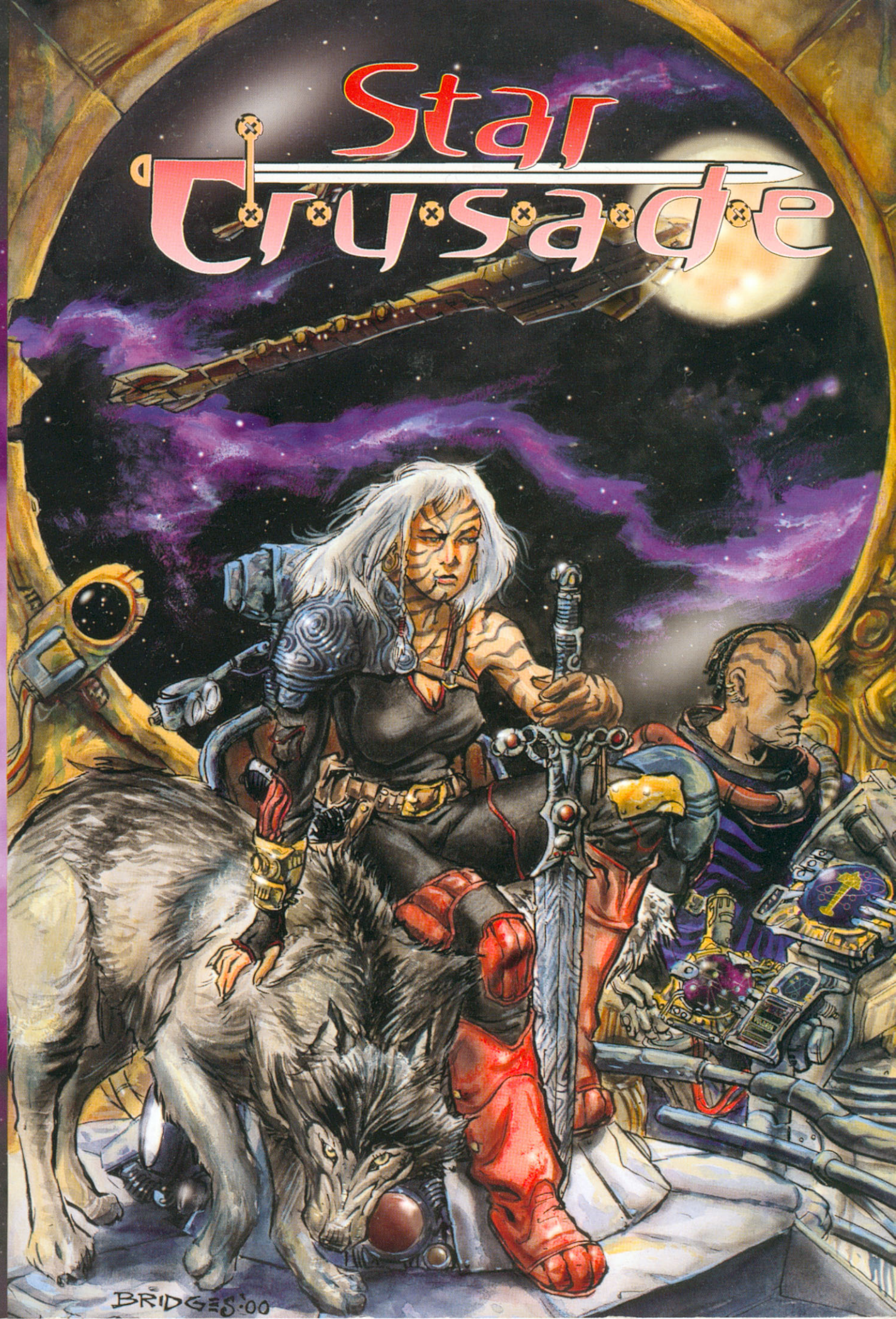




Star Cruisade



BRIDGES '00

FADING SUNS™



Jumpweb of Barbarian space

Star Crusade



by
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Emblems:

The emblems on the front cover represent the Kurgan Caliphate and the Vuldrok Star-Nation.

Pilgrims:

For when you walk among strangers, if you bear arms, you will be met with arms. And when you bear instead open palms, mayhap you will still be met with arms. But if you bear an open heart — Pancreator willing — you may be met in kind, and thus may light catch light and reflect tenfold throughout the universe. Then shall new and unseen suns begin to burn...

Scanned by Ivan Krenyenko.

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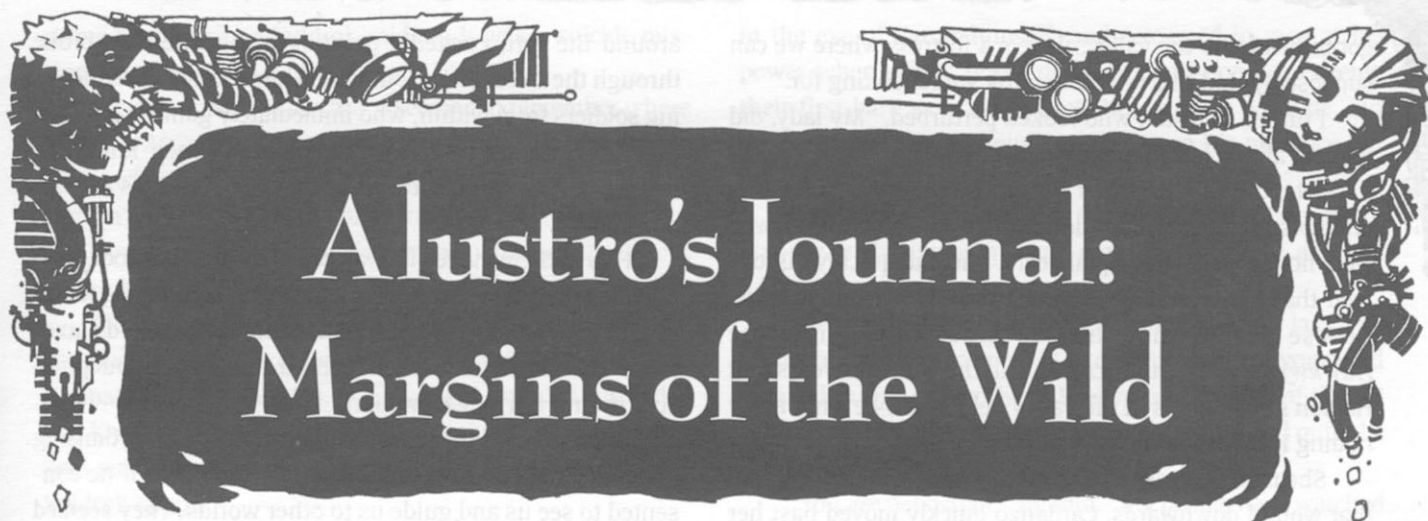
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Alustro's Journal: Margins of the Wild

The margins of the wild seem much closer here.

I couldn't help but feel pity for the stray mongrel from the woods that stared at me, its ribs shockingly apparent on its starved torso. It eyed me with a mixture of wariness and desperation, wondering if I was the sort to kick it or feed it.

I opened my satchel and withdrew a strip of dried meat, part of the travel rations we had purchased in Elfhome before making our way into this Pancreator-forsaken country of Jyandhom. Hargard has proven every step of the way that it is not one of the Known Worlds. I threw the strip at the mongrel's feet; it leapt backwards before realizing what it was I had offered. It lunged greedily at the meat and gobbled it in an instant, and then looked to me for more.

I sighed and turned away, looking into the thatch hovel where Erian and the rest of our group held converse with the local matron. We sought a meeting with the infamous star-thane, Haldon Boldeyes, in the hopes of acquiring his patronage as an escort and guide deeper into Vuldrok space. While the idea of allying with one of the raiders who routinely pillaged Hawkwood space was initially abhorrent to me, it's necessity is now obvious after weeks of failure to obtain jumpkeys to other Vuldrok worlds.

Our lack of knowledge about these planets and their people proves a constant hindrance as we betray our ignorance to the locals with every word we speak. What little information was provided us by fellow Questing Knights and Cohorts has taken us this far and provided us with a number of potential guides, along with some murky idea of what other worlds lie further beyond Hargard's gates. But it has proven terribly incomplete, full of hearsay and bigoted opinion relayed as fact.

I felt something tugging at my satchel and looked down to see the mongrel had advanced upon me from behind and now held my bag in its teeth, attempting to wrest it from

me. I yanked it away, crying "No!", but it clung tighter and growled evilly. I pulled again and freed its jaws, but the beast, boldened by its taste of meat, leapt at me, barking.

I jumped back, afraid it would bite me and bring a host of infections, but it whimpered and ran, quickly disappearing into the nearby woods. I recovered myself, wondering at its sudden cowardice, and turned to enter the hovel — only to run straight into Onggangarak, my Vorox friend. He had silently come from the hovel upon hearing my cry to stand behind me. No wonder the mongrel had run off.

He chuckled and smiled, shaking his head. "A lesson about wild beasts: if you feed them, they will see you as food."

"Well, I... it didn't seem completely feral. I mean, it did approach me. Surely it's been around the people of this village long enough to become somewhat domestic."

Ong smiled. "I know something of 'becoming domestic,' and it is but a thin veneer over a surface of instinct. Some would say it is not worth the effort, but I disagree, appreciating greatly the wonders of civilization. I can thus see the lack of contrast between the two more clearly, perhaps, than you, little father. You have lived long among those schooled in morals."

"Is not certain morality inborn? While dire circumstance may try even the best of us, does not even a cub understand and seek love?"

"Perhaps. It is hard to remember what I thought before I was taught to think in the known manner. It is an argument without ready propositions."

I laughed. "Ong, you could argue theology before the Metropolitan of Kish! Most men are not so familiar with our own language as you."

We were interrupted by Julia, exiting the hovel followed by the rest of our party. "Enough philosophy, you two. We've

got to head into the valley; there's a fortress where we can supposedly find this fabled Vuldrok we're looking for."

I turned to Erian, who looked perturbed. "My lady, did you get all the information you needed?"

