **-3 Initiative Penalty:** An accenting character suffers a -3 penalty to his initiative for the action.

- **Lore skills:** Lore skills or other rolls to access knowledge, research a fact or any similar long-term action may not be accented.

- **Gamemaster fiat:** If a gamemaster feels that a character is abusing the rule for no good reason (she negatively accents for three or more turns in a row), he should feel free to levy one of a number of penalties (not necessarily all at once):

- The character must spend one Wyrd point to accent any roll.

- It's hard to concentrate or expend so much energy for multiple turns. Environmental distractions should be harder and harder to block out: the character suffers penalties for excessive noise or activity around him that is not directly focused on his target.

Passion/Calm Option

Instead of using a character's skill as the gauge for accenting, the character's Passion and Calm characteristics can be substituted. For positively accenting a roll (throwing everything the character's got) the limit is equal to Passion, while the limit for negative accents (careful concentration) is Calm.

1d20 Damage Chart

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1d20 Roll

1d20 Damage Chart

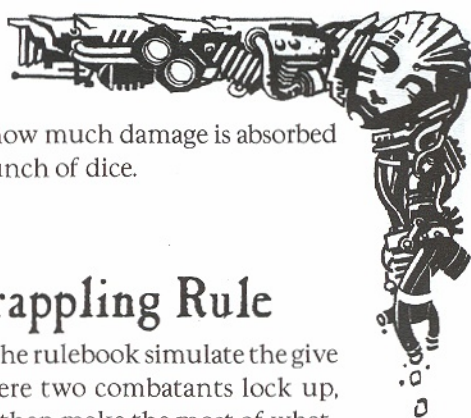
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
|----|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | 1 (1/1) | 2 (2/1) | 3 (2/2) | 4 (3/2) | 5 (3/3) | 6 (4/3) | 7 (4/3) | 8 (5/3) | 8 (5/4) | 9 (5/4) | 10 (6/4) | 11 (6/4) | 12 (6/5) | 12 (7/5) | 13 (7/5) | 14 (8/5) | 15 (8/6) | 15 (8/6) | 16 (9/6) | 17 (9/6) |
| 2 | 1 (1/1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (2/1) | 4 (2/2) | 5 (3/2) | 6 (3/2) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (4/3) | 8 (4/3) | 9 (5/3) | 9 (5/3) | 10 (5/4) | 11 (6/4) | 12 (6/4) | 12 (6/4) | 13 (7/5) | 14 (7/5) | 15 (7/5) | 15 (8/5) | 16 (8/5) |
| 3 | 1 (1/1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (2/1) | 4 (2/1) | 4 (2/2) | 5 (3/2) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 7 (4/3) | 8 (4/3) | 9 (4/3) | 10 (5/3) | 10 (5/3) | 11 (5/4) | 12 (6/4) | 13 (6/4) | 13 (6/4) | 14 (7/4) | 15 (7/5) | 15 (7/5) |
| 4 | 1 (1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (2/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/2) | 6 (3/2) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (4/3) | 9 (4/3) | 9 (4/3) | 10 (5/3) | 11 (5/3) | 11 (5/4) | 12 (6/4) | 13 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) | 15 (7/4) |
| 5 | 1 (1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 3 (2/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (3/2) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 8 (4/2) | 9 (4/3) | 10 (4/3) | 10 (5/3) | 11 (5/3) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (6/4) | 13 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) | 15 (6/4) |
| 6 | 1 | 2 (1/1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 5 (2/2) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (4/2) | 9 (4/2) | 10 (4/3) | 10 (4/3) | 11 (5/3) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) | 15 (6/4) |
| 7 | 1 | 2 (1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (2/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/2) | 7 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (4/2) | 9 (4/2) | 10 (4/3) | 11 (4/3) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (6/3) | 14 (6/4) | 14 (6/4) |
| 8 | 1 | 2 (1) | 2 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (1/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 6 (3/2) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (4/2) | 10 (4/2) | 10 (4/3) | 11 (4/3) | 12 (5/3) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 14 (6/3) |
| 9 | 1 | 1 (1) | 2 (1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (1/1) | 4 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 9 (4/2) | 10 (4/2) | 11 (4/3) | 12 (5/3) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) |
| 10 | 1 | 1 | 2 (1) | 3 (1/1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 7 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 9 (4/2) | 10 (4/2) | 11 (4/2) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) |
| 11 | 1 | 1 | 2 (1) | 3 (1) | 3 (1/1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (3/1) | 8 (3/2) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 10 (4/2) | 10 (4/2) | 11 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) | 12 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) |
| 12 | 1 | 1 | 2 (1) | 2 (1) | 3 (1) | 4 (1/1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (3/1) | 8 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 10 (4/2) | 11 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) | 13 (5/3) | 13 (5/3) |
| 13 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 (1) | 3 (1) | 4 (1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (2/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (3/1) | 9 (3/2) | 9 (3/2) | 10 (3/2) | 10 (4/2) | 11 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) |
| 14 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 (1) | 3 (1) | 3 (1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (1/1) | 5 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 8 (3/1) | 9 (3/2) | 10 (3/2) | 10 (3/2) | 11 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) |
| 15 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 (1) | 3 (1) | 4 (1) | 4 (1/1) | 5 (1/1) | 6 (2/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 9 (3/1) | 9 (3/1) | 10 (3/2) | 11 (3/2) | 12 (4/2) | 12 (4/2) |
| 16 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 (1) | 4 (1) | 4 (1) | 5 (1) | 5 (1/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 9 (3/1) | 10 (3/1) | 10 (3/2) | 11 (3/2) | 12 (3/2) | 12 (3/2) |
| 17 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 (1) | 4 (1) | 5 (1) | 5 (1) | 6 (1/1) | 6 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 9 (2/1) | 9 (3/1) | 10 (3/1) | 10 (3/1) | 11 (3/1) |
| 18 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 (1) | 4 (1) | 5 (1) | 5 (1) | 6 (1) | 6 (1/1) | 7 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 9 (2/1) | 9 (2/1) | 10 (3/1) | 11 (3/1) |
| 19 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 (1) | 5 (1) | 5 (1) | 6 (1) | 6 (1) | 7 (1) | 8 (2/1) | 8 (2/1) | 9 (2/1) | 9 (2/1) | 10 (2/1) |
| 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 (1) | 6 (1) | 6 (1) | 7 (1) | 7 (1) | 8 (1) | 9 (2) |

DMG: Total number of damage dice, including victory dice

Odds: Based on goal numbers of 13 (5/3)

Blasters: The first number in parentheses is the damage that leaks through an energy shield

Flameguns/heat: The second number in parentheses is the damage that leaks through armor and/or an energy shield



Damage

There are a number of different systems for resolving damage which will not conflict with the weapons and damage lists found in a number of **Fading Suns** sourcebooks. For those who are looking for something different, here you go...

Damage with d6's

Some people do not like rolling 20-sided dice for damage. The dice are rather large for multiple rolls and their range is perhaps too broad. However, we recommended them in the rulebook so that every reference to dice pointed to a d20.

If you have access to lots of six-sided dice (most gamers do, and six-siders are easily found in stores), feel free to go ahead and use them instead. When rolling a d6, the goal number is 4, as shown in the following chart:

| Roll | Result |
|------|------------------------|
| 1-4 | Hit (one damage point) |
| 5-6 | Miss (no damage) |

Blasters leak through energy shields on a roll of 1 or 2. Flame or heat damage leaks through armor and/or energy shields on a roll of 1.

1d20 Damage Chart

Some people don't like rolling lots of dice for damage. We do. We think it's fun. But we respect the wishes and alternate gaming styles of others. To your left is a chart for resolving damage with a single d20 roll. Simply add up the total number of damage dice that would normally be involved in a roll (including victory dice), find that number on the horizontal column, and then roll 1d20. Find the number rolled on the vertical chart; the number where the two columns meet is the amount of damage points inflicted. The numbers in parentheses represent the amount of damage that leaks through energy shields: the first number is for blasters, the second is for flame or heat damage.

The chart assumes an average and thus does not represent the chance of rolling maximum damage (the odds for this in most cases are greater than 1 in 20). Gamemasters might want to allow their players the option of which method to use: The traditional roll (with its chance for higher reward), or the chart (which is simpler to resolve).

The chart only covers up to 20 dice of damage; you'll have to figure the rest out on your own. Each number on the d20 represents a cumulative 5% chance (1 = 5%, 2 = 10%, etc.), and assumes an average of 20 rolls. The goal numbers are 13 (5/3).

Armor Options

For those who believe the armor rules are too beneficial to victims, try this option: Convert the constant protection to dice. For instance, 4 + 4d chainmail becomes 8d chainmail. As an additional option, use the 1d20 Chart

given above to determine how much damage is absorbed without having to roll a bunch of dice.

Combat

Optional Grappling Rule

The grappling rules in the rulebook simulate the give and take of wrestling, where two combatants lock up, fight for an advantage and then make the most of whatever leverage they gain. Gamemasters who want a more streamlined approach can use the following system:

Instead of requiring that the attacker succeed in a contested Strength + Vigor roll as soon as he makes the grab roll, the gamemaster only has the character make such a roll when the victim wants to spend an action trying to break the hold. The victim can only try to do this once per turn, and the attacker can only apply grappling damage once per turn as well.

New Martial Arts Actions

Here are a number of new actions characters can add to their martial arts repertoire:

Head Butt (Level 3): Exactly what it sounds like. Not a charge, but a close-up blow from the attacker's head. This may hurt the attacker in addition to his opponent, and thus is only for the tough and (fool)hardy. The attacker will take the full damage of any blow that deals more damage than his Endurance (armor will protect him but not an energy shield).

Most people can butt their heads against a foe, but without training in this action, they will take the full damage they deal to their target, regardless of their Endurance rating.

There are no head butts in Shaidan style, but Koto has Wisdom Meets Folly and Mantok teaches Bow to Pray, Greet the Beloved.

Confuse Foe (Level 4 and 7): The character performs all sorts of crazy, distracting tricks to overcome his foe's concentration, from mimicking drunken stumbles to pretending a greater enemy is standing behind the opponent. The character rolls Wits + Knavery; each victory point subtracts from the opponent's dodge or block roll for the character's next attack (in that turn or the next). A Level 7 version of this action allows a parry action along with the confusion action (with no multiple action penalty).

Shaidan has no such confusion tactics, although Koto practioners are perhaps the best at them. They have many maneuvers for this, from Monkey Steals the Peach to Jolo Bird Squawks (named after a particularly annoying Aylon bird's cries). Mantok even has Step to Side, Speak in Tongues.

Disengage (Level 4): The character knows how to best slip out of grabs or holds. He gains a +3 bonus on his Strength + Vigor roll to resist grapple actions. Shaidan calls

this Ending the Tryst, while Koto artists call it Water Escapes the Net. Mantok has Step Back, Resist Temptation.

Rooting (Level 4): The character can sink and center himself, making it much harder for opponents to topple him. He gains a +3 on any roll to resist being knocked over in combat, although he may not move in the same turn he roots. Once a character successfully roots, he does not have to keep rolling until he is uprooted.

Of the many names for this action in different styles, there is Shaidan's Astride the Throne, Koto's Sage Stays Home, and Mantok's Remain Still, Reach to Heaven.

Drop and Kick (Level 5): The character drops low and kicks, hopefully gaining surprise by hitting his opponent from an unexpected angle. This enacts a -2 initiative penalty on the attacker's next action. Of the many names for this action, Shaidan has Diegn to Speak, Koto has Bow to Offer Tithes, and Mantok has Bend Down, Step Through Door.

Bear Hug (Level 7): A crushing grab. The character wraps both arms around his opponent and squeezes. This is considered a grapple, but the target does not get a resistance roll (unless he elects to dodge). For each successive turn, the character can keep squeezing his target and inflicting damage; he does not have to reroll the goal but he must reroll the damage. His target must make a resisted Str + Vigor roll to escape the hold.

In Koto, this action is called Vorox Greets a Friend, and Mantok calls it Extend Arms, Embrace the Pilgrim.

Iron Body (Level 7): The character has practised many painful exercises which have hardened his bones. When he blocks a hand-to-hand attack (not weapon attack), his opponent may be injured. When making a block action, the number of victory dice gained on the roll act as damage dice against the character's attacker. Otherwise, the block action is resolved normally to resist attacks.

Shaidan calls this practice Golden Armor. Koto calls it Ascorbite Lends His Hide. In Mantok, it is known as Cross Arms, Don the Robe.

Slide Kick (Level 8): The character slides under his foe to kick her feet, hopefully knocking her down. Of course, the character also winds up on the ground, but is prepared to take advantage of the situation. He may get up and perform another action in the next turn without suffering a multiple action penalty. The attacker compares his goal roll successes +3 against an opponent's Dex + Vigor (or Acrobatics) successes; if the attacker has the most, the opponent is knocked down.

Koto calls this Old Lady Falls and Gets Up, while in Mantok it is known as Drop to Ground, Scrub the Floor.

New Fencing Actions

Counter Parry (Level 3): When the character's attack is confronted by a parry, she can counter the parry by swiftly rotating her blade, gaining a better chance of getting past the parry. A successful Wits + Melee roll means that a parrying opponent loses the +2 bonus to her goal.

The attacker does not suffer a multiple action penalty for this roll.

Fancy Footwork (Level 4): The character dances and dodges, twists and turns, doing everything possible to confuse her opponent. Every victory point on a Dexterity + Vigor roll reduces her opponent's goal on any melee attacks by one. This footwork constitutes one action; characters performing it with any other action (except dodge, block or parry) will suffer the multiple action penalty.

Compound Attack (Level 5): The character is going through an elaborate pattern designed to set her opponent up for her next attack. While this turn's attack has a -1 to the goal number, whatever fencing maneuver she makes next turn is at +2.

Stop Thrust (Level 5): When done properly, a stop thrust attack will prevent an opponent from landing his attack. In reality, the character often lands just moments before the opponent's attack. While that may be all the character needs to win the duel, this is not always the case.

Wall of Steel (Level 6): The character can parry up to three attacks in a turn without a negative modifier, though he can do nothing but parry. The character must have already purchased the Parry maneuver before buying this one.

Florentine (Level 7): With this action, he can use two blades — one for attacking and one for defending. He can take two actions, an attack and a parry, without negative modifiers. Taking a third action would require that all his actions for the turn have the normal -6 modifier. The character does not have to know the Off-hand action to fight Florentine, but if he does not, any other actions he takes with an off-hand weapon will suffer a -4 penalty.