"No," she sighed, tired after these weeks of frustrating attempts to pretend the Vuldrok informers she interviewed were not peasants but equal peers. She had quickly discovered that her typical noble airs aroused only hatred here. "These people know how to hide secrets from the *Hawkwyrdedda*, as they call us. But the woman swears that Haldon's steading is in the valley below — if he's not away raiding Hawkwood fiefs."

She marched past us toward the woods, to the thin trail that wound downwards. Cardanzo quickly moved past her to take the lead, and Ong dropped to all sixes and bounded into the trees to the right side of the path, scouting our flank and remaining hidden in case the need for surprise arose. The rest of us, I, Julia, Sanjuk and Lt. Gosado, followed behind our liege.

Lt. Gosado is still new to our company, but her military discipline has served her well in our strange surroundings these past weeks. Her presence among us has calmed Erian, for she is a soldier sworn to Erian's uncle, General Hanmei Usaki Li Halan; it is almost as if the old warrior were here himself, so well does Lt. Gosado know his proverbs and tactical wisdom.

It was a cool day, but not as cold as it was rumored to get in this region. I pulled my robes tighter, but had no need for anything thicker. As we marched through the woods, I found time to reflect on the immediate environment and took some pleasure in its peaceful beauty. Green conifers dominated, but the occasional open meadow displayed brightly-colored flowers, with the slight buzz of insects about. Birdsong rang through the trees from various distances, undisturbed by the sounds of any human-made thing — there was no whine of flutter or skimmer, no jangling even of horse-tack or horse-drawn wheelcarts. While this is not unusual even in the Known Worlds, it was new to me to experience this nearly uninterrupted for weeks. Even the poorest fief in the empire has some form of craft or tech to eventually disturb the silence.

We soon came into the valley, and the trees opened up to reveal a broad meadow with a trickling stream cutting through its center, its source revealed as a thin cascade from a rising mountain chain on the far side. In the middle of the field was a stone fort, supposedly built — according to our recent village informant — years ago by the earliest Vuldrok settlers. It was an old ward station marking the boundary of a now extinct thanedom. The only sign of modernism to it were the ceramsteel planks bolted to serve as shutters on its windows, stolen, I surmised, from some spaceship hulk.

Children ran and played in the stream and mud ponds

around the fort, excitedly pointing at us when we broke through the trees. Their commotion summoned bored-looking soldiers from within, who immediately gained some energy upon seeing us. They called more of their kind, and waited patiently but glowering by their home as we approached.

Five of them moved forward as we neared the door, each handling his or her (there were women soldiers among them) sheathed or slung weapons, an assortment of swords, axes and even a blaster-axe, much notched and scorched but probably in fine working condition.

Erian greeted them and explained our goal, promising Imperial riches and rewards to Haldon Boldeyes if he consented to see us and guide us to other worlds. They seemed unimpressed, but sent a man inside to inquire of their chief. He eventually returned, this time smiling, and gestured for us to enter the fort.

It was surprisingly cosmopolitan inside, its walls hung with fine hangings and fine art paintings — loot from Known Worlds holdings. A short passage opened to stairs on either side (upwards to the left, down to the right) and forward, into a main chamber, where a hearty laugh greeted us.

A man in a worn but well-kept Charioteer jumpsuit opened his arms and smiled at us. His chest was studded with patches and badges, both Merchant League and Vuldrok, and an array of weaponry (blaster pistol, dirk and skinning knife) and tools hung from his belt — including a key ring with at least 12 jumpkeys.

"Aha," he cried. "Julia Abrams! Little Jules!"

Julia stared aghast at the man, and finally stammered out a reply. "Gordon Samothrace? It can't be you!"

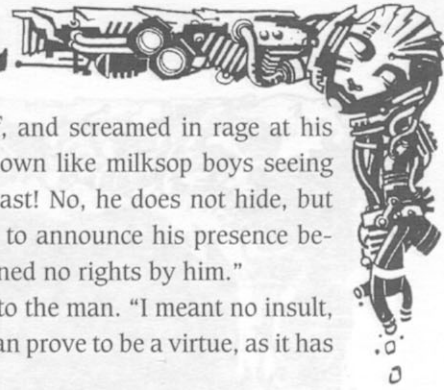
"It is! It is! In the flesh and healthier than ever!"

"But the travelwaste disease! You were dying of radiation poisoning last time I saw you at the Academy on Leagueheim. Pancreator's mercy, that was nearly 10 years ago!"

"A lifetime. Time enough to be born anew. I have put weakness behind me and live with gusto, Little Jules, my best pilot in the whole squadron!" He turned to Erian, as if she were but one among many of us, not the obvious noble she was. "Nobody took to tax collection maneuvers like Jules! The Reeves were ready to graduate her then and there as long as she signed on with the fleet. But not Jules! She had her own gig going already! What was it? A contract with the Li Halan worlds for a Rampart-Kish mercantile route was it?"

"Something like that," Julia said, not wanting to talk about her past sour contracts. "What the hell are you doing here? How did you get here? How long have you been here?"

"Oh, going on seven years I suppose. I wanted to go out fighting, Jules, not die in some sickbed racking up Apothecary bills. I hired on with a Hawkwood noble seeking re-



venge against some Vuldrok raiders. It was a suicide mission for all us, but I had nothing to lose."

Erian coughed. Samothrace seemed to remember where he was. "Ah, what a host! C'mon, sit down." He gestured to the benches surrounding a large throne, what looked to be a captain's chair torn from some starship deck. He sat on a fur-covered ottoman beside the throne, while we spread out on the benches.

"To continue my tale," he said, winking at Julia. "I came here to Hargard intending to die in a glorious space battle against barbarian hordes. Well, we got boarded instead. I was knocked out cold and woke up captured instead of dead. Sold as slaves, we were separated and sent on deeper into Vuldrok space."

Erian again coughed. Samothrace smiled. "To make a long story short, I worked my way into the trust of our ship captain — helping steer the ship after its own pilot got himself shot got me many kudos. I was eventually freed and offered the position of pilot on Haldon Boldeye's ship. Those were hectic times. So harried that I almost forgot about my disease. It seemed to disappear. I learned that I loved this new, reckless life, with no idiotic bureaucratic authority from on high to tell me what to do. I haven't had a disease symptom in three years. The life of a raider has cured me."

Julia shook her head, staring in wonder at him. "Amazing."

I prodded Julia. "You seem to have an awful lot of old acquaintances scattered across the stars. Are you going to properly introduce your friend to our liege?"

"Oh! Uh, yeah. Sorry about that. Commander Gordon Samothrace, this is Lady Erian Li Halan, currently serving in the Emperor's service."

Erian nodded at the pilot and began to speak, but he cut her off. "Another Questing Knight? Been a lot of you guys around here lately, poking around, asking questions, all trying to get to the Vuldrok heartworlds."

"My mission of diplomatic embassy is a noble one, commander," Erian replied, hiding her annoyance well. "Is it so wrong to greet one's neighbors with visits?"

"Considering that these neighbors — including me — have been pillaging your Emperor's holdings for some time now, yeah, it makes some of us suspicious."

"And what of Haldon Boldeyes? Do you speak for him? Or does he hide behind pilots, fearful to meet us himself?"

Our new friend frowned, not a look of anger, but disappointment, as if a dinner guest used the wrong fork. Before he could continue, one of the soldiers who had brought us in spoke, stepping further into the room.

"Fear? Haldon fears no one and no thing! He has spat

in the eye of Satrar himself, and screamed in rage at his power when others broke down like milksop boys seeing their first bare woman's breast! No, he does not hide, but neither is he stupid enough to announce his presence before strangers who have earned no rights by him."

Erian stood and bowed to the man. "I meant no insult, star-thane. But impatience can prove to be a virtue, as it has here."

The soldier stared warily for a moment and laughed. "What an odd way to speak! I like it. Too many of your kind demand things or beg them. Few speak honestly of them." He walked past us and spun around as he dropped onto the throne. So this was Haldon.

"You are persistent," he said. "My people have watched you and sent word of your seeking me these past weeks. I told them to delay you, to test your resolve and demeanor. So far, you have proved yourselves able enough. Perhaps you would not be so annoying on a long star journey as I at first thought, eh? Gordon, how say you to their request?"

Samothrace smiled at us, looking longest at Julia. "I say honor it, thane. There is much to be learned on both sides."

Haldon nodded. "It is done then. You want me to guide you into the Vuldrok Star-Nation. I want you to tell me of your emperor and pay me 25,000 firebirds."

"What?!" Julia cried. "That's robbery!"

Both Haldon and Gordon roared with laughter. "You think I got my jumpkeys for free?" Haldon said. "They cost me in blood and broken tech, and they'll now cost you."

"A high fee," Erian said. "One we shall pay. On one condition: our portion of any raids you involve us in goes towards this fee."

Haldon was shocked. "Ah, I'm seen through. How did you know I intended to raid with you aboard?"

"You can't afford to travel far without stopping for booty. If we're with you, you'd surely expect us to pull our fair share of the duty."

Haldon nodded and narrowed his eyes at Erian. "Aye, I would. And if you turn against me, to protect one of your own kind, the deal's off and I leave you in the void."

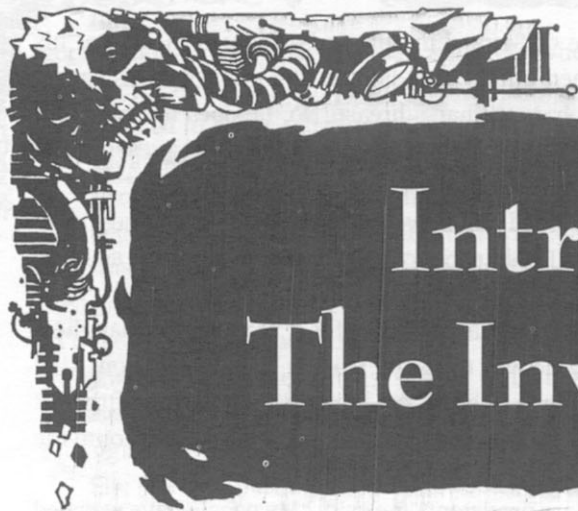
"Conditions accepted," Erian said, smiling slightly.

I was astonished. I could not believe my lady intended to engage in piracy to achieve her goals. I looked to Cardanzo and saw that he was not surprised at all. Surveying all my friends, it appeared that only Ong was equally surprised, but he smiled at the prospect of action while I paled at it.

"We leave for Khotan at the end of the week then," Haldon exclaimed. "And then on to Frost."

It appeared that the margins of the wild were not only close, they had engulfed us.





Introduction: The Invisible Quest

"Hear ye! Sir Gadavalt Justinian returned! Tales of barbarian horrors and golden treasures! Strange beasts fought and defeated! New lands explored and conquered in Alexius' name! Fierce space battles with pirates and marauders! Hear ye! Full report at Sruevan Square today after vespers! The Carnivalers announce an enactment of the adventure a week hence at the Plydek Pavilion upon eventide! Come one and all!"

— Recently heard Town Crier guildsman (Byzantium Secundus)

The Questing Knights have returned from sojourns in barbarian space with jumpkeys, but they are not sharing with everyone. They are under orders to keep these jumpkeys within the hands of Imperial agents only. Of course, some keys have been copied already, as evinced by the guild's presence in the new frontier. The Church, too, has sent missionaries there, claiming their keys were found in old cathedral archives or such (an unlikely story, but none dare question them outright). Likewise, Hawkwoods (with captured Vuldrok keys) and Hazat (Kurgan keys) also pass beyond the borders of the Known Worlds.

In 4892, Regent Jurgan Shoko Li Halan declared the General Interdiction of Worlds against travel to and from barbarian space except for military purposes. While it has never been repealed, it has almost never been enforced. Alexius has just enforced it — Imperial ships interdicted a League freighter bound from the newly-rediscovered world of Collier's Landing, a "show piece" interdiction to warn other that Alexius does not want people on a stampede to barbarian space.

He has released a decree declaring his Questing Knights and their Cohorts exempt from the General Interdiction Order (along with all Imperial agents, whether from the Eye or the Fleet), and has also exempted House Hazat's military effort for Hira alone (not for other worlds). The Hawkwoods are allowed to send scouting missions forth, to bolster their

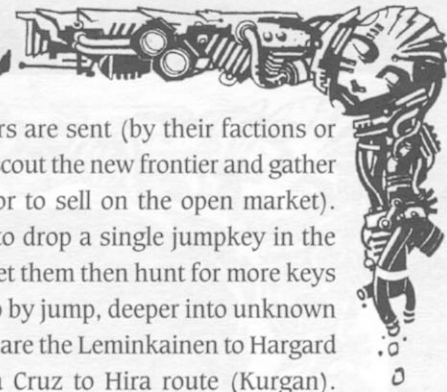
defenses against the Vuldrok. Hawkwood old liners claim it is not enough, while younger members recognize it as a possible boon Alexius has allowed the house — a head start on reaping return on all their losses to the barbarians over the centuries without worry of other noble house intervention.

The Church has also received exemption for a certain number of declared missionaries per annum — a number far too restrictive for its tastes. The League guilds have been invited to bid for contracts to accompany diplomatic missions or send forth their own few merchant ships to test the waters of trade; rather than publicly bicker about the unfairness of it all, they are falling over themselves, backstabbing one another to gain the choicest contracts. Once these are sewn up, then they'll plot to reverse the edict or widen it to their advantage.

This whole thing has, of course, sparked deep controversy. The League, houses and Church grumble that Alexius is attempting to overstep his power and deny all the factions their right to plunder barbarian lands, but Alexius's supporters claim he is trying to build a diplomatic solution to the barbarian problem. Nobles grumble about the promise of land grants to the Questing Knights, leaving most of the houses with no chance of gaining new lands. While they all secretly send their own forth into the frontier, the Decados scheme, the al-Malik renew their ties to the guilds, and the Li Halan whisper in the Church's ear about the same thing the Hazat have long pleaded for — crusade.

If the patriarch were to declare a crusade, it would override the General Interdiction of Worlds edict — unless Alexius declared his own crusade. As emperor, his power is supreme (he did not sign the Church's Holy Writ), but he has yet to challenge the Church's traditional power, and many doubt he could even do so. It would give his other rivals all the excuse they need to turn against him.

Indeed, the Hawkwoods sought an Imperial war against



the Vuldrok, but Alexius has avoided this and seems intent on continuing this tact. Without such a war, many in the house see a crusade as their only option to take the fight back to the Vuldrok in full.

The Brother Battle order rallies for a holy crusade, and has begun applying what pressure it can, sending Brothers into barbarians space — legally or not — to gather evidence of heresy and Antinomy among the barbarians. The Eskatonics, however, fear a crusade, for Magister Moore claims that dire portents and ill omens foretell a dangerous future for the Faithful should it come to pass. The Amaltheans oppose such a military endeavor on general principles, preferring to lobby for the few allotted missionary positions in the hopes of showing the heathens a more enlightened side of the Prophet's Church. Temple Avesti, unsurprisingly, is all for a crusade; any excuse to hunt heresy is good — especially against those who don't have powerful noble houses or guilds to protect them.

But the patriarch is unsure whether such a crusade would benefit or harm the Church. What if it loses? What if the heretics win? The Church can't risk defeat against an enemy they barely know — let alone two large enemies (would the Vuldrok ally with the Kurgans?). For now, most believe that the patriarch seeks further intelligence on the heretics, sending missionaries forth to get it, and offering rewards to any of the faithful who provide verifiable data.

Hence, the borders slowly open, and adventurers, explorers, spies, missionaries and black market merchants flood through — some legal, most not — in a desperate bid to plant flags, make claims, gather intelligence, not to mention boldly seeking out new worlds and civilizations.

Out there, beyond the border, there's no backup, no cavalry waiting to charge — yet. The next year will greatly decide the fate of the coming millennium — is it to be war or peace? And who will come out the strongest: Alexius, the noble houses, the Church, the League, the barbarians, or some unexpected and perhaps as yet unknown party?

Gamemastering Star Crusade

Barbarian space is too large to fully describe in one volume. The book you hold in your hands details the Kurgan and Vuldrok worlds; a second forthcoming volume, entitled "Lost Worlds: Star Crusade 2," will cover the independent lost worlds, those unaligned to the Caliphate or the Star-Nation. However, an outline of the independent planets appears in the Appendix (see *The New Frontier*).

For gamemasters, the number of possible dramas and epics set in barbarian space is endless. Certain prominent plots suitable for player characters come to mind, however.

Known Worlds Player Characters

The following plot ideas can be used with Known Worlds player characters entering barbarian space.

Scouting: The characters are sent (by their factions or their own restless spirits) to scout the new frontier and gather evidence (for their leaders or to sell on the open market). The best way to run this is to drop a single jumpkey in the player characters' laps, and let them then hunt for more keys as they work their way, jump by jump, deeper into unknown territory. Good starting spots are the Leminkainen to Hargard route (Vuldrok) or the Vera Cruz to Hira route (Kurgan). Other routes to any of the independent worlds are also possible.

The Hajj: The characters follow in the footsteps of the famed 19th century adventurer of Old Urth, Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton, who traveled among Muslims disguised as a pilgrim to Mecca. Beginning at Hira, the group travels with a well-guarded but incognito pilgrimage onwards to Khayyam, encountering every aspect of Kurgan culture along the way. But beware — members of the Ikhwan-i-Sihr may travel alongside, disguised as well.

Kurgan Players

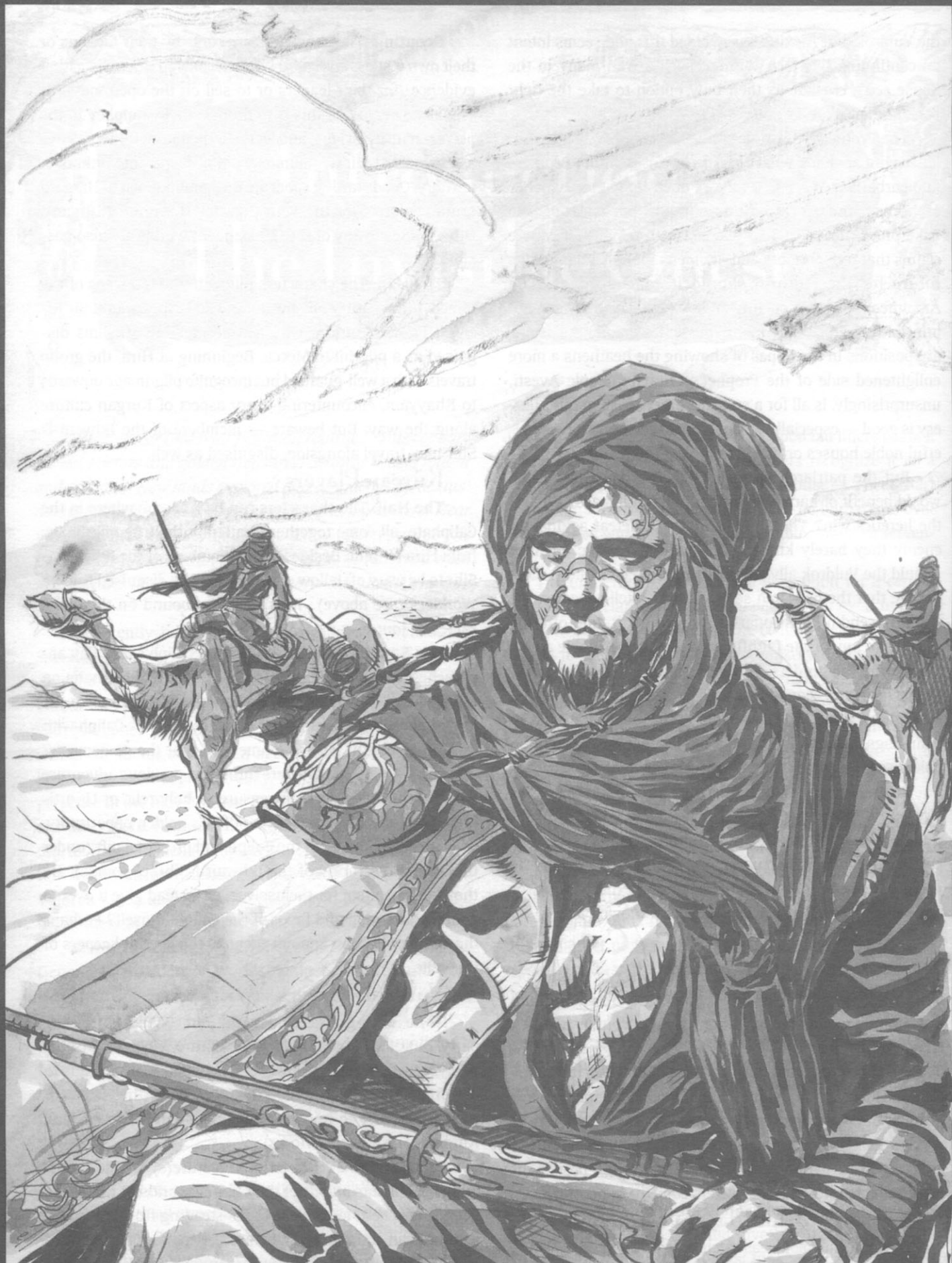
The Hajj: The characters can be from anywhere in the Caliphate, all come together to attempt the true pilgrimage from Hira to Irem. Besides secret members of the Ikhwan-i-Sihr to be wary of, fellow pilgrims could be disguised Known Worlders (see above). Tests of faith abound on this most sacred of journeys.