New Firearms Actions

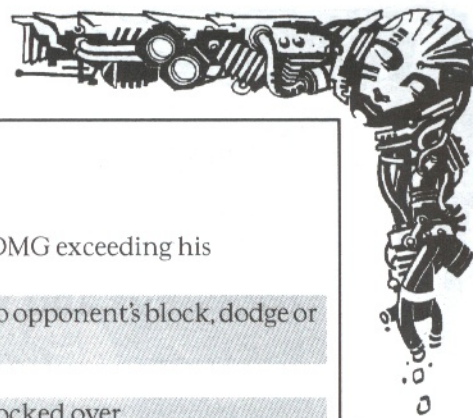
Hipshot: The character takes a quick shot without taking time to aim — he just trusts his aiming instincts. This can only be performed for the initiative benefits during the first shot of combat, as the gun is drawn, and only applies to handguns. At the gamemaster's discretion, a carbine or other light rifle may be used (ala *The Rifleman*).

Quick Reload (Level 1): The character can reload a clip, fusion cel or revolver speed-loader and fire the gun in the same turn without suffering a multiple action penalty.

Cavalry Shot (Level 2): The character is experienced at riding a trained beast and firing at the same time without suffering any penalties (her combat skill may exceed her Ride skill). Non-trained beasts may rear back or run in fear when a gun is fired so close to them.

Off-Hand Shot (Level 5): The character suffers no penalties for firing a gun in his off-hand.

Leap and Shoot (Level 6): The character can leap one meter in any direction and shoot at a target without suffering adverse penalties for the movement (although other environmental factors — noise, opponent activity, etc. — may cause penalties).



New Martial Arts Actions Chart

| Action | LVL | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | Effect |
|-------------|-----|--------------|------|------|-----|--|
| Head Butt | 3 | Dx+Fight | -2 | +1 | 4 | Attacker takes any DMG exceeding his Endurance |
| Confuse Foe | 4 | Wits+Knavery | | | | -1 per victory point to opponent's block, dodge or parry |
| Disengage | 4 | Dx+Dodge | -1 | +1 | | +3 to resist grapples |
| Rooting | 4 | Dx+Fight | | | | +3 to resist being knocked over |
| Drop & Kick | 5 | Dx+Fight | | +2 | 4 | -2 Init next action |
| Bear Hug | 7 | Dx+Fight | -2 | -1 | 4 | Can roll DMG each turn until target escapes |
| Iron Body | 7 | by block | | | | Attacking opponent takes 1 DMG per victory pt on blocking roll |
| Slide Kick | 8 | Dx+Fight | -2 | -1 | 5 | Compare attacker successes +3 vs target's Dx+Vigor roll; if target loses, he is knocked down |

New Fencing Actions Chart

| Action | LVL | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | Effect |
|-----------------|-----|--------------|------|------|-----|--|
| Counter Parry | 3 | Wits + Melee | | | | Eliminates opponent's +2 parry bonus |
| Fancy Footwork | 4 | Dx + Vigor | | | | Opponent's goal is reduced by 1 per victory pt |
| Compound Attack | 5 | Dx + Melee | | -1 | | Next turn's goal is at +2 |
| Stop Thrust | 5 | Dx + Melee | +3 | -2 | | Reduce opponent's goal by 2 |
| Wall of Steel | 6 | Dx + Melee | | | | Can make three parries |
| Florentine | 7 | Dx + Melee | | | | One attack and one parry without multiple action penalties |

New Firearms Actions Chart

| Action | LVL | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | Effect |
|---------------|-----|----------|------|------|-----|--|
| Hipshot | | Dx+Shoot | +2 | -1 | | Only for first shot of combat with a handgun |
| Quick Reload | 1 | None | | | | Reload clip and fire with no multiple action penalty |
| Cavalry Shot | 2 | Dx+Shoot | | | | No penalties for riding and shooting |
| Off-Hand Shot | 5 | None | | | | Suffer no penalties for off-hand handgun |
| Leap & Shoot | 6 | Dx+Shoot | -1 | -1 | | Leap 1 meter in any direction |
| Roll & Shoot | 7 | Dx+Shoot | -2 | -1 | | Roll up to 3 meters in any direction |
| Two Gun | 7 | Dx+Shoot | 0/-1 | | | One shot from each handgun with no multiple action penalty |
| Instinct Shot | 9 | Dx+Shoot | +1 | -1 | | Fire at unseen target |

Roll and Shoot (Level 7): The character can roll across the ground and shoot at a target without suffering adverse penalties for the movement (although other environmental factors — noise, opponent activity, etc. — may cause penalties). The character can cover up to three meters in any direction.

Two Guns (Level 7): The character must first learn the Off-Hand Shot action. He can fire two shots — one from a handgun or submachinegun in the right hand, the other from a gun in the left hand. He suffers no multiple action penalties for these shots. A Level 9 version of this action allows the character to fire an assault rifle or shotgun in each hand.

Instinct Shot (Level 9): The character can take a single shot at an unseen target and have a good chance of hitting it. This is not a psychic power, but relies instead on instinctual cues — the villain walking in the rafters above makes just enough noise to give his location away, or the character senses the slowly-opening hidden door behind the bar and the gunman hiding there. If there are no conceivable clues, no bonuses can be gained from this action.

Traits

The following traits can be purchased by any character with the permission of the gamemaster.

Blessings and Curses

Behavior

These traits represent how one's behavioral quirks can improve or harm one's functioning.

Blessings

Dedicated (2 pts: +2 Passion when following a cause)

Loyal (2 pts: +2 Passion when following liege)

Stubborn (2 pts: +2 Wits to not change one's mind)

Curses

Argumentative (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert in conversation)

Berserker (+3 pts: -3 Calm in combat)

Brainwashed (+2 pts: -2 Wits when confronted with something that disagrees with character's brainwashed belief)

Delusional (+2: -2 Perception when confronted with something that disagrees with character's delusional belief)

Disrespectful (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around authority figures)

Phobic (+2 pts: -2 Calm around source of phobia)

Rebellious (+2 pts: -2 Calm when following others' orders)

Secretive (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around strangers)

Surly (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert when upset)

Weak-willed (+2 pts: -2 Endurance against adversity)

Capabilities

These traits represent modifications to a character's capabilities or potentials.

Blessing

Maximum Characteristic +1 (2 pts): For some reason, the maximum rating for one of the character's characteristics has increased by one, allowing him to begin the game with a 9 rating and increase it to an 11. He still has to buy the characteristic levels normally. This is usually the result of odd breeding or chemical experimentations, and the gamemaster should also make the player buy more Alien. Characters can only buy this Blessing with the gamemaster's permission. This Blessing can be bought multiple times, but gamemasters should be wary of allowing this or letting characters buy this for anything but Body characteristics. In no case can a character buy up his maximum rating in Tech or Occult characteristics; such a modification requires an extreme evolutionary experience as yet unknown to any species.

Vitality +1 (3 pts): The character is more robust than his constitution would normally allow. This usually requires certain chemical and/or genetic therapies. While this Blessing can be bought multiple times, the

gamemaster should be wary of this, and the player may have to buy more Alien (when the superman comes, he's not going to look normal).

Curse

Minimum Characteristic -1 (+1 pt): The base rating in one of the character's characteristics begins at a lower level than usual. This could be because of a debilitating disease suffered in childhood (Body characteristics), a mental handicap (Wits), damaged vision and/or hearing (Perception), or some other reason. In no case may a characteristic be lower than 1.

Dark Side (+3 pts): This can only be bought by characters with Psi or Theurgy. The character's dark side is awake, and he begins the game with one level of Urge or Hubris. Ur-Ukar cannot purchase this Curse.

Injuries

These traits represent injuries or diseases the character has suffered which impair her functioning.

Curses

Bad Heart (+2 pts: -2 Endurance with athletic tasks)

Bad Liver (+2 pts: -2 Endurance against toxins)

Bad Lungs (+1 pts: -1 Endurance with athletic tasks)

Horrible Scar or Burn (+2 pts: -2 Charm when visible)

Incurable Disease (+3 pts: -1 base Vitality)

Limp (+1 pt: base run = 8 meters)

Missing Arm (+4 pts: -4 Dexterity for tasks requiring two arms)

Missing Eye (+3 pts: -2 Perception due to limited field of vision, -1 Shoot due to poor depth perception)

Missing Leg (+4 pts: -2 Dodge, base run = 2 meters)

Pain Sensitive (+4 pts: -2 to all tasks for two turns after being wounded)

Shaky Hands (+2 pts: -2 Dexterity with fine manipulation)

Knacks

A catch-all category for traits representing odd abilities or luck.

Blessings

Born Salesman (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when selling)

Hacker (2 pts: +2 with all think machine tasks)

Thrifty (2 pts: +2 Wits in money matters)

Curse

Poor Liar (+2 pts: -2 Wits when lying)

Benefices and Afflictions

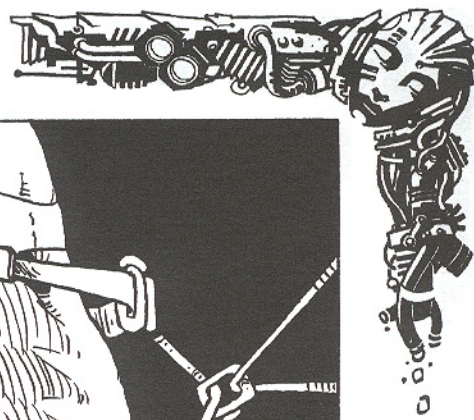
These traits represent social or circumstantial situations the character is involved in.

Background

These traits represent the character's past circumstances which affect how he interacts with others today.

Benefice

Secret Identity (1 pt): The character has a cover story and the documents to prove it. This identity is good



enough to stand up to any but the most rigorous tests.

Afflictions

Unaware (+3 pts): The character does not know some significant fact of his background, like his being a clone or of the Changed. Gamemasters should only allow this Affliction if it is likely to get the character in a great deal of trouble.

Vow (varies): Some village priests complain that commoners swear by anything, but some people take their vows seriously. It is not only Church leaders who take vows of celibacy but lay men, nobles and guild members as well. Vows generally cover something the character decides to give up, such as material goods, sex or talking. The gamemaster decides how many points it is worth based on the impact the vow has on the game.

Vow of Silence +3

Vow of Poverty +2

Vow of Celibacy +1 (depending on the epic)

Physical

Such traits represent a physical endowment or shortcoming which Blessings or Curses do not easily simulate — a trait which does not always add or subtract from another trait.

Affliction

Addiction (2–4 pts): The character is addicted to some substance, and this addiction makes his life difficult at times.

2 = Basic addiction. Substance is cheap and easily gotten. The character must have at least one dose per week before symptoms of withdrawal begin.

+1 = Stronger addiction: Substance must be had twice weekly before withdrawal symptoms begin.

+1 = Substance is difficult to find (rare or illegal).

Symptoms of withdrawal vary based upon the drug and the withdrawal period. Gamemasters may require Calm rolls, or assign goal penalties as the symptoms get worse — whatever increases the dramatic tension of the moment is appropriate.

Status

Traits which represent the character standing in society or with a guild, house or sect.

Affliction

Excommunicated (+3 pts): The character has committed some great heresy and repeatedly refused absolution from a priest, forcing the Church to excommunicate him. Orthodox doctrine states that the character is damned, denied the Pancreator's grace. The character is an outcast; any further crimes against Church law or doctrine are punishable by flame.

Learned Skills

These traits represent abilities which must be taught by another or which are self-trained after personal re-



search. Unlike natural skills, characters do not begin with a rating in these skills unless they purchase them.

Acrobatics

Roll: Dexterity + Acrobatics

Acrobatics is the study and practice of complex movements of the body, such as flips, cartwheels, etc. This skill also provides a working knowledge of acrobatic actions involving equipment, such as parallel bars and horses. The character also has a superior sense of balance, useful in situations such as tightrope-walking.

Breakfall: The character has practised falling many times and knows how to land without injuring herself. The victory points on a Dexterity + Acrobatics roll are subtracted from any damage points taken in a fall.

Leaping Dodge: When the character has some room to work with, he can tumble out of harm's way, using his acrobatic skill to complement a Dodge roll. Roll Dexterity + Acrobatics; add the victory points to the Dodge goal roll. Leaping dodges can only be maintained for a number of turns equal to the character's Endurance.

Complementary Skills:

• **Stoic Body:** When performing acrobatics while in adverse conditions, such as intense heat or cold, a toughened body may allow the character to ignore or lessen any penalties due to these conditions.

Forgery

Roll: Wits + Forgery

While the Bureaucracy skill allows a character to attempt to forge documents and papers, this is a more specialized skill that also covers forging signatures, signet rings, etc. Characters with this skill are knowledgeable in all manners of forgery, from as low tech as copying a signature all the way up to working with copying machines. If the character has the appropriate Tech Redemption skills, he may also attempt to forge identification that includes magnetic strips or retinal scans. The character is, of course, limited by the equipment to which he has access.

When creating a forgery, the character rolls Wits + Forgery and records the successes achieved. Anyone inspecting the forgery must make a Wits + Forgery roll (or a Wits + Search with a -2 penalty) and score more successes than the forger to notice that something is amiss.

Complementary Skills:

• **Academia:** Forging passcards to break into Second Republic facilities often requires the forger to first research which type of passcard is needed. The same principal applies to many forged books or items.

• **Bureaucracy:** This skill gives the character knowledge of different forms and their powers within a bureaucracy. Without this skill most governmental forgeries must either be made from an example or from guesswork.

• **Read:** For forging anything beyond a symbol, the character is required to be able to read and/or write the language of the forged document. Church documents are often written in Latin.

• **Redemption (High-Tech or Volt):** These skills are required for creating forgeries which involve magnetic strips, retinal scans, bar codes, etc.

Social (Teaching)

Roll: Extrovert + Teaching

It is not always easy teaching others to learn. Too often, knowledge imparted is quickly forgotten or the student struggles to understand it. Getting it to stick in the minds of students is an art. Teaching allows skills to be taught to others in less time than usual. However, learning is a two-way path; the student must want to learn. Part of this skill involves igniting interest in a student and aiding her discipline, but this skill cannot take the place of a student applying herself.

A teacher can only teach what he already knows. In other words, the teacher must himself know the skill he is trying to teach. In addition, he can only teach students who are less capable than he is; those with higher skill ratings must seek a more qualified teacher. The Social (Teaching) skill is not required, but is helpful.

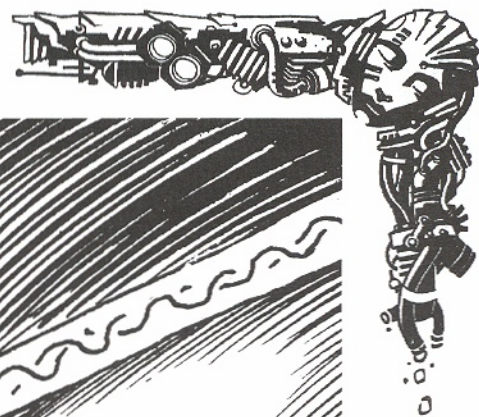
To raise a skill by one level, a student must train a number of weeks equal to the current level he has in that skill plus one. A student learning Ravennan history who already knows the Lore (Ravennan History) at 4 levels must spend five weeks training to raise his skill to 5 levels. It takes one week to learn the basics (level 1) of a particular skill.