You Say It's Your Birthday: The Caliph's birthday approaches, and a grand party is scheduled by his khans on every world. Now is an unprecedented chance for even the lowliest person to rise in favor by presenting the Caliph with an unrivaled gift. It is recommended that the gamemaster first run the player characters through a previous adventure wherein they gain a great treasure (a holy relic or Ur artifact); they are then made aware of this golden opportunity, where all may approach the Caliph and present a gift (under the watchful scrutiny of the Ikhwan-i-Sihr, of course). Do they keep the item for themselves, or instead give it over to gain the attention and favor of the Caliph himself? Perhaps the Caliph will even appoint them as the special keepers of this relic...

Vuldrok Players

Gone Viking: The characters join a Vuldrok raiding party, out of an urge for glory, adventure, violence, lust for booty, or a genuine need to feed one's family. This leads to all sorts of potential trouble, from new rivals (the victims or their protectors) to unexpected competition (other raiders, Kurgans or Known Worlders).

Grendel Hunt: A mysterious creature(s) threatens outlying settlements on one of the Vuldrok worlds. A thane has begged any hero to come save his steading from this menace. Is it an unknown alien race? A malformed Changed human? An unearthed golem programmed to destroy? Or some demon thing from the Dark Between the Stars?





Kurga Caliphate

A traveler from the Empire of Alexius Hawkwood will be struck by the dazzling contrasts found among the worlds of the Kurga Caliphate. Breathtaking luxury lives alongside abject poverty; plump, perfumed hedonists take counsel with skeletal ascetics; refinement, piety and civility mark every social interaction, while crimes are punished with gutwrenching brutality. To Known Worlders, Kurgan space is a lawless, barbarous region, devoid of any guidance from the Royal Houses or inspiration from the Universal Church, where even the Merchant League hesitates to trade.

The peoples of the Caliphate, however, look upon the Known Worlds with similar feelings. In their view, Kurgan society is the most perfected of all cultures, the last bastion of enlightenment in a chaotic universe. Everybody occupies a place in the well-ordered social system, directed by the wise and beneficent Caliph who rules in the name of the Maker of Stars.

Egon's Worlds

Kurgan history and culture began with a single man, just as modern Kurgan society revolves around the Caliph. That man was Bjorn Egon, whose lifetime straddles the end of the Diaspora and the start of the Second Republic — indeed, early historians considered him one of the “founding fathers” of the Republic (although this characterization, the product of his aggressive public-relations executives, was disputed). A shadowy figure, heir to a large mercantile fortune and usurper of many noble holdings, Egon was a ruthless businessman who maintained a wall of absolute privacy to isolate himself from public life. In truth, Egon despised Republican ideals, viewing their ethic of equality as a threat to his accomplishments and an attempt to deprive him of his immense wealth. Later Republican historians depict him as a merciless tyrant to his employees, embodying all the abuses of power, wealth and privilege normally attributed to the nobility.

In the early 36th century Egon acquired a failing mining concern, which claimed to possess the jumpcodes to two mineral-rich planets beyond Khayyam (then connected to Sutek). Egon moved in to set up shop, keeping his new interest as secret as possible in order to avoid the anti-monopoly laws of the new Republic. Over the next several decades, Egon gradually diverted manpower and equipment from his other businesses, keeping false records to show the Senate, bribing space patrol officials at Khayyam to look the other way when his transports jumped through their system, and moving his workforce in ships with portholes painted over to keep them from knowing where they were being sent.

Envious of the pageantry and splendour of the late Diasporan nobility, Egon created his own private empire, re-educating his employees and indoctrinating their children into an artificial culture of his own devising, a jumble of influences from Central Asia and the Middle East of ancient Urth, to which he gave the Central Asian name of “Kurga.” Part of Egon’s plan was to keep his workers dependent upon him both personally and socially, as well as economically, by setting himself up as a divine ruler. Another part was to create a web of scenic worlds with strange colorful inhabitants for use as his own private playground, into which he could invite his closest friends or rich and powerful people he wished to impress.

Egon and his successors managed to keep his private empire hidden until the late 38th century, when Republican authorities discovered the secret jumpweb and moved in to liberate the captive employee population. In the process they opened the secluded jumproutes to free travel, tourism and exploration. Egon’s cultural indoctrinators had done their work well, however. The “Kurgan” people regarded the new Republican influences as alien and abhorrent, and the Republican welfare system imposed upon them as a degrading form of oppression. Most eventually fled the cities where the Republican system was strongest and lived in the unde-

veloped wildernesses of the newly terraformed planets, ignored and ultimately forgotten by the authorities.

Sata Natura

Kurgan culture, such as it was at that time, enjoyed a slight notoriety in the late Republican era when Sata Natura, a nomad-born Kurgan woman, capitalized upon her exotic beauty, endearing social skills and shrewd business savvy to become one of the top entertainers of the late 40th century. Separated from her tribe while still very young, Natura worked as a prostitute in the poverty-stricken cities of Al Fashir, then as a dancer and singer with a number of traveling theater troupes before obtaining a contract with a large holo-vid company. By the 3960s she was not only the most widely recognized celebrity in the universe but also confidente, physical therapist and secret lover to some of the most prominent men and women of the late Second Republic. In the successful holo-vid *Jumping To Nineveh*, a singer and a comedian travel to the mythical planet Nineveh (the Kurgan-inspired sets and costumes of which became vogue among many Republicans) and form a serio-comic love triangle with the local Queen, amply portrayed by La Natura. Her career was so extensive that examples of her work have survived the past millenium in both Kurga and the Known Worlds, in the form of poster art, holoreal models and prerecorded vocal intonations such as "Thank you for doing business with us and have a pleasant day," "Please watch your step when exiting the vehicle," and the memorable "This installation will self-destruct in five... four... three..."

Sata Natura (a Latin stage name — her given name long forgotten) used her covert position of influence to lobby for Kurgan interests among senators and corporate magnates, working to stem the massive influx of tourists to Irem and exempt the most remote nomadic tribes from the mandatory census. She retired from public life a decade before the Fall when her scandalous politicking was brought to light amidst rumors that she had dosed many unwitting heads of state with exotic drugs to achieve her ends. Through her contacts she learned of a Philosopher's Stone which exerted a powerful influence upon the jumpgate at Hira; during the Hazat coup against House Chauki, she lead a squadron of Kurgan nationalists who seized the artifact and used it to shut down the jumproute from Hira to Vera Cruz. Proclaimed a Kurgan folk hero during her own lifetime, many legends are told of her exploits during the turbulence of the Fall; when the welfare system collapsed, she was said to have halted the bloodiest food riot on Tsuma with but a few soft-spoken words. When Khayyam elected to seal its jumpgate, Natura convinced them to allow her one last tour of Hira, where she told the Kurgan populace of Khayyam's decision — which would effectively seal Hira off from jump travel as well. In a series of dramatic and impassioned personal appearances,

Natura foretold that one day the route through Khayyam would re-open and the people of Hira could rejoice a united Kurga.

Anarchy and Barbarism

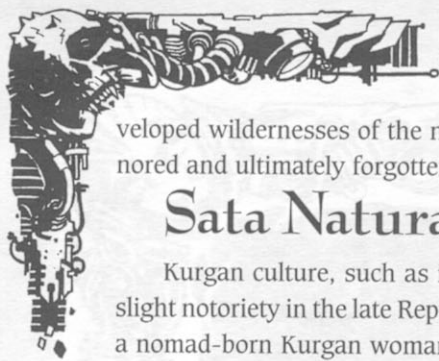
After the Fall, major population centers — weakened by their dependence upon Egon and later the Republic — either consolidated under military dictators or degenerated into anarchy. Driven by starvation or local oppression, many fled into the surrounding countryside, occupying any farmlands they could hold or attempting to take up the nomadic way of life (with varying degrees of success). Tiny isolated kingdoms rose and toppled, warred, allied or were subsumed into nascent empires all over the Kurgan worlds. Few lasted for very long, however, due to the ever-growing strength of the nomads, whose self-reliant lifestyle left them virtually unaffected by the Fall and subsequent turmoil. Tribes raided weaker kingdoms when resources were scarce, and banded together to overrun larger empires which they perceived as a threat. Some settled in to enjoy the fruits of their conquest, and some even took to the stars as spacefarers whose wanderlust could not be contained within a single planet.

In the early 44th century, Kurgan nationalists on Khayyam succeeded in reactivating the jumproute to Al Fashir, initiating a brief period of trade and prosperity among the Kurgan worlds until Vuldrok scouts discovered the jumproute to Irem and began to explore the Kurgan jumpweb. The fractious Kurgan states had no major planetary defenses, their few remaining starships reserved almost exclusively for trade or pilgrimage caravans (which were allowed to pass peacefully by all Kurgan worlds, and thus were seldom heavily armed or escorted). Meanwhile, at Hira, the jumproute to Vera Cruz spontaneously re-opened for one year, during which an exploratory mission from the Hazat seized a fief on the backward planet before being cut off from their homeworld.