Assuming that a teacher has 10 hours a day, five days a week to train students, there are 50 hours of teaching a week. If this is adjusted up or down, it will take longer or shorter to learn or raise a skill. The required amount of time can be adjusted downward by the Social (Teaching) skill. Before the tutoring begins, roll Extrovert + Teaching and subtract five hours for each victory point. Thus, a teacher who rolled 3 victory points can teach the curriculum in only 35 hours a week.

The roll is made only once per teaching period. If the teaching is interrupted for more than a week, it can be resumed at the same pace and with the same hours accumulated unless more than three months have passed, in which case all hours are lost and the student must begin the study anew.

Player characters are somewhat of an exception to this rule; many of them are self-taught through experience rather than training. They must pay experience points to raise skills or learn new skills. The gamemaster can be flexible about the amount of training time it takes player characters to train (that is, spend their experience points for new skills or levels in existing skills), and should allow most of this training time to pass between game sessions (out of active play).

Instead of spending experience points, a non-player character who spends the requisite amount of time learning must roll Wits + Focus; if she fails the roll, the training has failed to stick. She has remembered only trivial things from the class. She can, however, repeat the training until



she gets it right. A good teacher comes in handy here: the non-player character can substitute the teacher's Social (Teacher) skill for her Focus.

Complementary skill:

• **Empathy:** The ability to figure out what your students are feeling can help in gaining their attention or getting them excited about learning.

Psychic Paths

The outer limits of physical and mental functioning, representing either new evolutionary possibilities or re-discovered ancient abilities.

Bedlam

The dervishes (see *Weird Forces* in Chapter Five: The Military) follow this path, and they learn to create mass confusion through the power of their bodies and wills. A number of leading psychics have studied this path since it reached something approaching official sanction during the Emperor Wars. As a result, they developed a variety of powers at each of the levels, and that is reflected below. Except where noted, Bedlam cannot be resisted like mind-based psychic powers; it must be resisted physically (dodge, parry, etc.).

Prana

(All levels, Introvert + Focus, temporary, 1W)

Successful use of Prana adds damage equal to the level at which the character bought Prana to all the character's hand-to-hand and melee attacks. Note that the character can buy Prana power at levels 1-10. This is generally the first power a dervish learns.

Forced Entry

(Level 2, Dexterity + Observe, temporary, 1W)

Every victory point the character gains on this roll reduces the number of dice his opponents can roll for their armor by one when defending against the character's hand-to-hand or melee attacks. This power only effects the dice, not the constant points.

Confusion

(Level 3, Ego + Empathy, touch, instant, 1W)

If the character can touch her opponent, that person cannot act in the next turn. If the character has not acted in the current turn, then he loses the current turn's actions. This requires two actions: one to touch and one to Confuse.

Whirling Dervish

(Level 4, Passion + Focus, temporary, 1W)

This is the power from which military users of Bedlam got their name. Successful use means the character suffers no modifiers for making two actions, and is only at -4 for taking three actions.

External Vibrations

(Level 5, Introvert + Vigor, touch, instant, 1W)

The character can destroy inorganic material like ar-



mor or a vehicle chassis. Successful use of this power means that if the character rolls more damage on a hand-to-hand or melee attack than the object's armor can absorb, it is destroyed.

Inner Vibrations

(Level 5, Introvert + Vigor, temporary, 1W)

Successful use of this power means the character's hand-to-hand and melee attacks leak through energy shields like blasters. Any damage die that rolls a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 gets through.

Blur

(Level 6, Passion + Dodge, temporary, 1W)

The character is both harder to see and to hit. Reduce opponent's Perception and attack rolls against him by the number of victory points rolled.

Prana Burst

(Level 7, Passion + Vigor, instant, 1W)

The character acts like a 12-dice hand grenade, with the character as the center of the explosion. The character takes no damage from it, but everyone else is effected normally. The radius is five meters (plus two meters per extra Wyrd point spent).

Resonate

(Level 7, Ego + Impress, instant, 1W)

This allows the character to use Confusion on everyone within an enclosed area like a tank. If the character

hits the structure, everyone within it loses their next turn. If the character is inside whatever structure he hits, then it effects him as well. This should not work on much more than a 10 x 10 foot area.

Nerve Burn

(Level 8, Ego + Remedy, touch, temporary, 1W)

Successfully hitting the target of this attack means the victim temporarily loses an amount from all his physical characteristics equal to the number of victory points on the roll. Like Confusion, Nerve Burn requires two actions.

Stupefy

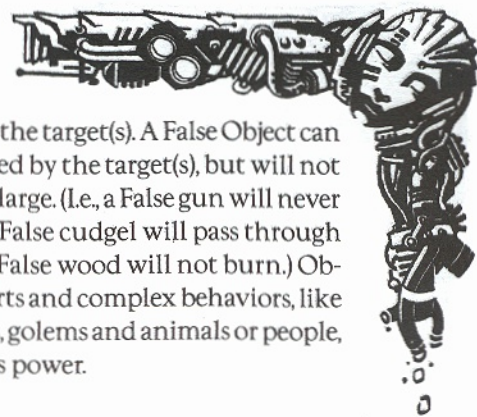
(Level 9, Ego + Empathy, touch, instant, 2W)

Victims touched by someone using this power lose Wits equal to the number of victory points on the Ego + Empathy roll. This is a permanent loss. Victims may resist with an Ego or Faith + Stoic Mind roll (psychics or theurges may substitute their occult characteristics if they wish). Like Confusion, Stupefy requires two actions.

Visioning

This rare and fabled path allows the psychic to project illusions of progressively greater believability. Never fully studied by the Phavian Institute, its practitioners are secretive and reclusive, avoiding any discovery since they are feared and distrusted by Known Worlders almost as much as telepaths.





The illusions created by this path are intended to be perceived by a single target, but the number of targets may be doubled with each additional Wyrd point spent, without the usual penalty. Whenever a specific and recognizable creature, object or activity is to be projected as an illusion, the gamemaster may require the psychic to roll Wits and an appropriate knowledge skill to get the details correct enough to deceive a knowledgeable target. (E.g., Wits + Melee to make an illusory flourish with the blade to cow a prospective opponent; Wits + Physick to show a convincing but nonexistent gaping wound; Wits + Geology to simulate an earthquake with verisimilitude. Some Visioneers have learned to improvise with Wits + Arts.) The target(s) may make an opposed Wits + Observe roll if they are expecting a trick or are naturally suspicious.

Except at the highest known level, Mass Hallucination (below), illusions created through Visioning will not be picked up by cameras or microphones, and cannot be recorded. Targets with enhanced senses (whether cybernetic, occult or Changed) get a +2 bonus on an automatic Perception + Observe roll to see through a deceptive image or recognize a sound as illusory. In addition, the normal rules for resisting psychic powers apply.

False Glimpse

(Level 1, Wits + Impress, sensory, instant, 1W)

At this level the psychic can create a brief illusion lasting one combat turn and affecting one sense only. For instance, she can generate an image of a gun in her hand, but if she "fires" it there will be no noise, and if she holds it in plain view too long, everyone will see that it is just a bit of plastic tubing. The illusion cannot be large, elaborate or detailed, and will not withstand close scrutiny; common effects are flashing then concealing a weapon, a face in a crowd, inserting a phrase into a conversation, or giving all in the room a whiff of smoke or lethal gas. The psychic gains a +1 to activate if a prop (like a toy gun) can be used, and a complementary Sleight of Hand or Knavery roll may enhance the effect at the gamemaster's discretion.

False Sight

(Level 2, Extrovert + Impress, sensory, temporary, 1W)

This power is basically the same as False Glimpse, but may be maintained for up to 10 turns. This can be a liability, as targets have a better chance of spotting discrepancies.

Lying Senses

(Level 3, Extrovert + Focus, sensory, temporary, 1W)

At this level, two illusions affecting different senses may be combined, so that a false gun will resound loudly if fired, or a smoking flamegun will reek of burning Ka oil.

False Object

(Level 4, Wits + Focus, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

With this power a single realistically detailed object of up to humanoid size can be generated that will seem to

have weight and solidity to the target(s). A False Object can be handled and manipulated by the target(s), but will not affect the physical world at large. (I.e., a False gun will never hit anything when fired, a False cudgel will pass through the skull it's swung at, and False wood will not burn.) Objects with many moving parts and complex behaviors, like squawkers, think machines, golems and animals or people, cannot be created with this power.

False Scenery

(Level 5, Wits + Arts, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

This power enables the psychic to change a major aspect of the target's environment, like turning day to night, rearranging views and landmarks in order to disorient, hiding things in plain sight and showing great spectacles happening in the distance. These illusory changes, while affecting multiple senses and incorporating movement, are essentially inactive and stationary, in that they will not affect, or be affected by, the target(s).

False Creature

(Level 6, Extrovert + Performance, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

At this level, a complex animate object, such as a think machine, golem, animal or person, may be created and controlled by the psychic. The psychic must be very familiar with the thing or person imitated for the illusion to be convincing. A False Creature can only act as specifically directed by the psychic, and, like a False Object, cannot directly affect the physical world. (For instance, an illusory knight can appear to attack the target, but will not deal actual damage.)

False World

(Level 7, Wits + Arts, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

At this level the psychic can project a total hallucinatory environment to surround the target(s). All the previous powers may be combined to populate the illusory world with people and things that can interact with the target(s) directly and convincingly. The illusion can be so convincing that a hapless target can actually feel the pain from an unreal assault, and suffer any resulting wound penalties although no actual Vitality is lost.

Persistence of Visioning

(Level 8, Wits + Focus, distance, perpetual, 1W)

With this power the psychic may extend the range and duration of any previous powers without additional cost. False Objects continue to "exist" long after their creator has left the room, and False Creatures may be "programmed" with a limited range of simple responses and habitual behavior.

Mass Hallucination

(Level 9, Ego + Focus, distance, perpetual, 1W)

This is the most powerful level to which a Visioneer can aspire, because with this power her illusions are no longer limited to a specific number of declared targets, but are plainly visible to all within range. The illusions are now actual images appearing in the physical world, and

will be registered by cybernetic eyes, cameras and other recording equipment.

Cloaking and Turning

These two paths are extremely rare and have never been studied scientifically. Their existence is whispered of in covens, and those who claim to have discovered a person practicing them are usually discredited as unreliable witnesses. In fact, training in the paths of Turning and Cloaking is only available through the highest echelons of organized covens like the Favyana or the Invisible Path.

Because these paths mainly affect other psychic powers, the gamemaster may decide to give the player with the higher Psi rating an advantage of +1 per every two levels of difference between the battling characters' Psi traits. This contest of wills can even be elaborated into a series of opposed rolls using Ego + Stoic Mind. (Theurges substitute Faith for Ego.)

Cloaking

In this path the psychic learns to conceal not only his physical presence, but his aura and thoughts as well.

ShadowDance

(Level 1, Wits + Sneak, temporary, 1W)

This power gives the psychic an intuitive and reflexive ability to keep just beyond the limits of humanoid perception, by slinking behind sight-obstructing objects and through shadows, instinctively utilizing blind spots, peripheral vision and subliminal distractions. The psychic gets a -2 penalty against cameras and cybernetic eyes.

At Level 2 this power can be used against multiple targets for a prolonged duration.

Stone Wall

(Level 3 or 4, Introvert + Stoic Mind, temporary, 1W)

At this level the psychic can block any basic occult sensing power like Subtle Sight, MindSight or the theurgic Rending the Veil of Unreason, preventing targeted observers from reading the state of her body, mind or soul.

At Level 4 this power can be used against multiple observing targets for a prolonged duration.

Veiled Face

(Level 5 or 6, Ego + Impress or Knavery, temporary, 1W)

With this power, the psychic can project false auras and thoughts that targeted observers with Subtle Sight or MindSight will read as true reflections of his psyche.

At Level 6 this power can be used against multiple observing targets for a prolonged duration.

IronBrow

(Level 7 or 8, Ego + Stoic Mind, temporary, 1W)

At this level the psychic can resist telepathic commands, psychic attacks, theurgic rites designed to force certain actions and most other types of occult mind control and domination.

At Level 8 this power can be used against multiple observing targets for a prolonged duration.

Invisibility

(Level 9, Introvert + Sneak, prolonged, 1W)

This power is true invisibility, letting light and almost all other forms of electromagnetic radiation, as well as psionic energies, pass through the body without any tell-tale distortion. At this level the psychic receives no penalty against cameras and mechanical eyes.

Turning

Turning enables the psychic to defend herself against psychic attacks and theurgic rites, often by reflecting the assault back upon the attacker.

Psi Sense

(Level 1, Perception + Focus, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

The first step on this path involves a heightened sensitivity to the ambient Wyrd energy currents that surround us all the time. The psychic learns to "feel" nearby occult activity, even when not actually observing it with some type of Wyrd vision, and can automatically know when it is directed or aimed at her. The victory points of this roll can be added to Initiative for occult actions.

Diffusion

(Level 2, Wits + Focus, sight, instant, 1W)

This power teaches the basics of disrupting a flow of Wyrd energy and dissipating it into an ineffectual wide scattering. The victory points for activating this power become a negative penalty on the opposing psychic's (or theurge's) roll.

Absorption

(Level 3, Introvert + Focus, sensory, prolonged, 0W)

The character can absorb the occult energy of an attack, channeling it to her own Wyrd reserve. This does not necessarily halt the attack; for this, the character must either resist the power or rite or use another level of Turning to diffuse or redirect it. If any attack is successful against her, regardless of subsequent resistance, diffusion or redirection, she gains one Wyrd point, unless she is already at her full rating, in which case she can channel the Wyrd into a Tabernacle or other Wyrd storage device (if she has one on her). This power costs no Wyrd to activate, but requires five minutes of silent mediation; it lasts for one span.

All-Seeing Eyes

(Level 4, Introvert + Observe, sight, instant, 1W)

The character can examine the patterns which occult energy leaves on others. While this will not give the kind of detail Wyrd Sight or Second Sight does, it will allow the character to "read" the patterns left upon another to determine whether or not he is a psychic, theurge or other type of occult practitioner (and what his stigma is). With three victory points, the character can know which paths or theurgic schools the target practices. Four victory points provides an idea of how powerful the target is (her rating in Psi or Theurgy). Five victory points reveals if the target's Urge or Hubris is awakened, and six shows the Dark Side's level.



Refraction

(Level 5, Wits + Stoic Mind, sight, instant, 1W)

This power causes incoming occult energy to “bounce” off of the psychic, retaining its coherence so that its psionic effect (perception, attack or command) strikes an unintended target randomly chosen by the gamemaster.

Reflection

(Level 6, Ego + Focus, sensory, temporary, 1W)

At this level the psychic can return the effects of any occult power back upon their point of origin. This has been known to drive some telepaths mad, trapped in a strange loop of reading their own minds.