Vuldrok invaders met with little resistance in Kurgan space — aside from interplanetary nomads who put up too much fight for too little loot — and for the next century and a half they raided and plundered their way across Irem, Tsuma, Beliah and Al Fashir. The Vuldrok advance was finally stemmed at Khayyam, where more technology had survived the Fall and superior global communications enabled the world to mount a unified defense. Successive waves of Vuldrok settled on the rich worlds of Irem and Tsuma, occupying the domed city of Irem Zat el-Amad and establishing a Vuldrok kingdom that would dominate the planet for most of the 45th century.

The New Prophet

At this time there lived among the steppe nomads of Irem a man named Juhangiz Turhan, the son of a chieftain,



who had renounced his birthright of tribal leadership to follow the contemplative life of an ascetic hermit. Shortly after Juhangiz retired to his hermitage, the Turhan clan fell prey to a Vuldrok slave raid, and when news of this reached Juhangiz, further mystic contemplation was out of the question. For a decade he waged a one-man guerilla war against the slavers, sometimes rallying the support of outlaw bands or forming short-lived tribal coalitions, but with only sporadic success. Juhangiz realized that he would need more powerful allies, and so took his cause to the stars.

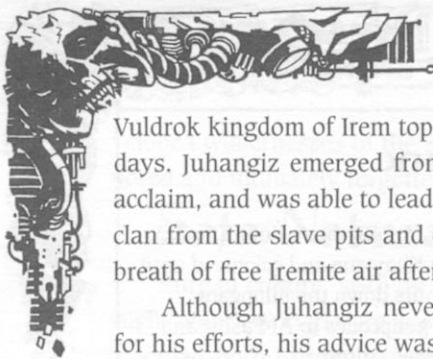
Many legends are told of the First Pilgrimage of Juhangiz. Children are fond of the tales describing how he cleverly contacted his kin among the spacefaring nomads and was whisked away to fight Vuldrok pirates in the Beliah system. On Al Fashir he rode with the desert warriors against Vuldrok settlers, and retrieved the Hiran Philosopher's Stone from the remote tribe who had kept it in secret since Sata Natura entrusted it to their care centuries earlier. After preaching about the evils of the Vuldrok in the agorae of Khayyam he used the Philosopher's Stone to jump to Hira and warn the primitives there of the menace that threatened to spill past the Khayyam jumpgate.

Hailed by the Kurgans of Hira as the fulfillment of Sata Natura's prophecy, Juhangiz had little difficulty in gaining the support of the world's more civilized kingdoms; not content, however, he took his mission into the jungles and the most remote quarters of the planet. Although his cries fell mostly upon deaf ears, some natives, recalling the earlier invasion attempt by the Hazat, agreed to follow him. Returning through Khayyam, Juhangiz pointed out to planetary leaders that the disruption of the trade route was severely crippling their economy; unwilling to risk the lives of their people for another world, the leaders of Khayyam agreed to supply Juhangiz with weapons and tech. At Al Fashir he armed the tribes, whipping them into a righteous fury, and succeeded in capturing all the Vuldrok colonies in that system within five years. At Beliah, he left his forces under the command of his lieutenants, continuing on to Irem alone after leaving detailed instructions with his commanders.

Upon his return to his homeworld, Juhangiz allowed himself to be captured by slavers and was taken to toil in the great dome. For two years he endured the manacles and whips of his Vuldrok masters, working all the while in secret to organize covert resistance and foment rebellion among the slave population. His work came to fruition in 4473, when the combined Kurgan forces at Beliah, armed with weapons from Khayyam and captured Vuldrok starships, jumped to Irem in full force, hammering away at the occupying fleet and landing troops to lay siege to the domed city. When Juhangiz saw that the attention of his overlords was directed skyward, he gave the signal that triggered the slave revolt. Caught between war fronts without and within, the

Kurga Timeline

Date	Event
ca. 2500	Khayyam discovered from Sathra's Boon (Sutek).
ca. 2550-2650	Hira discovered from Khayyam and colonized until a cometary impact shuts down the jumpgate.
ca. 3500	Bjorn Egon acquires jumpcodes to Al Fashir and Beliah; creates "Kurgan" culture.
3728	Jumproute from Khayyam to Hira reopens.
3770	Second Republic discovers Egon's hidden empire.
ca. 3940	Sata Natura born.
3997	Natura closes Hira's jumproute to Vera Cruz.
4000	Khayyam seals own jumpgate.
ca. 4000-4473	Age of the pre-Juhangid khalifs.
4317	Khayyam's jumproute to Al Fashir is reactivated.
ca. 4320-4548	Vuldrok invasions of Kurga.
4327	Don Gonzago Justus establishes a Hazat kingdom on Hira.
4434	Juhangiz Turhan born.
4467	Juhangiz re-opens Khayyam's jumproute to Hira.
4473	Juhangiz liberates Irem Zat el-Amad; Kurga Caliphate founded; Year 1 of Caliphal calendar.
4498	Juhangiz kills the last rukh on Rukh.
4506	Tarkhan Rustam Khabir succeeds Juhangiz; Khabir reactivates Hira's jumproute to Vera Cruz and begins Jihad.
4525-35	Vuldrok warlord Freya Firestorm's vicious raids on Kurgan worlds weaken Khabir's Jihad.
4547	Khabir dies on Vera Cruz; succeeded by Ogadai
4559	Siyurkuktiti succeeds Ogadai; declares end to Khabir's Jihad.
4584	Sulayman Darumai succeeds Siyurkuktiti.
4587	Sulayman welcomes his heretical rival, Kubilai ibn al-Hansur Abu Ilghazai, the Agha Khalif of Al Fashir, into the Kuriltai, as well as initiating him into the Mysteries of Satai.
4591	Sulayman Darumai dies.
4764	Caliph Salim Rahman stops initiating newly appointed potentates from Al Fashir and Khayyam into the Mysteries of Satai after a fistfight between the Agha Khalif and the Noyan of Al Fashir during the Rites.
4801	Caliph Bayazid Iskandur renews Khabir's Jihad.
4819	Civil unrest on Khayyam; Sultana Kutukti Baghira entrusts many local relics to Caliph Bayazid.
4843-51	Caliph Zeenat Amina renovates Irem Zat el-Amad.
4889	Sultan Juruk ibn Hachmet moves the seat of the sultanate of Al Fashir from Uwandibad to Rub el-Harim.
4899	Caliph Juhangiz XVII closes Vera Cruz jumproute.
4974	The Agha Khalif takes Uwandibad
4987	Hira's jumpgate spontaneously reactivates Vera Cruz route; Baronet Teikorc of the Hazat takes the M'Ballah Garrison on Hira.
4992	Hazat invade Hira in force.
4999	Hazat control most of Hira except for the Balif kingdoms.



Vuldrok kingdom of Irem toppled in the space of just a few days. Juhangiz emerged from the chaos to overwhelming acclaim, and was able to lead the surviving members of his clan from the slave pits and out of the dome for their first breath of free Iremite air after two decades of oppression.

Although Juhangiz never claimed any title or reward for his efforts, his advice was sought by all for the remainder of his life, his words so inspiring that he was proclaimed a living prophet. Toward the end of his life people began to call him the khalif, or vice-regent, of Zebulon, and asked that he name a successor to guide the folk of Kurga when he was gone. As many expected, he chose Tarkhan Rustam Khabir, a warlord of Beliah, renowned for his many victories over the Vuldrok and his almost prophetic ability to anticipate the actions of his opponents in battle.

The Prophetic Succession

Khabir worked to consolidate the power of the unified Kurgan worlds and establish the office of the khalif (by then pronounced "Caliph" to reflect the harder consonants of Khabir's Beliahin accent) as sole central authority. To this end, he declared a jihad — holy war — to extend the territory of the Caliphate and used the Hiran Philosopher's Stone to reactivate the jumproute between Hira and Vera Cruz. During his reign, which spanned five decades, a route to Ravenna via Antioch and Twilight was discovered, giving Kurga the opportunity to make war upon both Hazat and Hawkwood worlds. Thanks to the strong martial traditions of both houses — and the Vuldrok Freya Firestorm's encroachment into Kurgan space — the expansionist intent of Khabir's crusade was thwarted, but his forces proved such a threat to travel and trade in the Known Worlds that Vladimir Alecto was eventually able to unite the feuding houses.

Khabir died fighting on Vera Cruz in 4547; his successor was Ogadai Dzakan, a visionary Tsuman merchant to whom Khabir had intended to entrust the economic leadership of the Caliphate once the jihad was over. Caught off guard by his premature ascension and lacking any training in military leadership, Ogadai found himself unwilling to finish what Khabir had begun, and closed off the Vera Cruz jumproute. Within a decade, however, it had reopened of its own accord and Ogadai took this as a sign to resume the Vera Cruz Jihad, partially out of a duty to take Vera Cruz and recover the body of the second Caliph, and partially because of the vast wealth he and his colleagues on Tsuma were accumulating by financing plundering forays into the Known Worlds. Addicted since birth to luxury and decadence, Ogadai applied much of his wealth to transforming the domed city of Irem Zat el-Amad into his own personal pleasure palace, reigning for 12 lavish years until succumbing to heart fail-

ure without having named a successor.

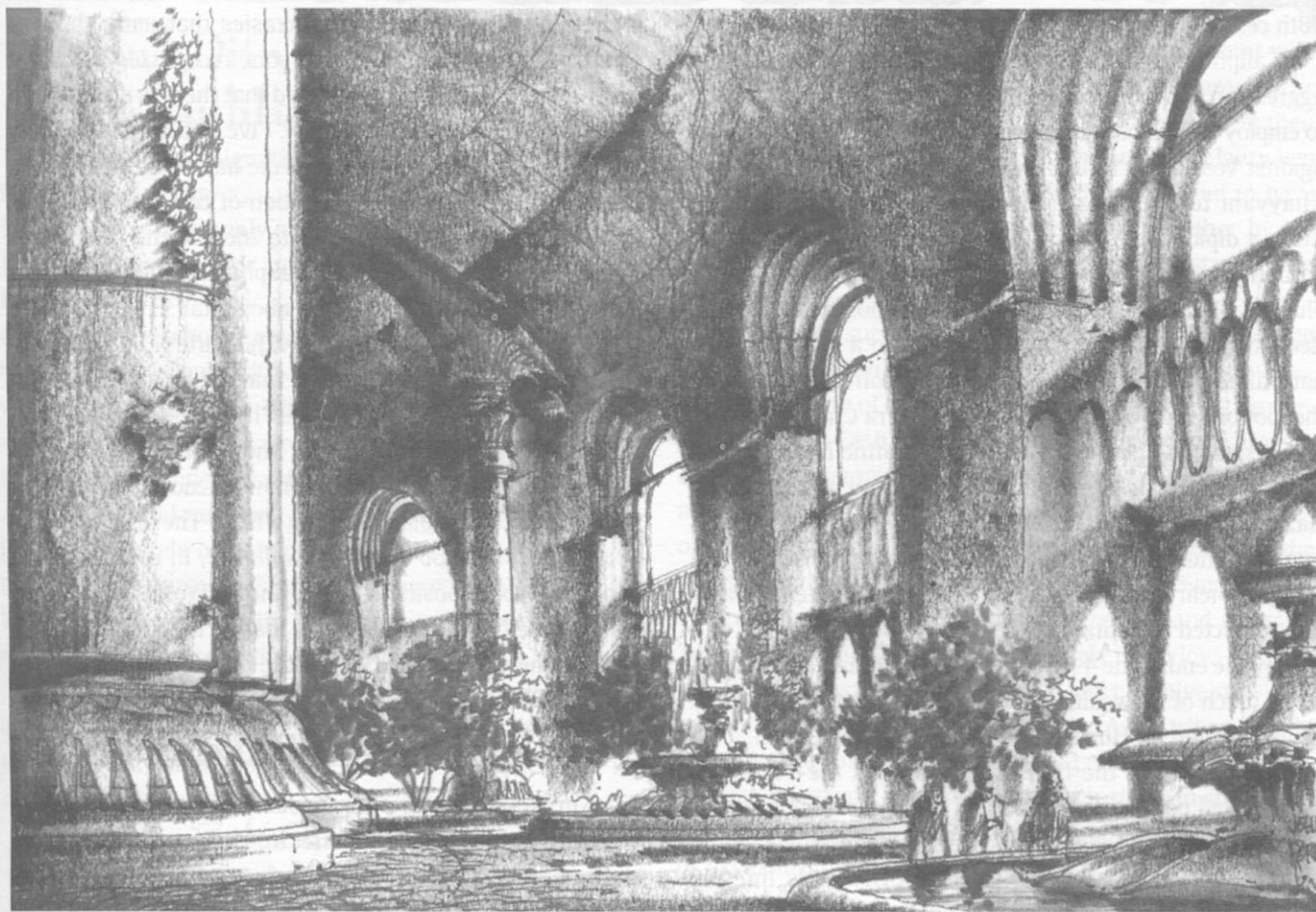
The Caliphate might have collapsed at that point had not an unlikely candidate emerged in the person of Siyurkuktiti, a lesser concubine to Ogadai the Fat (as he was by then known). Charismatic and flamboyant, she had demonstrated a healing touch and an ability to predict the future, but some — most notably Ogadai's chief concubine — whispered that she was a witch, or at the very least a fortune-telling charlatan. Despite such opposition, Siyurkuktiti had immense support from the common people who had suffered under Ogadai's rule, so much so that even her political enemies finally had to agree to her ascension simply to avoid unrest among their own subjects. Khabir's Jihad had run its course, she said, and Ogadai's greed had driven most of Kurga to the brink of economic ruin. The nascent empire of Vladimir was posing a threat even greater than that of the Vuldrok by the time Siyurkuktiti ordered the route to Vera Cruz closed.

With the Kurgan worlds at peace and the pilgrimage route secured for the first time since the Fall, Siyurkuktiti worked to repair the excesses of her predecessor. Much of Ogadai's fortune she redistributed to regions with the greatest need, especially in war-torn Hira. Her reign lasted some 25 years, and is marked by the greatest flowering of Kurgan culture. She made large donations to the arts and to education, sponsored festivals and contests, and gathered all the most learned or talented folk in Kurga to her court. Siyurkuktiti was poisoned by her old rival, Ogadai's chief concubine, who was subsequently torn to pieces by a grief-maddened crowd.

Siyurkuktiti chose her successor shortly after being named Caliph; many thought her choice was a joke, or some kind of subtle political maneuver. Her choice, Sulayman Darumai, was a holy hermit of Rukh who was already an old man when Juhangiz liberated that world during the preceding century. When Siyurkuktiti died, Darumai was well over a hundred years old, a fact which convinced many of his spiritual power, as the people of Rukh are relatively short-lived and the wizened ascetic had no access to longevity serum. At first some doubted the ability of this mystical recluse to lead the widely varied Kurgan states, yet Darumai proved himself not only capable of ruling with wisdom and solemn dignity, but with a surprising degree of vigor as well.

Eschewing the pleasure palace at Irem Zat el-Amad, Darumai spent nearly all of his brief reign on perpetual pilgrimage, visiting all the Kurgan worlds on numerous occasions. While he made all the obligatory visits to the centers of power, performing all the political duties by then expected of the Caliph, most of his time was spent exploring the more remote stretches of Kurga, parleying with nomad chieftains and preaching the Caliphal gospel to the most savage and backward tribes in nigh-impenetrable wildernesses.





Most of his important executive decisions were made in transit, and the most autocratic heads of Kurgan states took his style of rule in absentia as license to ignore his edicts. But Darumai followed through with his actions, cultivating an intelligence network that permeated all levels of society and relayed back to him the degree to which his commands had been obeyed. Though a kindly and caring soul, he did not hesitate to deploy carefully orchestrated social pressure, subtle intrigue, overt force and even — on a few rare and well-remembered occasions — terror, to rid the Caliphate of corruption and injustice whenever it was discovered.

Darumai's rule was characterized by a strong moral sense which endeared him to the common folk, and rulers who took his principles to heart prospered. Building upon the achievements of the preceding Caliphs, who established the temporal authority of the Caliphate, Darumai skillfully wove the broad cultural diversity of Kurga into a rich tapestry arrayed around a clear and strong spiritual center, the religious authority of the Caliph. (Even the economic ideas espoused by Ogadai the Fat in his early days proved workable when applied to all Kurgans, rather than just Ogadai's rich friends on Tsuma.) Although he warned against the dangers of inflexible doctrine, Darumai's words and acts were recorded in exacting detail, and are cited as the strongest precedent in all matters to which they apply, even to this day.

Tradition holds that when Darumai named his successor (another holy hermit, this one from the wind-swept mountains of Al Fashir), he also announced the exact time of the next Caliph's ascension. On the seventh day of the seventh month in the seventh year of his reign, Sulayman Darumai perished in his sleep of no discernable cause. All the Kurgan worlds spent the next year in mourning, and it is said that during that year no blow was struck, no voice was raised in anger, all raiding and feuding ceased among the unruly nomads, and no important action of any sort was undertaken without a prayer being said for the Fifth Caliph.

The first five Caliphs comprise the Golden Age of the Caliphate, and set the pattern which all who came afterward were to follow. During the Silver Age, generally considered to encompass the 47th and most of the 48th centuries, the majority tended to be of Darumai's type: solitary ascetics whose removal from worldly affairs had given them the spiritual clarity to rule with wisdom and justice. For nearly 200 years the line of prophetic succession remained unbroken, as did the jumpweb between Irem and Hira. The Jihad was pursued only as a defensive measure to protect the integrity of Kurgan space, rather than the naked expansionism espoused by Khabir. Culture and interplanetary commerce flourished, and Kurgan society assumed much of its present shape and aspect. This era of peace ground to an ignoble close as civil unrest rocked Khayyam and Al Fashir from the mid-

48th century onward.

Caliph Bayazid Iskandur ushered in an age of renewed aggression when he became Caliph in 4801; his first act was to employ the Philosopher's Stone in restarting Khabir's Jihad against Vera Cruz. Troops were quartered on Al Fashir and Khayyam to keep peace on those troubled worlds, and Kurgan diplomats, raiders and profiteers made forays into barbarian space and the Known Worlds to treaty, trade or plunder. Bayazid's successor was his foremost raider, Ilkhan Zeenat Amina, who turned the Jihad into a purely mercenary, almost piratic, venture, stuffing the coffers of Irem with the loot of nearly a dozen worlds. The Vera Cruz jumprouete was opened and closed on an almost routine basis to send out raiding parties or cut off pursuing Hazat patrols. Many Hazat forces managed to enter, however, in ever greater numbers and with growing frequency, until the Hira system was in a near-constant state of war and interstellar travel was restricted to military maneuvers.

By the end of the 49th century the Caliphate had squandered much of its wealth on the Jihad, while the Hazat had gained ground on Hira. In 4899 Caliph Juhangiz XVII, a direct descendant of the first Caliph, ordered the Vera Cruz route closed permanently, and had the Hiran Philosopher's Stone secured in a vault at Irem Zat el-Amad. The ensuing decades were devoted to taking care of Kurga's internal troubles, but to little avail — anti-Caliphal sentiments on Al Fashir and Khayyam continued to grow. A succession of spiritually inclined Caliphs sought diplomatic solutions over the objection of conservative elements from Beliah and Tsuma who cried that the Jihad should be declared against the rebellious worlds.

The Present

In 4987 the Vera Cruz jumprouete spontaneously reopened, and Caliph Hulagulu assented that this was clearly a sign to renew Khabir's Jihad. For almost a decade the Caliphal fleet enjoyed unprecedented success in battle with the Hazat, who were forced to turn the bulk of their power to the Emperor Wars. Once the Wars were over, House Hazat descended upon Hira in full force, fortifying their small holdings and conquering or allying most of the non-Kurgan kingdoms on the planet. Amidst this, Hulagulu died without naming his successor; fully a year passed before a new leader, another young scion of the Turhan lineage — Juhangiz XXIV — emerged as the last hope of the fragmenting Caliphate.