Wyrd Harvest

(Level 7, Introvert + Charm, touch, instant, 1W)

The character can tap into another's occult energy, adding it to his own reserves. The target must be willing. The character can take up to one Wyrd point per victory point gained on the roll, but only as much as the target allows. Wyrd Tabernacles can also be transferred this way (owner willing).

Redirection

(Level 8, Ego + Focus, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

The psychic can redirect the effects of any psychic action taken around him, sending FarHand maneuvers spinning, returning attacks to attackers, making telepaths

read the wrong minds, or just hogging all of the Amalthean's healing rite for himself.

Dark Harvest

(Level 9, Ego + Impress, touch, instant, 1W)

The character can tap into another's occult energy without that person's consent. The character can take up to one Wyrd point per victory point gained on the roll. The target may resist using the normal psychic defense rules. Wyrd Tabernacles can also be transferred this way. This is a highly unethical power, regardless of how needy the character may be (even if he uses the Wyrd to save the universe). If used successfully, the character's Dark Twin may awaken or be strengthened; roll Ego + Stoic Mind to prevent its arousal.

Theurgy

The supernatural powers of faith. Most religious sects within the Known Worlds practice some form of theurgical rites, whether to ensure a good crop or to smite their enemies.

Group Rites

Religion is a group activity; so are its rituals. While theurgy is usually cast by a single priest, many priests can band together to increase the effectiveness of their rites.

When one or more priests joins together in a rite, use

the following guidelines:

- One theurgist is designated the rite leader while all others are participants. Theurgists can only actively participate in rituals they each already know. Thus, if two priests join in casting a Prophet's Holy Blessing rite, each must already have learned the rite.

- There is no limit to the number of theurges who can join in a single rite. However, gamemasters should use common sense before packing a room full of theurges — such spiritual experts are not common in the first place, and when two or more get together there is no guarantee that they will know the same rites.

- Members of different sects can sometimes learn the same ritual. However, methods of casting may differ from sect to sect. If a rite has participants of multiple sects (even if it's just one Amalthean among two Eskatonics), reduce all participants' goal numbers by one.

- Group rites can extend the range and/or number of targets that the rite may affect. Any of these extensions require that the rite leader AND each participant spend the requisite Wyrd for the rite, as if each were casting the rite alone. Any participant who chooses not to add range or targets to the effect need not spend the Wyrd; only those who spend the Wyrd are counted when considering the extension effects (although all can complement the roll as detailed below).

Choose only ONE of the following options before resolving the casting roll:

The number of targets which the rite affects can be doubled with each participant. If two priests cast a rite which is normally effective only against a single target, it can now affect two targets. If three priests are involved, it can affect three targets. If the rite normally affects five people, 10 can be affected with one additional rite participant, 20 with a third, and so on.

OR

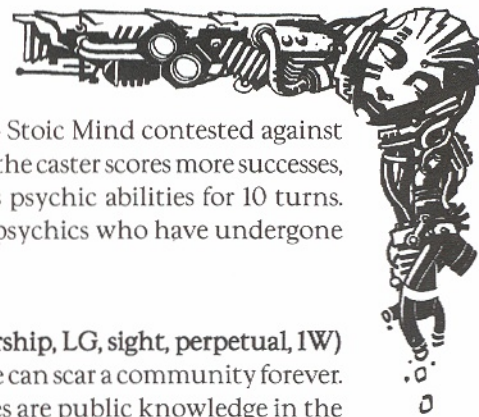
The range of the rite can be increased with each participant in the rite. Refer to the Distance listing in the Psychic Powers Chart on p. 131 of the rulebook: each participant raises the rite by one level. For example, a "touch" ranged rite may be raised to "sight" with the addition of one participant, or to one kilometer with three participants, and so on.

If the ritecasters desire to increase the range AND the number of targets, then each rite participant (including the rite leader) must spend one additional Wyrd point.

- Each participant makes her casting roll and applies any victory points to the rite leader's goal number (as per normal complimentary skill rolls). This may raise the rite leader's goal number above 20; use the Extended Success Chart at the start of this chapter.

Only the rite leader's roll is used to determine the success or failure of the rite itself. Participant failures do not adversely affect the rite leader's casting, but any critical failure will automatically cause the rite to fail (additional ill effects can be levied at the gamemaster's discretion).





Orthodox Rituals

Although other Church sects may explore such divergent theurgic disciplines as astrology and geomancy, the Orthodox Church disapproves of such "impure" rituals. The Orthodoxy instead stresses a more "vertical" relationship with the Pancreator, without the dubious complexities of other philosophies. This does not mean that Orthodox rituals are easy to learn, but most avoid the more exotic mystical trappings of some other sects. Many Orthodox rituals strive to preserve order and harmony in a universe rapidly spinning out of control.

Chasten

(Level 1, Extrovert + Debate, L, sight, temporary, 1W)

Sinners have an amazing propensity for self deception. This ritual strips away these rationalizations, laying *one* of the culprit's transgressions open for him to see. The caster must know about the sin and confront the sinner with it verbally. What the sinner chooses to do with this information is wholly up to him. He may decide to repent and change his ways, or he may continue in his actions, but must do so with the full knowledge that what he is doing is wrong. This revelation may allow the sinner a Faith + Focus roll to lose a level of Hubris.

Once this ritual wears off the sinner will still remember this moment of revelation, but may begin to rebuild her rationalizations. A critical success increases the duration of this ritual to a full span. This ritual is a two-way street. If the caster is guilty of a similar sin, the ritual affects her as well.

Calm the Flock

(Level 4, Extrovert + Oratory, LG, sensory, 1W)

Many horrors, both natural and supernatural, endanger the faithful. Sometimes the flock panics, becoming a fearful or vengeful mob. The priest can calm the flock with words of reason and scripture, protecting themselves and others from their own irrationality. To use this ritual the priest must confront the mob and attract their attention so they can hear his words. If the priest succeeds he can calm down a crowd of 10 people for each victory point. A crowd under the control of another supernatural agency (e.g., psychic or demonic influence) requires a contested roll against whatever power the opponent is using to control the crowd.

Tightening the Leash

(Level 4, Faith + Stoic Mind, LG, sight, temporary, 1W)

To find grace in the Pancreator's eyes, many psychics repent for their ill-famed powers and come to the Church for forgiveness. The Orthodoxy alone receives these Penitents into its arms, training them so they may use their powers for the greater good. Unfortunately these sinful powers can sometimes overcome even the most rigorous Church training, turning the Penitent against the faith-

ful. The caster rolls Faith + Stoic Mind contested against the psychic's Ego + Focus. If the caster scores more successes, she nullifies the Penitent's psychic abilities for 10 turns. This ritual only works on psychics who have undergone the Penitents' conversion.

Protect the Flock

(Level 5, Faith + Leadership, LG, sight, perpetual, 1W)

A supernatural menace can scar a community forever. Although such occurrences are public knowledge in the universe of the Fading Suns, the Church strives to protect its flock from the full reality of these incursions. To enact this ritual the priest must, through roleplaying and a successful casting of the rite, convince at least one person in the community that the recent event had a more mundane explanation. This may go against the grain for some clergy, since the Church preaches the reality of such occurrences. Nevertheless, the Church also desires to minimize the damage caused by these phenomena.

If the priest convinces the target, word will spread in the community and many people will believe the more rational explanation. The more victory points scored, the more people will believe this explanation. The target's position in the community helps here: JoJo the Idiot Boy may not readily convince his fellow townsmen but Ladok the Mayor may hold some considerable sway. A truly superstitious target may contest the rite roll with Passion + Stoic Mind.

Redeem the Flock

(Level 6, Faith + Leadership, LGP, 1W)

Sometimes the damage caused by the minions of darkness is too great to cover up, and the populace suffers greatly. These wounds may be physical or spiritual, and may effectively destroy the parish. In the wake of such destruction, neighbors may become more suspicious of each other, even going so far as to turn away from the Pancreator. Any good priest will try to heal her community in such a crisis, but one with this ritual may perform miracles. The caster must throw herself into the work of healing the parish, working alongside serfs, nobles and guilders alike to breathe life back into the shattered community. The casting roll may suffer penalties depending on the size of the community and the seriousness of the disaster. A successful ritual will galvanize 15 percent of the parish's population for each victory point. These people will fully dedicate themselves to rebuilding their shattered community, addressing physical damage and even patching over old grievances to work together.

Such deeds will obviously bring attention to the priest, marking her for promotion and respect from the faithful. It is such service to the Pancreator that marks saints. If her work returns even a few souls to the Church, she may roll Faith + Focus to lose a level of Hubris.

Money

Rogue Coinage

While Alexius has declared the firebird to be the only interstellar legal tender, rogue coins still exist, forming a basis for local trade on many worlds far from Byzantium Secundus. The Dark Ages and Emperor Wars saw a dizzying number of coins minted by each house — and often by each city, fief and guild. Similar to Earth's Netherlands in 1614, where 400 different coinages flowed in and out of that country alone, the Known Worlds witnessed multiple currencies with little central control over exchange.

The only party capable of maintaining some order in this chaos was the Reeves guild, whose members acted as money lenders, setting exchange rates between the houses, guilds and cities. Their power in this, however, came solely from their acceptance by the involved parties. If one house refused the Reeves' rates, then no trade would occur under their rules. However, enough parties accepted the guild as an impartial observer that they would usually demand a Reeve negotiator in most major trade situations. Whenever a house's actions lowered its coinage's value, it was the Reeves' recognition of this loss which helped other parties from making bad investments.

Of course, this control over the economy made the guild quite rich, since it controlled the interest rates on loans — both others' and its own.

In the post-Emperor Wars years, this confusion has been relieved somewhat by Imperial control. The Reeves now help control investment rates on the firebird, under Imperial contract — thanks to the judicious gamble the League made in awarding Alexius their vote scepters during his regency. Nonetheless, many noble fiefs still mint and distribute their own coinage.

The Reeves no longer concern themselves as much with local, non-firebird trade. Thus, the houses and local guilds once again set their own rates for their own coin — within limits, of course. Any such coin caught in interstellar dealings or in fief-to-fief trade may bring the Imperial Eye into the region.

Thus, travelers in an al-Malik fief may exchange firebirds for the local sparkler. But once they leave the fief, they may find the sparklers useless. In addition, they may find the exchange rate has changed for the worse since they first transferred their money. Not everyone is obligated to accept rogue coins, although, in practice, most do, especially on the black market. Usually, the many coins found on a single world can be exchanged for other coins of that world, but there are no guarantees that off-world coin is so accepted. Barter is often an acceptable basis to gain coins.

There is no central stock exchange for the Known Worlds. The Empire tries to set a fixed firebird rate for certain items, such as military construction contracts, but outside of Byzantium Secundus or Tethys, merchants and

The Firebird

This unique coin is minted with a secret high-tech process traditionally known only to the regency and now the Empire. Its secrets are guarded by the Imperial Eye — safeguarding the firebird is actually one of its primary tasks. The coin is made of a strange alloy which is very hard to counterfeit. Its value is actually equal to the coin it represents — one coin holds about one firebird in value in its metal alone.

It is manufactured to be easily broken into halves or quarters (crests and wings), but the substance itself is a riddle to make. This unique substance was dubbed prismium by the Second Republic scientists who invented it. Some argue that it is actually a new element, since a cyclotron is required for its manufacture (one of the main reasons counterfeiting is so hard — few high-tech physics machines exists anymore, and those that do were turned toward military purposes during the Emperor Wars).

Alexius has yet to cement enough control to initiate a major new minting, but when he does, inflation will surely increase — as will Imperial control over Known Worlds economics.

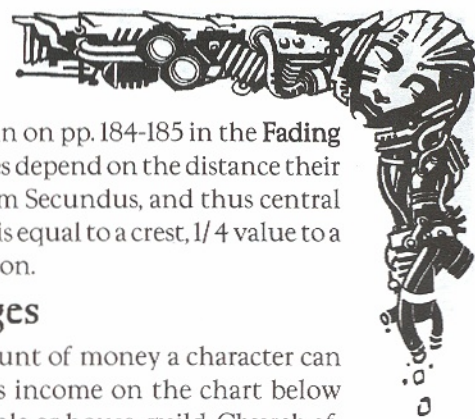
manufacturers can charge whatever they think they can get away with.

The advantage the League has over local guilds is that they can set their own fixed rates across the Known Worlds, providing interstellar travelers some stable spending base — as long as they trade with League merchants. On certain worlds, they will even lower their prices somewhat to compete with local prices. However, since they are interstellar and depend on repeat business, they rely instead on more expensive but dependable goods. Travelers cannot be sure what they are buying when they buy local.

The cost listed for items in most **Fading Suns** sourcebooks represents this fixed rate set by the League, although costs will fluctuate somewhat with local supply and demand (see p. 17 of **Forbidden Lore: Technology** for guidelines).

It is impossible to list every rogue coin in use on all the Known Worlds — most worlds have over 100 in distribution, from city to city or fief to fief. This varies, of course, with population and rulership: De Moley has few coins besides the firebird, as its population is gathered into tight, well-regulated areas, but Criticorum hosts nearly 500 different coinages. Even Rampart has its varieties, although they are being clamped down on by the new Li Halan lords.

While rogue coinages vary, their uses are usually very similar. They can be broken down into two different types: Talons (purely local lucre, from a single fief or city) and house coins (usable only within that house's worlds).



Costs of Goods/Services

Below is a list of various goods and services and the usual costs for them (in talons). The actual cost will vary with local conditions: a flood driving folks from their homes may fill up the nearby inns, raising costs for room and board in the region. The costs in cities may be more than in hamlets or villages, representing the increased cost of importing goods and the unscrupulous raising of prices to match the higher incomes of city residents. In addition, some items may only be available on high-tech worlds or cities (soda-pop, for instance, is rare on Malignatius). Some items have three listings: cheap/moderate/fine.

Food

| Item | Talon cost |
|-------------|------------|
| Ale | 1 |
| Beer | 1/2/3 |
| Hard liquor | 2/4/6 |
| Wine | 3/6/12 |
| Soda-pop | 2 |
| Snack | 1/2/3 |
| Breakfast | 1/3/6 |
| Lunch | 2/4/8 |
| Dinner | 2/6/12 |

Lodging

| Item | Talon cost |
|------------------------|------------|
| Table in main room | 2 |
| Shared bedroom | 5 |
| Private room | 10 |
| 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 |

Talons come in many varieties, from the Madoc Coral (made of rare coral found only on that world, requiring special skills to carve properly) to the Delphi Matriarch (gold coins with the profile of Baroness Felicity Hawkwood, found only in one fief in the distant Grampas Mountains). While their value varies radically, they are considered the lowest class of coinage acceptable for trade. The Reeves call these coins "talons," since you can usually exchange one firebird for eight of them (the firebird depicts a phoenix with eight talons). One wing will yield two talons and one crest will yield four talons.