Culture

The values of Kurgan culture are those of the nomad, reflecting an ever-shifting balance between personal independence and responsibility to one's community. On the one hand, Kurgans take pride in their individual accomplish-

ments and revel in the idiosyncrasies that mark them as unique. On the other hand, everyone recognizes that tribal unity is necessary for survival and that there is no shame in submission to a worthy authority. Five centuries of increasing urbanization under Caliphal rule has pushed each ideal to its extreme, extending the notion of community beyond just the tribe or neighborhood to include the region, the world, and ultimately the entire Caliphate, resulting in a view that is at once provincial and cosmopolitan.

While all strangers are met with courtesy and hospitality, all relationships in Kurga are marked by an assessment of personal merit. Kurgans despise hypocrisy, will not place their trust in anyone they do not know, either personally or by reputation, and will never follow a leader who has not proven herself capable of leading wisely. The primary virtue is to know one's job and do it well, but, in contrast to the hereditary social positions of the Known Worlds' feudal system, coupled with this virtue is that of making one's own place in the world, to excel in a life of one's own choosing, rather than simply being given a role at birth.

Social Structure

Kurgan society is often mistaken by outsiders as adhering to a rigid caste structure; in truth, there is some social mobility within the Caliphate, but few ever take full advantage of it. The overwhelming majority of Kurgan peoples are content with their lot, having been raised to carry on the life led by their parents. The basic social unit is the *usun*, or "bone," a term which encompasses the idea of both an extended family or tribal clan, and that of a family business. Parents teach their children the family trade, training them to maintain their usun's place in the local economy.

During adolescence, a child may opt to become an apprentice for another usun, and, upon reaching the age of majority, chooses whether to return to his original usun, continue life with his adopted usun or marry and begin his own usun. Although sons and daughters have every legal right to choose whatever path they wish, family pressure — shaped by economic necessity — is a tremendous factor, so most apprenticeships and marriages are arranged by usun elders long in advance. Going against the wishes of one's family is a popular theme in Kurgan romances, but those who try it in real life often find it difficult.

As its name suggests, the usun system forms the backbone of Kurgan society, with each succeeding generation carrying on the family trade. Each usun belongs to an *ordu* (the root of the Urthish word "horde"), broad categories which describe the usun's trade or lifestyle — primarily for legal and civic purposes. Due to the insular nature of the usun system, each ordu listed below can easily be identified by their distinctive body type, with regional variations reinforced by generations of marriage within the same ordu.

Ordu'l-Diin — “The Faithful Horde”

The broadest designation, this term is often used to refer to Kurgan society as a whole, or to those of Kurgan descent, who are commonly shorter and stockier than Known Worlders, with dark hair and eyes combining Asian, Middle Eastern and North African features. Specifically the term denotes anyone who acknowledges and submits to the spiritual and temporal authority of the Caliph in all matters. Those who share the Faith (“El-Diin”) may live as they will, where and however they will, so long as they fulfill standard communal responsibilities (like doing their job, paying their taxes and obeying the local laws), offering to the office of the Caliphate any goods or services they can spare and alms to those less fortunate. A Faithful One may, once during her life, declare herself a hajji, or pilgrim; upon completion of the pilgrimage at Irem, the pilgrim is allowed to approach the Caliph personally, to briefly speak her mind without fear of reprisal, and to ask one question which the Caliph by tradition must answer as best he may. The Faithful Horde is divided into three parts:

Uighur — “Soft-Skins”

The Uighur are city-dwellers, their local ordus designating their profession. Because they live in such close quarters, the Uighur are bound by more laws, and because most wealth flows through the cities, the Uighur are more heavily taxed. Despite this, most view the cities as centers of opportunity and in recent centuries have flocked there to pursue lives of relative comfort and prosperity. True to their name, Uighur are easily known by their paler, softer skin, and most have lighter colored hair and eyes denoting Vuldrok or even Republican ancestry.

Khirghiz — “Fertile Fields”

The Khirghiz live in rural communities, and Khirghiz ordus may be villages, suburban provinces, family farms, vast plantations with feudal power structures or communes practicing some experimental political model. As usable farmlands are relatively scarce among the Kurgan worlds, the Khirghiz have a major responsibility to produce as much food for the Caliphate as possible. Any ordu which cannot work its land to the fullest extent may see that land granted to another ordu by Caliphal command. Lighter features are sometimes found among the Khirghiz, but all exhibit the healthy complexion and hearty constitution of country life.

Khaizak — “Wanderers”

The Khaizak are the nomadic tribes who have lived in the wildernesses and desolate regions of the Kurgan worlds since before the Fall. Despite increasing urbanization, the nomads are still considered to be the heart and soul of the Kurgan people. Nearly all of the pre-Juhangid khalifs were

of the Khaizak, and many Khirghiz and Uighur point with pride to whatever Khaizak ancestry they can prove. The Khaizak are afforded a great deal of autonomy within their own lands and even enjoy some privilege under the law when traveling in more populous regions. Khaizak tend to have leaner builds, wiry and hard skin burnt to leather by life under the open sky and scarred by the daily struggle for survival.

A notable subclass of the Khaizak is the spacefaring nomads, called Tengri-Igren or “Sky-dwellers.” Found in every solar system of the Caliphate, they are especially numerous around Al Fashir and Beliah, and cover an even broader diversity of customs, beliefs, lifestyles and physical appearances than their cousins planetside. Most visit the surfaces of inhabited worlds on a regular, if infrequent, basis, in the role of pilgrims, soldiers, traders or — in extreme circumstances — raiders. Some of the most remote and reclusive Tengri-Igren have lived and bred entirely in the low- or zero-gravity environs of moons, asteroids and primitive starships, and cannot live long in Urthlike gravity. A few tribes, mostly found in the Rukh system, are descended from Egon employees genetically altered to work exclusively in space, and have passed on such traits as enhanced cardio-pulmonary or skeletal-muscular systems and fully articulated prehensile feet.

These three divisions seldom mix socially, and intermarriage is rare, even expressly forbidden in some regions. The Uighur keep to their cities and travel only in large groups. The Khirghiz and Khaizak have been enemies since time immemorial, as growing agrarian populations encroach upon nomad territories and tribes respond with cattle raids and highway banditry. Present within all three are the Great Ordus defined by lifestyle or profession, each with its own restrictions and privileges under law. Each Great Ordu is further subdivided into lesser ordus, which may denote the area in which they operate or their specialty within their field.

Ordu Bagatur — “The Valiant Horde”

(Singular: bogatyr = “soldier”) Professional armies, local police, personal security and seasonal raiding are all a prominent part of life in the Caliphate, as local politics and economic disasters cause wars between neighboring tribes and kingdoms whenever Kurgans have no immediate external threat to unite them. The Ordu Bagatur is sworn to protect anyone on the pilgrimage; so sacred is this duty that opposing armies in the midst of pitched combat are known to cease fighting, lay down their arms and wait patiently until a passing pilgrim caravan clears the field. A bogatyr may carry firearms otherwise forbidden in most Kurgan cities, and, in times of war with the Hazat or Vuldrok, may be authorized by the Caliph to use high-tech weaponry. A council of the Ordu's highest war-chiefs maintains an academy on Beliah where students from all of Kurgan space may be



instructed in the martial sciences, and where the Caliph selects the finest warriors for his personal guard, the Qashik. Bagatur stand out in any crowd, being in general bigger, stronger and more heavily armed.

Ordu Kibituk — "Wide Wagons"

(Sing.: kibitka = "merchant") The Kibituk are the merchant class of Kurgan society, from the richest interplanetary shipping magnate to the humblest shopkeeper. The Ordu Kibituk may travel far and wide to ply their trade, and may deal in any goods not prohibited by the Caliph or the local khan. Though few restrictions are placed on the accumulation of wealth (other than heavier taxes and social pressure to give alms to the needy), the Caliph may demand money, goods and services from any successful merchant in the event of wars or natural disasters, or simply to redistribute wealth to other more depressed economies nearby. The wealthiest kibitkas gather to do business in the markets of Tsuma, where they portion off supplies and foodstuffs to be given away as alms. Obesity is considered the mark of a successful kibitka, and thus avidly cultivated by all members of this Ordu.

Ordu Kankali — "High Carts"

(Sing.: kankal = "entertainer") The Kurgan folk are nothing if not expressive, celebrating their culture in music, dance, poetry and drama. Artistic talent and the ability to communicate well are qualities which command just as much respect from Kurgan society as skill in war or business. Professional performers and artists comprise the Ordu Kankali, which includes heralds and storytellers, local musicians' guilds and traveling theater troupes. The Kankali pay fewer taxes and are generally considered exempt from local customs governing propriety and decorum, but at various times the Caliph may forbid them from using certain ideas, themes and depictions in their work. The master musicians and court poets of Irem are continuously on the lookout for the brightest talents to be brought before the Caliph. Although a wide variety of body types can be found throughout this Ordu, most kankali tend to be slender and attractively proportioned.

Ordu Bachinghai — "Nimble Fingers"

(Sing.: bachingh = "crafter") Craftsmanship is a prized virtue throughout Kurga, from fashion-conscious Uighur to Khaizak whose very lives depend upon the quality of their equipment. The manufacturers of the Caliphate are the Bachinghai: carpenters, masons, smiths, potters, leatherworkers, weavers and tailors. Bachinghai are taxed according to the volume of their business; a village potter on Hira pays less than an exclusive Iremite tailor or Tsuman factory owner. The Caliph may demand the finest example of a noted bachingh's work for his personal use, and may command a Bachinghai ordu to relocate to a region where their skills are needed. Bachinghai are often smaller in stat-

ure than most of their neighbors, with strong, capable hands from whence their name derives.

Ordu Fellahin — "Broad Backs"

(Sing.: fellah = "laborer") The unskilled workers of Kurga, rather than being the oppressed masses found throughout history, are granted respect and autonomy by Caliphal decree, in recognition of the fact that lands could not be farmed and nothing great could be built without them. The Ordu Fellahin has its roots in the labor unions of the Second Republic, and is thus rarely found among the Khaizak. (Many brawls result when nomads visiting farms and cities mistake fellahin for slaves.) This Ordu pays a flat tax based on its wages, and, like the Bachinghai, may be commanded to relocate where they are required (usually to help rebuild after wars or natural disasters.) As their name implies, Fellahin are generally big and strong, although seldom as well-developed as Bagatur, and hereditary giantism is common.