However, their true value actually varies radically; conditions can raise or lower a fief or city's talon: a small fief with a newly discovered vein of Pygmalium may see its coinage rise to the value of a wing or even a crest, but most change in value is usually for the worse (sometimes as low as 1/32 the value of the firebird).

House coins are listed in on pp. 184-185 in the **Fading Suns** rulebook. Their values depend on the distance their planets are from Byzantium Secundus, and thus central Imperial control. 1/2 value is equal to a crest, 1/4 value to a wing, and 1/8 value to a talon.

Beginning Wages

To determine the amount of money a character can begin play with, check his income on the chart below (based on that character's role or house, guild, Church affiliation), then give him 10% of that (the money he already made that year is assumed to have already been spent on living expenses). If the character has Riches, he may have 10% of the amount listed in cash; this amount is on hand as cash or in a bank readily withdrawable as cash. The rest of the money is tied up in investments (resources gained from a fief or business).

The money listed assumes that the character in question is constantly working for a living. If this is not the case — the character does no piloting, engineering or ministering — then his income may come in question or be cut off by his superiors. If the character is a noble, then her money is the stipend given by her family; if she fails to perform duties for that family when asked, she may be cut off.

| Firebirds | Class |
|-----------|--|
| 1 | Serf |
| 5-100 | Yeoman |
| 100 | Low rank (3 pts – 7 pts) minor guildmember |
| 300 | High rank (9 pts – 11 pts) minor guildmember |
| 200 | Low rank (3 pts – 5 pts) major guildmember |
| 700 | High rank (7 pts – 9 pts) major guildmember |
| 100 | Low rank (3 pts – 5 pts) priest * |
| 400 | High rank (7 pts – 9 pts) priest * |
| 1000 | Knight, Bishop (Good Riches) |
| 3000 | Baronet, Consul (Well-off Riches) |
| 5000 | Baron, Archbishop (Wealthy Riches) |
| 10,000 | Earl/Marquis, Count, Dean (Rich) |
| 20,000 | Duke (Filthy Rich) |

* Church income adjusted by sect as follows: Amaltheans (-10%), Eskatonic Order (-20%), Avestites (-30%), Preceptors (-15%, no expense account but no limit to personal riches)

Banking

So, just where do characters put the money they've made? If they don't make much (less than 15 firebirds), they may act like most folks and simply stash it in the mattress or in the flower pot; the hassle of dealing with a bank for this small sum is probably more than the effort is worth. However, if more money is made, then a bank is the only safe place to keep it — unless the character has a castle with a retinue of guards to protect his stash.

There are many kinds of banks in the Known Worlds. Noble scions usually keep their money in a family account. However, older family members can draw on it and often do — spending away the younger sibling's money on wine and song. League members have access to their own

accounts in the League bank, carefully overseen by the Reeves. Priests can keep their money in the cathedral safe, where it is usually quite protected. But it is not guaranteed against theft or disaster — the deacon may need it to buy foreign millirice to offset the local famine. Of course, a character who places vast sums in the cathedral safe may come under some criticism by his superiors, and may even be accused of the sin of greed.

The main question for those who turn to a bank is whether to go with an interstellar bank or a local one. Interstellar banks are more guaranteed — their owners are unlikely to go bankrupt anytime soon, especially since the Emperor Wars are over. The money is available from any outlet, usually found on most worlds, but the fees are higher.

The choices here are the League Bank (run by the Reeves, the most reputable money-lenders), Brother Battle (this sect has entered the money-lending business) or the Imperial Bank (as yet only available on Byzantium Secundus, Tethys, Stigmata and Criticorum). The following chart provides some idea of these banks' requirements:

| Bank | Min balance* | Annual Fee* |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| League | 10 | 5% of any deposit |
| Brother Battle | 1 | 10% of any deposit |
| Imperial | 5 | 3% of any deposit |

* In firebirds

Of these institutions, the riskiest is the Imperial Bank. If Alexius were to fall from grace before he can cement his power and lineage, the bank could go bust. The longer and more stable his rule becomes, the more secure is the Imperial Bank.

Local independent banks are much more susceptible to local disasters: the town is sacked by rebels and the vaults emptied, or the owner embezzles the accounts and is unable to pay the money back; it will take his now-indentured family years to make up the lost sum. However, service is usually much more personal and the fees are lower than the interstellar banks. Plus, the account holder is usually guaranteed that no noble house or guild will risk his money on foolish ventures. But the money is only available at the bank's local outlets, not on other worlds. Some people set up multiple accounts on multiple worlds, but this usually requires a money-management ability lacked by most people. Most local banks have no minimum balance and a fee of only a firebird or so.

All banks generally issue scrip for interstellar transactions: an account holder traveling to another world would withdraw money in the form of a note, then deliver that note to his destination's bank office to redeem it as coin. During the Emperor Wars, one could not always guarantee that a local office would honor off-world scrip, even though if it was drawn up by the same house or guild. Alliances shifted too quickly: the Rampart Reeves might honor Leagueheim Reeves scrip — unless it was held by the disliked Li Halan, new overlords of the planet. In the current peace, paper money is becoming more and more

popular as travel increases and institutions settle down and build long term alliances with other parties.

Scrip is easier to counterfeit than a firebird. High-tech means are used by the Reeves and the Empire to draw up scrip, which is usually printed by think machines on special paper and adorned with a special seal (either wax or a rare plastic). Nonetheless, certain clever parties have been known to fake scrip. The fines for this crime are deservedly draconian — torture to wrest the names of any co-conspirators from the criminal followed by public execution. The Brother Battle monks do not use scrip when guarding pilgrim coin: few are so bold to attempt a heist against a Brother Battle entourage.

Equipment Weapons

Note: Some of this material was previously published in the "Weapons Compendium," a 16 page staple-bound book bundled with the Fading Suns Gamemasters Screen. It is our experience that too many players are unaware of this material. Rather than continue to bundle the book with possible future printings of the screen, we publish the material here, mixed with new items.

Weaponry in the **Fading Suns** universe is extremely diversified, a hodgepodge of various tech levels and manufactures. Where swords were once worn only by the nobility as a sign of prestige, these elegant weapons are now far more common than the once- prominent blasters.

High technologies still exist, but the skill to build most high-tech weaponry has been lost. Those scientists who can craft the lightweight, efficient instruments of destruction used during the Second Republic are in heavy demand, although non-innovative blacksmiths are the norm. While some houses and guilds still manage to manufacture high-tech weapons, the devices created today are neither as graceful nor as powerful as those crafted during the Second Republic.

Advanced weaponsmithing requires years of training. While the average person can use an advanced weapon with little difficulty, few have the necessary skill to repair such a weapon or to improve upon an existing feature. In an era where even reading and writing are almost lost skills, the inner-workings of an automobile or a blaster are beyond the comprehension of most citizens.

Melee Weapons

Spear

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | +1 | | 5 | 3 | XL | 0 |

Tech Level: 0

Firebird cost: 1

An old favorite, spears have made a comeback on many worlds. They are considered primitive by even most peasants, but the increasing need on some backworlds to supplement crops with hunting means that they are used anyway.



Staff

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | +1 | | 4 | 3 | XL | 0 |

Tech Level: 0

Firebird cost: Negligible

The standby for merry men everywhere, this could be Little John's quarterstaff, a Japanese monk's bo staff, or just about any long stick (a short stick is considered to be a club).

Spring Knife

Cost: 1 Benefice/5 firebirds

The spring knife has the same traits as any other knife, but the blade stays concealed in the hilt until its user presses a button and brings it into play. Some of these are exceptionally well concealed, being worked into belt buckles and jewelry, but these are even more expensive than the normal ones. Needless to say, possession of one of these is a crime in many cities — these aren't tools.

Glankesh Sword

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | | | 6 | 4 | L | 1 |

Tech Level: 2

Firebird cost: 15 for Vorox, 25 for non-Vorox

A deadly crescent blade resembling a Pranese deerhook sword. These blades of superior craftsmanship are made by the Vorox, originally invented to make up

for their lack of claws (feral Vorox spurn these swords). While they are one-handed swords, Vorox warriors usually use one in each of their four-fighting hands. The crescent shape allows them to create a circle of death around their bodies as they slash the swords about with all arms.

These swords are forged from high-quality alloys found in abundance on Vorox. They are almost sacred to some Vorox warriors, who painstakingly engrave them with sigils of victory and hang "trophies" from the handles (enemy's teeth, hair, etc.). They don't like it when someone touches their Glankesh without permission.

Kurgan Side Sword

| Weapon | Roll | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|-------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Side Sword | Dx + Melee | 6 | 2 | L | 1 |
| Leg Sheath* | Dx + Melee | +3 | 1 | S | 1 |

* Must be used with a kick action; damage adds to kick damage

Tech Level: 5

Firebirds cost: 400

Light weight and deadly, the side sword is an odd but effective fighting weapon. Inside the hand grip is a metal crossbar. When this bar is grasped by the wielder, the inner padding around the hand and forearm constricts for a tight fit, making it hard to disarm the weapon (+3 Str + Melee roll to resist disarm).

The side sword was first encountered by Hazat forces in the Kurgan conflict. Little is known about the weapon's



origin, although it is not widespread among Kurgan troops. Hazat suspect that it is mainly intended as a ship-board weapon used to repel pirates.

When not in use, the side sword is stored in a leg sheath secured by a quick-snap strap. The leg sheath is sharpened, making the user's kicks more deadly.

Whip

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | +1 | -1 | 3 | 4 | XL | 0 |

Tech Level: 1

Firebird cost: 3+

Whips come in all shapes and sizes, from bull whips to slaver whips. The above traits assume a simple leather whip. If metal is added to the end of the lash, add one die of damage. High-tech synthetic whips are known at Tech Level 6+, and these usually have a base of 4 dice of damage and require only STR 3 to wield.

Whip users can learn the fencing action Disarm (Level 5), but this must be learned separately for blades and whips. In addition, there is another action available:

Snare (Level Six): The whip user can wrap his whip about a target's limb or neck and yank the target off his feet. The whipper rolls Dexterity + Melee to first snare his target (this can be resisted with a dodge). If successful, he rolls Dexterity + Melee again, but he can add the victory points from his previous roll to this roll. This roll is contested by the target's Strength + Vigor roll. If the whipper is successful, the target is yanked off his feet. It takes two actions to escape a snare, although no roll is required.

Suresnake Whip

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | +1 | +3 | 3 | 4 | XL | 0 |

Tech Level: 7

Firebird cost: 100

This can be any of the whip types listed above, but a special tracking wire has been threaded throughout the length of the whip. The tip of the lash holds a nanite computer which can home in on a chosen target; the tip must first be aimed at the target then "locked down" on that target with a flick of a switch in the handle (this takes one action). As long as the target does not disappear from the computer's sight for more than three turns, the whip gains a +3 goal roll bonus to hit its chosen target. These whips are popular among the Chainers, who use them to keep "special" cargo in line.

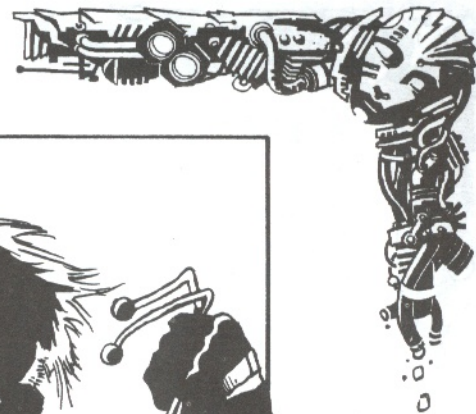
Garrote

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | -1 | -1 | 3 | 3 | XS | 0 |

Tech Level: 1

Firebird cost: 5+

A favorite assassin's weapon, garrotes have been used to strangle people throughout the centuries. Different models have been manufactured at different Tech Levels. A garrote user must first grapple his target around the neck (a Tough task, -6, unless the target is unaware of the



attacker). If successful, he may roll the garrote's damage plus his victory dice once per turn. The victim can try to break the hold using the normal grapple rules.

Primitive versions are made from metal wire, but more advanced models can be made from unbreakable synthetic plastics. At Tech Level 4 and above, garrotes can be hidden in increasingly clever places, from a line drawn forth from a wristwatch to a line that shoots out of a pen to wrap around its target from a distance (see Suresnake Whip, above; range is 2 meters, add 100 to the cost).

Boarding Gun

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | | | 3 | 3 | M | 1 |

Tech Level: 3

Firebird cost: 10 plus cost of gun

This wily weapon combines a gun with a knife. The traits above are for the knife; this can be combined with a light or medium revolver or autofeed gun. It is used by pirates and shipboard defenders alike. However, although it uses small caliber ammunition, a stray bullet can still be damaging to bulkheads.

Splinter Sword

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | | | 5/2 | 3 | L | 6 |

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: +50 to normal weapon cost

This unique plastic sword shatters on impact to leave tiny, sharp fibrous threads in the victim's body which continue to cut the victim's flesh until they are removed. After the sword has struck, the victim will suffer two dice of damage (ignoring all armor) at the beginning of each successive turn until the threads are removed. Since it leaves so many small threads, it requires 6 victory points on a sustained Dexterity + Physick roll to remove them all. The problem with a splinter sword is that, once it has struck, it is partially broken. Each sword can only deliver three punctures on a target before it is broken beyond use. These swords were factory manufactured during the Second Republic for cheap mass shipboard defense; they are rare these days.

Energy Melee Weapons

Shocker

Tech Level: 5

Firebird cost: +30 to normal weapon cost

Any knife, sword, mace, or even whip can be turned into a Shocker; it simply means that the weapon is rigged to release an electrical charge whenever it hits a target. Once the target has been struck, add three dice of damage (this is considered energy weapon damage, so metal armors suffer a -1 from their protection values against it). Models vary, however, and some may only deliver one or two extra dice of damage. A fusion cell is required (it lasts for 25 turns).



SPERA

Frap Stick

| Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | Shots | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|------|-------|-----|-------|-----|------|
| Dx+Melee | -1 | | 6 (3) | 3 | 5 | L | 6 |

Tech Level: 5

Firebird cost: 15 firebirds

This is a simple stick with an electric tip (similar to an anti-shark stick). It is often used by thugs to slowly slip under shields and tap the target once the tip is past the shield (suffer -2 to Initiative, withhold victory dice and hope the damage does not exceed the shield's impact threshold). Once the tip contacts a surface, a charge is released (damage 6, ignore energy shields but not other armor).

Ranged Weapons

Slingshot

| Roll | Goal | STR | DMG | RNG | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -1 | 2 | 3 | 5/10 | 2 | S | 0 |

Ammunition: Smooth stones or ball bearings

Tech Level: 1

Firebird cost: 1/2 bird (1 crest) for the sling, 1/4 bird (1 wing) for five stones

A "Y" shaped, hand-held instrument with a rubber cord and a pocket for holding the stone in place. Despite the obvious primitive nature of these weapons, a few modifications over the years have made what was once a child's toy into an efficient, if limited, weapon. Several brave souls have used actual blast capsules (see below) as bullets, with mixed results.

Spear Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | STR | RNG | SIZ | Cost |
|------------|------|---------|-----|-------|-----|------|
| Dx + Melee | | by head | 4 | 10/20 | M | 2 |

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 25 firebirds (1 wing per cannister)

The spear gun is primarily a fishing tool but can be an effective weapon under water. Several naval forces keep them for such purposes. Powered by carbon dioxide canisters, the spear gun fires a single projectile with great force over short distances underwater. Each propellant canister is good for four firings; it takes an action to load another spear into the gun.

Various types of spearheads can be placed on the end of the projectile. Among the more common are:

| Head | Goal | DMG | Cost |
|---------------|------|-----|---------------|
| Standard | | 3 | 1 crest per 4 |
| Injector* | +1 | 3 | 1 per 4 |
| Backbarbed** | | 4 | 1 per 4 |
| Concussion*** | -1 | 7 | 2 per 4 |

* Injects whatever drug it carries upon impact (as long as at least one point of damage breaches the target's armor or shield)

** Usually accompanied by a rope or line

*** Concussion heads explode on impact

Slug Guns

Silencer

Cost: 1 Benefice/5 firebirds

Attached to a autofeed or automatic rifle, a silencer muffles at least some of the noise made by a shot. Silencers vary just as much as any other technological artifact in the Known Worlds; some completely deaden the noise and make a gun more accurate, while others barely do anything and burn out after only a few uses. An average silencer requires anyone not near the shot (in the same room or within 20 meters) to make a Perception + Shoot roll to hear the gunshot and know what it is. These are illegal on most planets.

Decados Groin Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -1 | 3 | 5/10 | 4 | 2 | XS | 2* |

* 1 per 3 clips

Ammunition: .32 caliber

Tech Level: 5

Firebird cost: 30

The above model concealed autofeed gun is most often hidden in a codpiece, but can be modified for placement in other locations also. The spring-loaded gun snaps out of its hidden compartment at the flick of a switch. This switch is often hidden in a ring, but it can be an electrode attached to a certain muscle and tuned to activate when that muscle moves.

Mitchau Quarry Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +2 | 5 | 30/40 | 6 | 2 | M | 3* |

* 1 per 3 clips

Ammunition: .40 caliber

Tech Level: 5

Firebird cost: 50

A target revolver designed for marksmanship tournaments or bravado hunting. It is usually accompanied by a sight (+2). A favorite of pastoral nobles, quarry guns are also considered fine fashion accessories for parties (the noble usually rides on beastback to the host's mansion as if he just returned from hunting and had no time to disarm). However, too much braggadocio often leads to marksmanship challenges, forcing the fashion plate to back up his armament choice with actual skill.

Drexler Gatling Shotgun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| Dx+Shoot | 8 | 3 | 20/30 | 12 | 2 (A) | L | 3 / 1 |

per 3 clips

Ammunition: 8 gauge

Tech Level: 5

Firebird cost: 50

A shotgun capable of autofire. Ammunition is held in a rotating drum hanging in front of the trigger. Use the normal autofire rules (3-round burst, 6-round burst, spread, etc.).



Bullets

Sunder Slugs

Tech Level: 5

Cost: +3 firebirds each

Ceramsteel fragments in a gel medium, encased in steel. Add one die of damage and halve the target's armor protection value (except energy shields).

Vorox Claws

Tech Level: 4

Cost: +2 firebirds each

An expanding bullet which opens into a five-claw blossom upon impact. Increase damage by 2 dice.

Blast Capsules

Tech Level: 6

Cost: +6 firebirds each

Blast capsules have a special charge of stored plasma which is released upon impact. Add three to the damage. As with a blaster, these capsules can leak through energy shields, although not as effectively (only on damage rolls of 1, 2 or 3). These cannot be made in calibers below .40.

Flechette Guns

The following guns fire flechettes, tiny shards of metal (sometimes plastic). As with a shotgun, a flechette gun fires many shards in a spray, making it easier to hit a target.

Splinter Pistol

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +1 | 4 | 10/20 | 7(A) | 3 | M | 5 |

Ammunition: Flechettes, fusion cell

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 70 for the gun, 1/4 bird (1 wing) per shot of ammunition (a small handful of shards)

A splinter pistol uses a fusion cell to empower a magnetic field which propels a stream of metal shards down the barrel with each pull of the trigger. This gun is capable of autofire. One famous model is the Reznor Nail Gun, utilizing cheap ammunition shaved from recycled metal implements.

Splinter Rifle

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +2 | 5 | 20/30 | 13(A) | 2 | L | 7 |

Ammunition: Flechettes, fusion cell

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 100 for the gun, 1/4 bird (1 wing) per shot of ammunition (a small handful of shards)

A flechette carbine. Like a splinter pistol, the splinter rifle uses a fusion cell to empower a magnetic field which propels a stream of metal shards down the barrel with each pull of the trigger. This gun is capable of autofire. The only model currently being manufactured is the Reznor Model IX.



Flechette Ammunition

Splinter guns are designed to use specially made flechettes, although pistol and rifle flechette ammo is interchangeable. A splinter gun can be loaded with a handful of unprepared sabot (crude metal shavings, for instance), but this will harm the barrel. Only one such shot can be made; after that, the gun must be repaired or the barrel replaced before it will fire even regular flechettes again.

Thorns: Jagged edged flechettes. -1 goal roll (cumulative with the gun's modifier), +1 damage. Cost: 2 firebirds per shot.

Fangs: Ceramsteel flechettes. +2 damage. Cost: 7 firebirds per shot.

Sabot Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | Siz | Cost |
|----------|------|--------|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +1 | varies | 15/30 | 20 | 2(A) | XL | 9 |

Ammunition: See below

Tech Level: 7

Firebird cost: 2000

The Sabot Gun is a newly reclaimed Second Republic weapon redeemed by Ahriman Dreskel for the Scravers, useful for operations far from logistical support for long periods of time, such as exploration and reclamation jobs. This large rifle chops whatever is shoved into the ammo port into small splinters with an internal laser array. These splinters can then be fired out of the barrel with a burst of compressed air (nonmetallic substances) or magnetically (for metal materials); the firing mechanism must be activated manually by the operator.

The material to be used is fed into the ammo port, which is a 4" x 4" square hole on the bottom of the rifle. The weapon has been tested on wood, ice, steel, stone and a plethora of other materials, but is incapable of using anything stronger than construction grade steel. Certain materials, such as ice, are favored by agents due to the discomfort they inflict. A kilogram of most materials will allow the weapon 20 shots, but this can vary. A fusion cell powers the laser chopper and magnetic barrel for up to 50 shots.

The damage inflicted depends on what substance is used for ammunition. Suggested damages are listed below.

Substance: **Damage:**

| | |
|---------|---|
| Wood | 3 |
| Steel | 6 |
| Ice | 4 |
| Plastic | 4 |
| Stone | 5 |

Energy Guns

Eruptor Blast Pistol

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | 7 | 10/20 | 9(A) | 1 | M | 9 | |

Ammunition: Fusion cell

Tech Level: 7

Firebird cost: 700

This devastating gun is similar to the Alembic pistol, except that it is capable of autofire. It can perform 3-round bursts, 6-round bursts, spreads, etc. However, it is an unstable gun. Its barrel requires supreme craftsmanship; the slightest imperfection in the forging can cause problems later on. When autofiring the pistol, a critical failure will cause the gun to explode, causing 7 dice of damage to the user. The only pistols immune to this effect are those made by a master energy weaponsmith (guns of Quality +3, add 500 firebirds to the cost).

Like all blast pistols, it ignores energy shields on damage dice rolls of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Nitobi Blaster Axe

Blaster

| Roll | DMG | STR | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ |
|------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|
| Dx + Shoot | 9 | | 20/30 | 15 | 1 | XL |

Axe

| Roll | DMG | STR | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ |
|------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|
| Dx + Melee | 5 | 5 | | | | |

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 10 Benefice/ 3000 firebirds

This long-range and hand-to-hand hybrid weapon was an experimental design for Second Republic anti-rebel insurgents. Designed by Nitobi Corp, the blaster axe combines devastating energy damage with a high-tensile steel blade. The insurgents would sneak into rebel (often noble) territory, blast away at the fortifications and then charge through the breach to engage the rebels therein. The downfall of the Second Republic, however, saw the downfall of Nitobi and thus the end of production for this short-lived weapon. It has recently been resurrected by Ermin Jalon, a weaponsmith in the employ of House Li Halan.

While the weapons are sturdy, their manufacture requires a complicated forging process. Any critical fumble on the blaster roll may result in an explosion (9 DMG to the wielder), destroying the weapon. Ermin Jalon is trying to perfect the forging process to avoid this problem but has had little progress so far.

Jet Pistol

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -2 | 6 | 10/20 | 2 | 1 | M | 7 |

Ammunition: Mini-rockets

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 100

A rocket pistol, firing mini, jet-propelled capsules holding a large blast pellet (see below). While this bulky pistol is not very concealable, its small size makes it a favorite of mercenaries who like to destroy things. The most well-known model is the Gobo Lobber, manufactured by the Gobo weaponsmiths guild of Bannockburn.

Cluster Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -2 | 6 | 10/20 | 5 | 1 | XL | 7 |

Ammunition: Blast pellets (see below)



Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 100

Each shot from this rifle sprays a cluster of blast pellets into three hexes (one hex to either side of target hex). Anyone in those hexes suffers the damage (6 dice in each hex). These weapons are favored by those who need to clean out an area quickly without regard to making a mess. A popular model is the Gobo Garbage Chucker.

Explosives

Explosives affect anyone standing within their radius. Anyone standing in this range is affected (subtract one die of damage for each meter away from center).

Demolition Rig

Tech Level: 4+

Cost: 5 Benefice/200 firebirds

While any fool with a pipe bomb can blow something up, true experts prefer more exact equipment, the kind of stuff they can measure out to do just what they want it to — no more, no less. The demolition rig can come with any of a variety of explosives, including nitroglycerin, plastique or Ukar demo cream. It also usually features a number of different detonators, including fuses, timers and remote detonators.

Characters with a demo rig generally have about 100 damage dice worth of explosives as well as 20 detonators. The rig allows them to place and shape charges, focusing the damage in a specific direction if they make a Tech + Demolition roll. This means the explosives will only do half their damage in the direction the demo expert does not want it to go.

Frag Grenade

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 1 Benefice/20 firebirds

A shrapnel grenade, designed to fragment and send shards of metal in all directions (13 dice of damage). Radius is 5 meters.

Blast Pellet

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 1 - 2 Benefice per two pellets/ 5 - 10 firebirds each (depending on size)

A mini plasma pellet which explodes upon impact. Blast pellets come in various sizes, from ball-bearing sized (3 dice damage) to small rubber ball sized (6 dice damage). The explosion will affect anyone in a one meter radius around its point of impact. As with most plasma weapons, blast pellets can leak through energy shields (on a damage dice roll of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5).

Plasma Grenade

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 2 Benefice/30 firebirds

A plasma grenade, larger than a blast pellet. These devastating weapons do 18 dice of damage, which can leak through energy shields (on a damage dice roll of 1, 2 or 3). Radius is 6 meters.

Flash Grenade

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 1 Benefice/70 firebirds

These uncommon items are manufactured sparsely and mostly for military use. A flash grenade emits a blinding flash of light, either once its timer has elapsed or when it strikes something. All who see this burst of light must roll Wits + Observe to recognize the attack and turn away or close one's eyes in time. If the roll fails, the victim is blinded and suffers a -6 penalty to all goal rolls requiring sight (reduces this penalty by one for every four meters separating the victim from the point of impact). If the character succeeded in his roll, each victory point scored reduces the penalty by one. Any character wearing light amplification goggles or similar systems doubles the penalty.

These weapons are rarely used in large military battles, but are often utilized in commando missions and crowd control situations. They have seen extensive use in the ongoing conflict with the Kurga Caliphite.

Rad-Baffler Grenade

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 2 Benefice/200 firebirds

The remaining specimens of these items are leftovers from the Second Republic. Most often used in nuclear power stations or factories, these grenades temporarily reduce the radioactivity in a five meter radius to a tolerable level for a few minutes, although the duration is never certain. These have become prized amongst the Engineers and Charioteers, but few others have found significant use for them. Many treasure hunters and archaeologists use them to enter radiated ruins or the like, albeit temporarily. In some situations where the level of radiation is weak, rad-baffler grenades have been known to permanently remove the radiation within their radius. No one is really sure just how these things work.

Shock Grenade

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 1 Benefice/90 firebirds

Developed shortly after the stunner in the rush for crowd control weapons during the Second Republic, these grenades shoot out a high voltage charge over a four meter area. Anyone in that radius must make roll Endurance + Vigor (+1 to the roll for each meter from the grenade's impact) or be stunned for that turn and the next. If the roll fails, the target is unconscious.

Mist Grenade

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 1 Benefice/70 firebirds

These grenades cover a six meter diameter circle in a cloud of aerosol mist that subtracts 4 DMG from any lasers that pass through it. It subtracts two from the goal rolls of all other ranged attacks. These grenades are uncommon in most military units, especially those that use lasers, but they are popular against laser-wielding enemies.



Restraint Weapons

Taffy Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +1 | | 5/10 | 5 | 1 | XL | 5 |

Ammunition: Foam glue

Tech Level: 7

Firebird cost: 70

This rifle and backpack combination fires a foamlike substance which engulfs its target. Like quicksand, each move the target makes only entangles him more, until he can't move at all. When hit by the foam glue, the target must make a contested Strength + Vigor roll against the foam's potency (standard is 8 successes) to move. However, the more the target moves, the worse it gets; for each turn the target does anything besides stand still, add one to the foam's potency. The foam lasts for 30 turns before dissolving. If the target does not move, the foam will slowly slide off him (subtract three from the foam's potency each turn; when there is no more potency, the foam has completely slid off). These guns were developed to control rioting Second Republic citizens, but are now popular by Chainers for controlling slaves.

Stun Net

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | Siz | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Throw | -1 | 3/5 | 10/15 | 4 | | XL | 2 |

Ammunition: Fusion cell

Tech Level: 5

Firebird Cost: 200 Firebirds

Stun nets are large, weighted nets wired to a central power cord which leads to a fusion cell held by the net user, usually in a harness setup which comes with the net.

The net thrower makes a Dexterity + Throwing roll to entrap his target. If successful, the target suffers a -3 penalty to all physical goal rolls. Each turn, the attacker rolls Strength + Vigor to tighten the net's hold; each victory point scored increases the victim's penalty by one. The victim may make a Strength + Vigor roll each turn; each victory point scored reduces the goal roll penalty for the next turn by one. If at anytime, the penalty is reduced to zero, the victim is free.

The attacker may engage the shock option on the net at anytime, causing anyone trapped in the net to suffer six dice of electrical damage. One fusion cell can power up to 10 shocks.

The plastic net may be ripped or cut; it has Armor 3 and Vitality 10.

Stun nets are mostly used by the Chainers to keep rambunctious slaves in line and are often used in slave procurement. They are occasionally used by other groups to apprehend prisoners or as torture devices.

Grappler

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | 2 | | 10/20 | 1 | 1 | M | 3 |

Ammunition: Samson Hair wire

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 70

This pistol does not fire bullets, but instead launches a thin wire of high tensile strength and a grappling hook designed to grasp just about any surface. The hook latches shut on whatever object it first impacts, and has a Strength of 10. The wire can hold 500 kg before breaking. The maximum distance for the wire is 20 meters. When desired, the user can detach the hook with a flick of a switch on the gun, and the rope will rewind itself.

If used as a combat weapon, the rocketing grapple hook will deliver two dice of damage onto a target, and then latch onto the target (who must contest against the hook's Strength 10 to break free).

A "smart" version of the grappler is known, firing a hook with a homing computer. Before firing, the gun can lock onto a particular target; it will seek out this target when it is fired, no matter where the target has moved (as long as three turns have not passed with the target out of sight), as long as he is still in range. It can be set to encircle (and thus entangle the target) rather than hitting him directly.

Artifact Guns

The following guns are no longer manufactured, as the secrets behind their technology have been lost since the Fall.

Fusion Gun

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +1 | 15 | 30/40 | 20 | 1 | XL | 20 |

Ammunition: Fusion cell

Tech Level: 8

Firebird cost: 5000

Few hand-held weapons could hope to surpass the Second Republic's fusion gun. This large, sleek black rifle generates an energy discharge capable of liquefying even ceramsteel. The balance on these weapons is near-perfect, making them seem lighter than they actually are.

Neural Disruptor

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -3 | 5 | 10/20 | 6 | 1 | S | 10 |

Ammunition: Fusion cell

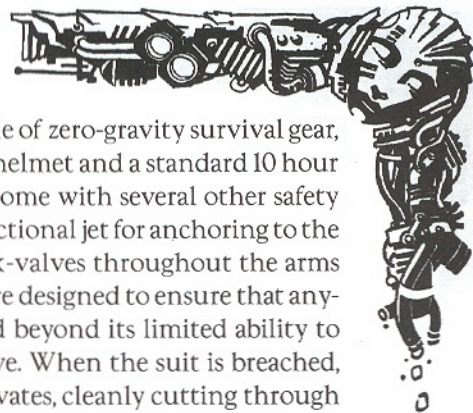
Tech Level: 8

Firebird cost: 3000

These small palm guns fire a nearly invisible and slightly erratic stream of energy which causes destruction to nerve cells and brain matter. If damage exceeds Endurance (or Psi, whichever is higher), the target is unconscious. If damage exceeds Vitality, the target is dead. Armor does not protect against this damage (although a Psi Cloak does).

Psychics may defend against neural disruptor attacks. To deflect the energy stream, roll Psi + Stoic Mind contested against the attacker's successes.

The Neural Disruptor had only just begun production as a prototype when the Fall of the Second Republic came to pass. Very few of these weapons are known to exist.



Symbiot Element Gun

Lightning

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | -1 | 9 | 40/60 | 10 | 1 | XL | 12 |

Hail

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | | 7 | 20/30 | 10 | 1 | XL | 10 |

Wind

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Dx+Shoot | +1 | 6 | 10/20 | 10 | 1 | XL | 9 |

Ammunition: Fusion cell

Tech Level: 8

Firebird cost: 5000

These weapons have been captured from Symbiots on Stigmata, and the few of these in existence in the Known Worlds are prized possessions. An element gun bears more of a resemblance to a strange sea shell than to a weapon. The outer casing is covered with organic spikes and hard edges that have seemingly nothing to do with its operation. Element guns are living weapons, apparently grown from their main host's body.

For each victory modifier rolled, an additional, adjacent target is also hit. These guns are little understood; the user of an element gun risks opening a Pandora's Box of unexpected effects. On a critical failure, freakish environmental effects occur. These could be freak storm systems building up in a matter of seconds or minutes, or localized weather of highly destructive effects: a monsoon engulfs only a portion of the beach, a tornado touches down on only one spot and then disappears, lightning strikes the same place not only twice, but three or more times. These effects may last for long periods of time or may reoccur at random times for years afterward.

Oddly, more of these unusual weapons have begun to appear in recent months, often showing up in the strangest places. While only a few have been sold to date, they have brought a substantial sum of money in the markets. On some planets, the sale of these weapons is prohibited; in theory they are to be handed over to the Church immediately. The Church considers these weapons to be demonic in nature.

Armor

Null-Atmosphere Survival Suit

Defense: 2 + 2d

Dex: -1

Vigor: -1

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 5 Benefice/200 firebirds

These lightweight suits use nanotechnology to ensure a perfect fit for anyone who puts one

on. Considered the pinnacle of zero-gravity survival gear, these devices come with a helmet and a standard 10 hour oxygen supply. They also come with several other safety features: a life-line and directional jet for anchoring to the exterior of a ship, and lock-valves throughout the arms and legs. The lock-valves are designed to ensure that anyone whose suit is damaged beyond its limited ability to repair itself can still survive. When the suit is breached, the nearest lock-valve activates, cleanly cutting through the wearer's limb and sealing out the vacuum of space. Better to lose an arm than to die in space. A cauterizer laser ensures that the wearer does not bleed to death. NAS Suits are designed to withstand heavy radiation, but must be decontaminated before being removed. NAS Suits are still commonly used on many starships.

A NAS suit cannot be combined with other armors or energy shields.



Weapons Chart

Melee Weapons

| Weapon | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|--------------------|------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Spear | Dx+Melee | +1 | | 5 | 3 | XL | 0 |
| Staff | Dx+Melee | +1 | | 4 | 3 | XL | 0 |
| Glankesh Sword | Dx+Melee | | | 6 | 4 | L | 2 |
| Kurgan Side Sword | Dx + Melee | | | 6 | 2 | L | 1 |
| Kurgan Leg Sheath* | Dx + Melee | | | +3 | 1 | S | 1 |
| Whip | Dx+Melee | +1 | -1 | 3 | 4 | XL | 0 |
| Suresnake Whip | Dx+Melee | +1 | +3** | 3 | 4 | XL | 0 |
| Garrote*** | Dx+Melee | -1 | -1 | 3 | 3 | XS | 0 |
| Boarding Gun | Dx+Melee | | | 3 | 3 | M | 1 |
| Splinter Sword† | Dx+Melee | | | 5/2 | 3 | L | 6 |

* Must be used with a kick action; damage adds to kick damage

** Against one chosen target, who must not leave sight for over three turns or bonus is lost

*** Must first perform successful grapple (-6 goal unless target is unaware of attacker), then roll garrote damage plus victory dice per turn

† Second damage listed is delivered each turn until splinters are removed from target. Sword can only deliver three punctures before shattering completely

Energy Melee Weapons

| Weapon | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | STR | SIZ | Cost |
|--------------|----------|------|-------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Shocker* | | | | +3d | | | |
| Frap Stick** | Dx+Melee | -1 | 6 (3) | 3 | 5 | L | 6 |

* Electrified melee weapon; use weapon's traits

** Second damage listed is if the stick is used as a club

Ranged Weapons

| Weapon | Roll | Goal | STR | DMG | RNG | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|-----------|------------|------|-----|---------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Slingshot | Dx+Shoot | -1 | 2 | 3 | 5/10 | 2 | S | 0 |
| Spear Gun | Dx + Melee | | 4 | by head | 10/20 | M | 2 | |

Slug Guns

| Gun | Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|---------------------|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----------------|
| Decados Groin Gun | Dx+Shoot | -1 | 3 | 5/10 | 4 | 2 | XS | 2/1 per 3 clips |
| Mitchau Quarry Gun | Dx+Shoot | +2 | 5 | 30/40 | 6 | 2 | M | 3/1 per 3 clips |
| Drexler Gatling Gun | Dx+Shoot | 8 | 3 | 20/30 | 12 | 2 (A) | L | 3/1 per 3 clips |

Flechette Guns

| Gun | Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|-----------------|----------|------|---------|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Splinter Pistol | Dx+Shoot | +1 | 4 | 10/20 | 7(A) | 3 | M | 5 |
| Splinter Rifle | Dx+Shoot | +2 | 5 | 20/30 | 13(A) | 2 | L | 7 |
| Sabot Gun | Dx+Shoot | +1 | varies* | 15/30 | 20 | 2(A) | XL | 9 |

* Wood: 3, Steel: 6, Ice: 4, Plastic: 4, Stone: 5

Energy Guns

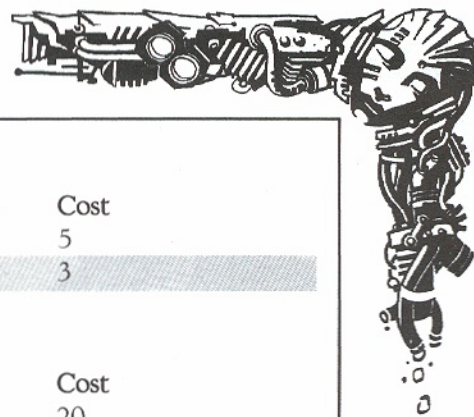
| Gun* | Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|----------------------|------------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Eruptor Blast Pistol | Dx+Shoot | | 7 | 10/20 | 9(A) | 1 | M | 9 |
| Nitobi Blaster Axe | Dx + Shoot | | 6/9** | 20/30 | 15 | 1 | XL | 10 |
| Jet Pistol*** | Dx+Shoot | -2 | 6 | 10/20 | 2 | 1 | M | 7 |
| Cluster Gun† | Dx+Shoot | -2 | 6 | 10/20 | 5 | 1 | XL | 7 |

* Ignores energy shields on damage dice rolls of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

** Damage is for axe/blaster; required Str is 5

*** Anyone within 1 meter of impact takes damage

† Anyone within one meter adjacent to either side of impact (a three meter line) takes damage



Restraint Weapons

| Weapon* | Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|-----------|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Taffy Gun | Dx+Shoot | +1 | — | 5/10 | 5 | 1 | XL | 5 |
| Grappler | Dx+Shoot | | 2 | 10/20 | 1 | 1 | M | 3 |

* See the descriptions in this book for details on restraining targets

Artifact Weapons

| Weapon | Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | SIZ | Cost |
|-------------------|----------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|------|
| Fusion Gun | Dx+Shoot | +1 | 15 | 30/40 | 20 | 1 | XL | 20 |
| Neural Disruptor* | Dx+Shoot | -3 | 5 | 10/20 | 6 | 1 | S | 10 |

Element Guns:

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----------|----|---|-------|----|---|----|----|
| Lightning | Dx+Shoot | -1 | 9 | 40/60 | 10 | 1 | XL | 12 |
| Hail | Dx+Shoot | | 7 | 20/30 | 10 | 1 | XL | 10 |
| Wind | Dx+Shoot | +1 | 6 | 10/20 | 10 | 1 | XL | 9 |

* See the description in this book for details on disruptor damage

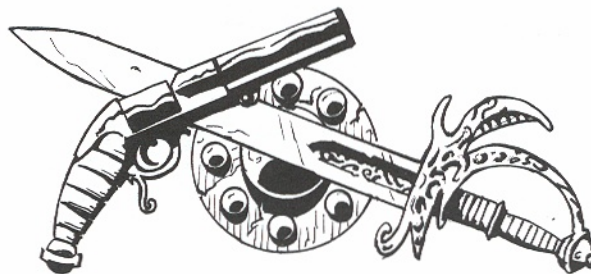
Armor Chart

| Suit | Defense | Dex | Vigor | Cost |
|--------------------|------------|-----|-------|------|
| NAS Suit | 2 + 2d | -1 | -1 | 5 |
| Abar Leaf | 3 + 6d | -1 | | 1 |
| Spikes* | add 1 + 1d | -1 | | +1 |
| Frictionless Gel** | 9d | -2 | | 10 |
| Chameleon Suit | 2 + 2d | | | 7 |
| Blur Suit | 2 | | | 8 |
| Morph Suit | 4 + 4d | -1 | | NA |
| Psi Cloak*** | 10d | | | 10 |

* Damage 2d during grapples or charges

** Can be worn over any type of armor; modifiers are cumulative

*** Defense is against mental or neural disruptor attacks only.



Abar Leaf

Defense: 3 + 6d

Dex: -1

Tech Level: 3

Cost: 1 Benefice/ 30 firebirds

This barbaric armor is used by the fervent primitives of Leminkainen, although it is said to have been an innovation of the Ascorbites of Severus (who do not suffer the suffocating effects). This alien plant is wrapped around the wearer's body in multiple strips and layers, with a special plant oil "glue" painted over it to firm it up. This creates a flexible and impervious armor. However, the wearer will slowly suffocate unless the abar leaf is cut off of him after 30 turns. For each turn after the thirtieth, the wearer suffers a loss of one Vitality point until he passes out. If the leaves are still not removed after an hour of unconsciousness, the wearer dies.

Heavy or padded clothing, leather, or synthsilk can be worn over abar leaf. However, suffocation will begin after 15 turns.

Spikes

Defense: add 1 + 1d

Damage: 2d

Dex: -1

Tech Level: 2

Cost: +1 Benefice/ 20 firebirds

Spikes can be applied to any firm armor, or small, spiked plates can be attached to flexible armors such as chain mail or leather. While they don't add much to the protection value, they are dangerous weapons in a wrestling match. When grappling or charging a foe (or being grappled or charged by a foe), the foe will suffer 2 dice of damage in addition to any other damage inflicted.

Frictionless Gel

Defense: 9d

Dex: -2

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 10 Benefice/ 500 firebirds

This amazing substance was first created during the Second Republic for use as a frictionless oil for use in advanced engines. However, someone early on realized its potential as a toy, and began marketing it as a "slimy fun gel for slick, slippery play." It is applied to a surface (such as



a piston or gear or human skin); after an hour of drying, its dried surface becomes frictionless. Obviously, this can avoid a lot of kinetic damage, but if misapplied, can lead to pratfalls. Its protection against energy weapons is only 3 dice. Gamemasters and players are encouraged to get creative with the possibilities.

Frictionless gel can be smeared over any type of armor; modifiers are cumulative.

Chameleon Suit

Defense: 2 + 2d

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 7 Benefice/ 300 firebirds

The texture and color of the armor can change to match surroundings. Just about any type of armor can become a chameleon suit, as long as it has been manufactured as such. The suit is applied with a clear lacquer of tiny, holographic nanites controlled by a central computer (usually attached by a flexible cord to a wristwatch control pad). The computer can adjust the color and texture of the suit to match its surroundings, effectively blending in to those surroundings. Add four to any Sneak rolls while moving, or six when staying still.

If the lacquer is shattered too often, nanites may be destroyed, shutting down the chameleon abilities in that section of the suit. The suit requires a fusion cell, which will last for one week of normal use, less if the suit shifts patterns often.

A chameleon suit cannot be worn with a standard or dueling energy shield, as its lacquer layer is too thick.

Blur Suit

Defense: 2

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 8 Benefice/ 500 firebirds

When this high-tech suit is activated, the wearer becomes blurry and hard to see (although not invisible). If she stays still, she is hard to notice by those who don't already know she's there (subtract eight from others' Perception rolls), but moving can betray the wearer (subtract only two from others' Perception rolls while moving). The suit uses advanced field manipulators to bend light around it and a mini-computer to adjust the shifting pattern of light as the wearer moves or lights change around her.

A blur suit cannot be combined with other armors or energy shields.

Morph Suit

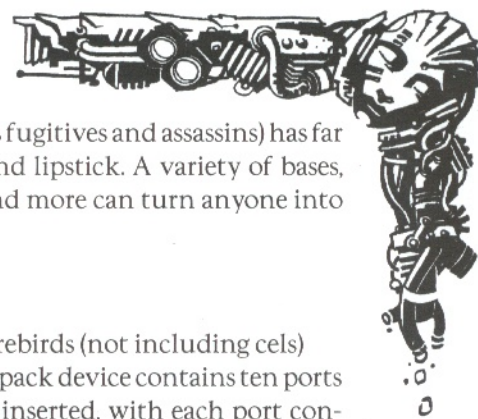
Defense: 4 + 4d

Dex: -1

Tech Level: 8

Cost: 10,000 firebirds

Perhaps the most amazing suit ever, this nanite suit generates just about anything the wearer wants, from spikes to camouflage. It is built on a base of stiff synth, and



can form weapons or any imagined physical object. The whole suit is a sort of advanced computer, hooked up to small wires taped to the base of the wearer's neck. Somehow, these trodes read the wearer's intent and translate it into the desired effect. The computer has a database of preformed objects; if an object is not in the database, it may take a few turns to get the object right. Complicated and moving machinery (such as a pistol) may not be possible without some object to mimic. It will remember any object it forms and store these in its database. The older and more experienced the suit, the more objects it can form.

Just because an object can be formed does not mean it can be used well. If the wearer forms a sword into his hand from the suit, he still must use his own Melee skill to fight with it.

These suits are extremely rare, as they were advanced for even Second Republic standards. They have not been manufactured since then. It is rumored that the suit is artificially intelligent and has a survival instinct, sometimes taking temporary control of the wearer's motor functions.

A morph suit cannot be combined with other armors or energy shields.

Psi Cloak

Defense: 10d vs. mental attacks

Tech Level: 8

Cost: 10 Benefice/ 3,000 firebirds

A Psi Cloak defends against mental powers and neural disruptors. It isn't so much a physical cloak as an energy aura around the wearer. The aura is not visible to the naked eye, but will be revealed in the ultraviolet or infrared spectrum (as a shimmering haze around the wearer). Most occult perception powers (Subtle Sight, Second Sight, etc.) will also perceive the cloak.

Physically, the cloak is like a dueling shield core, and can be concealed in a casing, such as a belt buckle, brooch or wristwatch. It requires a fusion cell and will take 10 hits (just like a shield) before shutting down. Some rarer models are known which can take more hits or defend with more dice. These are no longer manufactured and are highly sought by everyone.

Gear/Tools

Low-Light Goggles

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 2 Benefice/ 50 firebirds

These goggles magnify the available light to help their user see what is going on. Characters using these goggles take no negative modifiers to their goal numbers due to darkness unless they are in absolute darkness — a bank vault, cave or the like.

Makeup Kit

Tech Level: 4+

Cost: 1 Benefice/ 5 firebirds

A good quality makeup kit of the type used by any

guild entertainer (as well as fugitives and assassins) has far more in it than eyeliner and lipstick. A variety of bases, makeup pencils, putties and more can turn anyone into somebody else.

Fusion Pack

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 3 Benefice/ 250 firebirds (not including cels)

This bandoleer or backpack device contains ten ports where fusion cells may be inserted, with each port containing adapters for all manner of fusion cells built during the Second Republic. The circuitry in the fusion pack links all these cells, allowing a single, plugged-in item to get the power of 10 fusion cells, cutting down the need to reload. It takes three actions to insert a fusion cell into the pack, plug in an item.

Powerglove

Tech Level: 8

Cost: 5 Benefice/ 1000 firebirds (not including cels)

Designed by the Order of Engineers from stolen Vautech, this large gauntlet is widely-sought by technicians and energy-weapon wielders. A powerglove contains a series of five interconnected fusion cells. The glove's special energy transfer technology allows the glove to power one fusion-powered item picked up with it. The user need never change fusion cels again, except for those in the glove. Muster mercs value this device as it greatly decreases the need to reload during combat.

The one drawback is that it tends to malfunction near high energy fields. Whenever a personal energy shield burns out within three meters of the powerglove user, the glove will shut down for 10 turns. If it is ever in the radius of a power spike or surge, it will shut down for an entire span.

Mag Boots and Pads

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 1 Benefice/ 100 Firebirds

Mag boots and pads use electromagnets which allow their wearers to scale various metal surfaces. Mag boots have magnets on their soles and were originally used on spacecraft before artificial gravity was developed; they are also useful for boarding actions or repairing exterior hulls. Most star sailors have access to a pair of such boots. They can be used in gravity, but a pair can only bear up to 50 kilograms.

Mag pads are strap-on, circular pads which can be activated or deactivated by pressing a small button with the thumb. They essentially allow a character to climb a sheer metal surface with a Strength + Vigor roll, with each victory point allowing five meters of climbing.

Both items can be used for nonconventional uses, such as jumping on metal vehicles or attempting to grab metal weapons. They each require a fusion cel, which can last for up to 50 hours.

Drugs

Needle Rack

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 3 Benefice/ 500 firebirds, +1 Benefice/+100 firebirds for a new batch of chemicals

This heavy vest, usually made of synthsilk (armor value of 1+ 2d) is one of the more inhumane research projects of the Emperor Wars. It was built to keep soldiers in top fighting condition for hours on end by injecting them with chemicals (see Chemical Shock Troop in Chapter Five: The Military). A series of telescoping needles contained on the interior of the jacket inject whatever chemicals the diagnostic computer in the harness feels are necessary to meet the necessities of the moment. Most racks are programmed to keep the wearer fully alert for up to 48 hours and also tend his or her wounds. Unscrupulous commanders have been known to double the amount of chemicals carried in the rack to keep their troops running twice as long.

When a character wears one of these vests, she is not affected by fatigue and gains a +2 bonus to offset wound penalties — as long as the vest has chemicals. Vests also come equipped with two doses of elixir, which are used whenever the wearer is injured enough to suffer wound penalties.

The major drawback to a needle rack is that it ravages the wearer's system. When the vest is removed, the character must roll Endurance + Vigor; she must score one victory point for every three hours the vest was worn. Otherwise, the character will act sluggish and tired, suffering a -6 penalty to all actions. This period of lethargy lasts for as long as the character wore the needle rack. If a critical

failure is rolled, the character suffers one wound level of damage.

Needle racks are usually manufactured by noble houses for their Chemical Shock Troops, but the Muster has also been known to use them.

Zipper Collar

Tech Level: 6

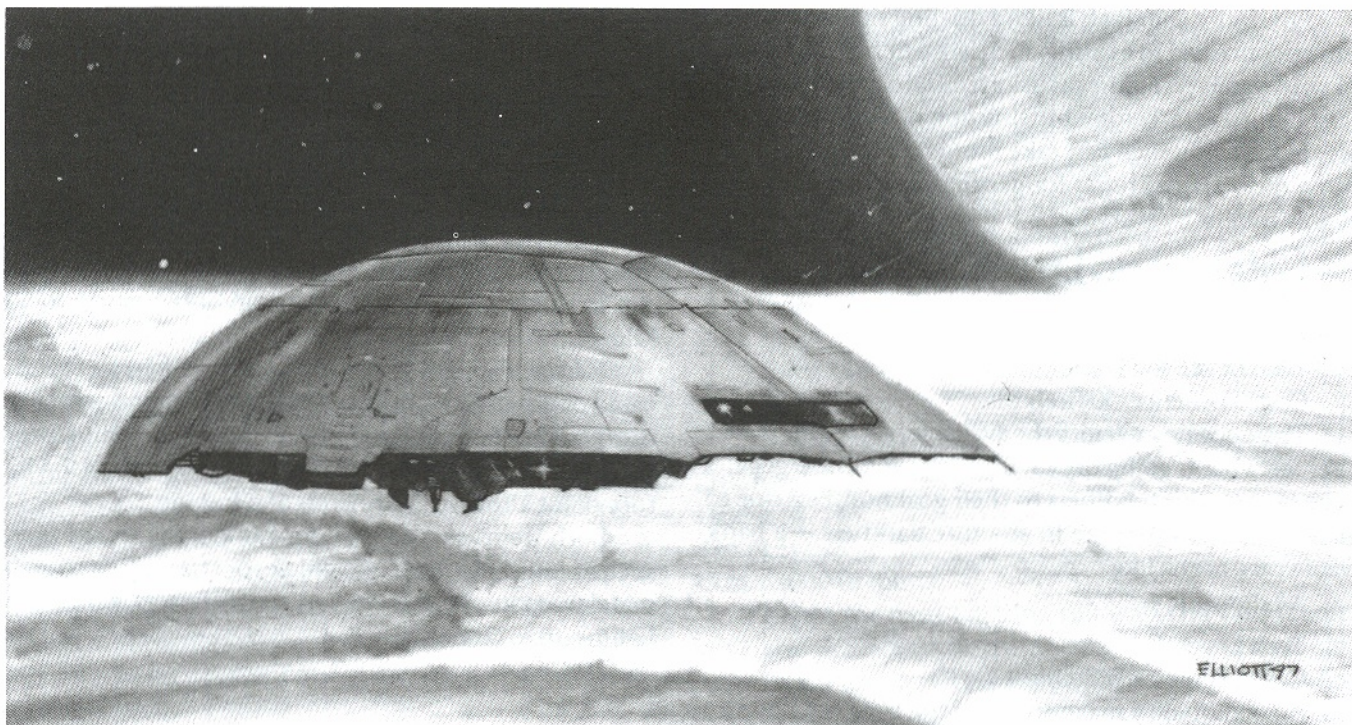
Cost: 3 Benefice/ 300 firebirds, +50 firebirds per refill

Like the Needle Rack, these collars were designed to be worn by Chemical Shock Troops. Each collar holds up to five doses of Zipper, a derivative of methamphetamine and several other high-energy drugs. Five buttons along the outside ring of the collar control the dosages; each button injects one dose.

One dose greatly boosts the user's energy level and alertness. All Body characteristics and Perception are increased by one, while Calm is reduced by one. Each dose lasts for 10 turns. The effects of multiple doses are cumulative: five doses provides +5 Body and Per, -5 Calm, and lasts for 50 turns (about two and a half minutes).

The problem is that, if more than one dose is taken within a single span, the character must deal with withdrawal once the effects are over. Roll Endurance + Vigor. If successful, the character is exhausted, and suffers to all goal rolls for the next span. If the roll fails, the character collapses, not unconscious but too tired to move (-10 to all goal rolls). On a critical failure, the character has a heart attack; he takes two dice of damage per dose he took. This damage cannot be resisted.

In some armies, the officer in charge of the Chem Shock squad holds a remote control which can release the drugs, instead of allowing the soldiers to choose when to use it.





Spaceships

Hazred Sidestepper

Grade: Atmosphere
Builder: Hazred Shipyards at Criticorum
Tech Level: 6
Length: 23 meters
Width: 14 meters
Crew: 2 (pilot and gunner/engineer)
Passengers: 4
Cargo (Internal): 20 metric tons
Cargo (External): None
Speed: 20% lightspeed (5 days to a jumpgate)
Jumps: 3
Supplies: 2 months
Sensors: Neutrinos 7
Weaponry: Med blaster cannon x2, torpedo pod
Maneuvering: +1
Armor: 3 + 3d
Vitality: -8/-4/-2/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0
Cost: 100 Benefice / 180,000 Firebirds

Description: Designed somewhere between sleek and inconspicuous, the Sidestepper follows the popular half ellipse design of the latter Second Republic. The major departure from standard design is that the ship is plated to appear almost completely smooth. There are no sections that appear to be anything other than polished steel plating, giving it a very shiny and sleek appearance. The ship is sturdy for its size, and quick — a smuggler's dream. While it is not meant for heavy combat, it has enough armament to stall most opponents until it can escape. All the weapons are concealed within the hull, deployable within seconds. The only drawback to the ship is the small cargo space, which is why few large shipping firms have shown interest in this costly but seemingly inefficient ship.

History: Built by the Hazred family for al-Malik patrons during the Emperor Wars, the Sidestepper makes no qualms about being a smuggler's ship. It is little known outside its al-Malik patrons, Charioteer pilots and Hazred designers (working from old records, as is usual). Most spacefarers assume that the little ship is a low quality yacht or an exploratory vessel, which helps to avoid suspicion.

Common Modifications: Most modifications for the ship include more weaponry or sensors. Few people tamper with the engines, which are somewhat temperamental (-2 goal for all engine repairs).

| Item | Time | Pts | Max | Cost |
|-----------------------------|--------|-----|----------|--------|
| Restoring Vitality (per pt) | 14 hrs | 10 | Vitality | 1200 |
| Armor (per pt) | 16 hrs | 12 | +2 pts | 3500 |
| Armor (per die | 13 hrs | 11 | +2 die | 2000 |
| +1% lightspeed | 24 hrs | 16 | +5% | 20,000 |
| Upgrade: Hvy Blaster | 16 hrs | 12 | | 1,000 |
| Upgrade Sensors | 20 hrs | 18 | +2 | 2,000 |

Imperial Combat Pod

(Raptor Egg)

Grade: Void
Builder: Imperial Shipyards at Tethys
Tech Level: 6
Length: 8 meters
Width: 3 meters
Crew: 1 (pilot)
Passengers: 14
Cargo (Internal): None
Cargo (External): None
Speed: 5% lightspeed (5 AU range)
Jumps: None
Supplies: 3 days
Sensors: Radar 4
Weaponry: None
Maneuvering: 0
Armor: 1 + 1d
Vitality: -4/-2/0/0
Cost: 5 Benefice/ 5000 firebirds

Combat pods are small craft constructed by the Imperial Navy for ship-to-ship boarding actions. They are used to transport boarding marines or Marauders to an enemy craft. When a pod reaches the enemy ship, it magnetically latches and a ring of lasers cuts a hole in the ship's hull within 30 seconds to a minute. A makeshift airlock attaches, and the crew of the pod enters the ship, axes swinging.

Destroyers and frigates usually have a complement of such pods on board, replacing some of their escape pods and lifeboats (combat pods can act as lifeboats for a short time).

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\$25.00 FS #229
ISBN 1-888906-07-3

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