The Great Ordus enjoy considerable social freedoms and opportunity — barring Caliphal restrictions — and are found at all levels of society, from khan to slave. Not all ordus are so fortunate, however.

Ordu Asmurdlegh — "The Stinking Ones"

(Sing.: smurd) Some professions leave an indelible mark upon their practitioners, usually in the form of an unpleasant stench, as with tanners, slaughterhouse workers and purveyors of fertilizer. Such folk are the Ordu Asmurdlegh, who are requested to keep themselves separate from the rest of the community — more as a matter of courtesy than as a legal requirement. Asmurdlegh communicate with others through written messages and intermediaries, wear heavily perfumed robes when appearing in public, and have separate quarters on pilgrim starships. Despite this, they have all the same rights under law as the rest of the Great Ordus, and then some — insulting a smurd is a greater offense in the eyes of the law than insulting anyone else. The inhabitants of Rukh have a very distinctive odor, and are considered to be Asmurdlegh whenever they travel off their homeworld; far from taking offense, however, they feel privileged and honored at this special treatment.

Ordu Hekelezai — "The Touched"

(Sing.: hekelet) Perhaps the most difficult social division to explain to a non-Kurgan, the Hekelezai are those who have been affected in some powerful way by the spiritual world. They may be ascetic hermits, bands of mystics seeking transcendence through ecstatic rites, tribal shamans or simply the village idiot who hears voices in his head. Sage or drunkard alike, the hekelet is regarded with a degree of religious awe, believed to have a special insight into the invisible workings of the universe — regardless of

whether he is capable of communicating his knowledge properly. The Hekelezai are exempt from taxation and most civic obligations, and may live off of communal alms if unable to earn their keep normally. The Hekelezai are the only Kurgans who may speak out against the Caliph with impunity (although they may not act against him), and it is not unheard of for a Caliph to seek the counsel of the wisest Hekelezai.

Ordu Kafiri — “Unbelievers”

(Sing.: kafir) This is the only ordu not considered a part of the Ordu'l-Diin, being composed of anyone who does not acknowledge the spiritual authority of the Caliph but who agrees to submit to the Caliphate's political power. The Ordu Kafiri includes ambassadors from non-Kurgan worlds, survivors of other religions in more densely populated areas, and remote pagan nomadic tribes. Kafiri are required to signal their status by means of mandatory tattooing and a distinctly recognizable mode of dress or hairstyle, must live only among their own kind and are absolutely forbidden from openly expressing their religious beliefs. Kafiri may travel and practice any trade where they are accepted by local law, but no kafir may ever occupy a position of authority over a member of the Ordu'l-Diin.

These three ordus are unique in that members of the community can declare someone to be a member regardless of that person's heritage and/or desires.

Ordu Sechenim — “The Horde of Wisdom”

(Sing.: sechen = “wise one”) The Horde of Wisdom is the most heavily restricted and closely policed segment of the Kurgan populace. The Sechenim are the teachers, scholars and scientists of the Caliphate, keepers of arcane and powerful knowledge which the early Caliphs realized could be used to unfair advantage if not carefully regulated. Because of this, most Sechenim lead isolated, monastic lives devoted entirely to their field of study, seldom if ever having any contact with the outside world. Although the Caliphate has no true priestly caste, the Ordu Sechenim fulfill much the same function as the Universal Church; it is they who preserve learning and culture, and who tend to the well-being of society as a whole.

The Ulema or Collegium, established by Siyurkuktiti, is the governing body of this Ordu, composed of the highest ranking representatives of each school, or Ikhwan. Each Ikhwan is a strict hierarchy of graduated initiation whereby apprentices are thoroughly grounded in the basics of their chosen science while masters may explore the complexities of their own special interests. Sechenim are known for the plain robes and shaven heads of their lower ranks, anonymous save for the insignia of their Ikhwan; the upper echelon may dress as they please, and usually don elaborate ceremonial fashion for special occasions, but many retain



the simple garb of their student days to signify that, whatever their accomplishments, there is always still more to learn.

Any member of the Ordu'l-Diin may petition an Ikhwan for admittance, and an Ikhwan may try to recruit the most intelligent or talented members of other ordus. Admission may take up to a year, as each applicant is given a variety of tests to demonstrate their suitability. Once admitted, a rigorous apprenticeship of 10 years or more is followed by a residency in one of the Ikhwan's institutions — usually a local shrine, school, library, hospital or some office of the Caliphate. A sechen who displays exceptional judgment may eventually be allowed to practice his skills in whatever segment of the public he sees fit.

Sechenim may not offer their services to the public unless the Caliph or one of his officers in the Ulema deems them to be socially responsible enough to wield their knowledge fairly and effectively. Once licensed to practice publicly, a sechen is not allowed to accept payment for his services but will, as an employee of the Caliphate, be provided out of communal alms with a home and sustenance of simple spartan comfort.

Ikhwan-i-Hakimun — “Healers”

(Sing.: hakim) Charged with maintaining the physical health of the Faithful are the hakim — doctors, nurses, surgeons, apothecaries, physical therapists and dietitians, who must study for years at one of the Caliph's excellent medical universities but are accorded the greatest degree of social freedom once they attain mastery. Kurgan notions of health differ regionally, but always address spiritual, mental and social issues as well as the physical state. Hakim are just as likely to prescribe rhythmic breathing, memorizing verses or specific dietary requirements as medication or surgery, being trained to understand every possible aspect of the human organism. Hakim are oath-bound to serve to the best of their ability any who ask their aid.

Ikhwan-i-Waziri — “The Wazirate”

(Sing.: wazir = “advisor”) Trained primarily as librarians, members of the Wazirate not only collect, preserve and catalogue the wealth of Kurgan knowledge, but are required to make their learning equally available to all of the Ordu'l-Diin. A wazir is expected to be an expert in matters of business, law, history and religion, and is compelled by the oath of his Ikhwan to answer clearly and honestly any question put to him by anyone. Waziri often function much like counsels in court, advising their clients about legal procedure, but they may not represent their clients as Known Worlds attorneys might do. Waziri are not allowed to make any decision which affects anyone's life other than their own and their family's.

Ikhwan-i-Qadiyun — “The Qadiyate”

(Sing.: qadi = “judge”) While the Wazirate concerns itself with the letter and form of Kurgan culture, the Qadiyate tends to its moral center, cultivating the balance of compassion and severity necessary to attain the elusive ideal of justice. Figures of public trust and respect, qadiyun have the longest apprenticeship of any Ikhwan, are thoroughly versed in Caliphal and local law, are required to hear any case brought to them and empowered to enforce any decision they make upon it. The equivalent of a Known Worlds judge or magistrate, the qadi functions more as a facilitator and referee, calling a court together and making sure that all proper procedures are followed.

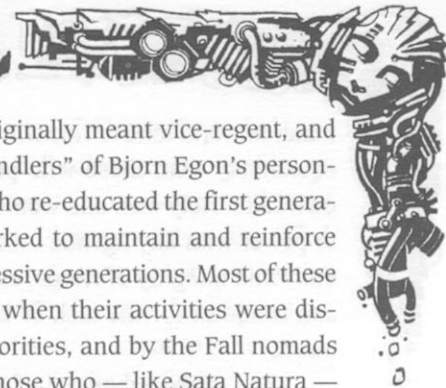
The Qadiyate and the Wazirate are expressly forbidden from communicating or interacting with each other outside of the courts or without specific instructions from the Ulema. Socializing, fraternizing and especially intermarriage between the two Ikhwans can result in expulsion from the Ordu Sechenim, and conspiring to subvert justice is a capital offense. This taboo reflects the Kurgans' distrust of the justice system of the Second Republic, in which judges and lawyers together formed a single professional class which alone was privy to the arcane workings of the law, thus excluding the layperson from any meaningful participation in the legal process.

Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun — “Artificers”

(Sing.: takhi) High technology is even more tightly controlled in the Caliphate than in the Empire, and those capable of understanding its secrets are the most heavily sequestered of all the Ikhwans. Certain tech has been deemed allowable in regions where it is crucial to survival and prosperity, and it is to the Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun that the Caliph turns for counsel when deciding such matters. A takhi is expressly forbidden to share her acquired knowledge with the public without explicit Caliphal permission. Some takhiyun are allowed to act as overseers and technical support in places where their devices see use in the world at large, but the most brilliant are kept in isolated research stations where they often give their lives testing the limits of applied science in the service of the Caliph.

Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi — “Astromancers”

(Sing.: ghamiz) Mystical scholars of esoteric lore are considered vital to the unity of the Caliphate, not only for their enlightened interpretations of theological doctrine, but also for their facility in maintaining the five-fold interstellar calendar by which the optimal scheduling of pilgrim caravans is determined. A ghamiz is held to be a guide to the invisible world, with insight into its broadest celestial rhythms and finest spiritual subtleties. Primarily trained in the sacred astrologies and geomancies of the Kurgan worlds, ghamizi may practice other kinds of divination as well, and many cultivate the Inner Flame required for theurgy. The



Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi is authorized to investigate mysteries too deep or dangerous for regular sechenim; foreign heresies, nomadic paganism, antinomy, husk plagues, Anunnaki artifacts and the like.

Ikhwan-i-Sihr — “Whisperers”

(Sing.: sahir) Not all of the sechenim can be mistaken for scribes and secretaries; some practice the sciences of secrecy, deception and intrigue, operating behind the scenes in the service of the Caliphate. They are the Ikhwan-i-Sihr, and act as the Caliph's spy network, secret police and covert action team. While sihr are most often deployed in dealings with non-Kurgan worlds, they are also used by the Caliph to spy on his own people, to make certain that all his commands are carried out as he intended and to keep him informed regarding events, situations and public sentiments which he might not learn about through normal channels. In addition to employing the usual sorts of intelligence workers — informants, double agents, deep cover agents, cryptographers, surveillance experts, saboteurs and assassins — this Ikhwan also makes an active effort to recruit psychics and any individuals who display some kind of exceptional power or ability. The physical training of the Ikhwan-i-Sihr's agents surpasses that of many Bagatur ordus, and its masters are said to be able to use any found object as a weapon. Every sahir must offer a personal oath of allegiance to the Caliph, and may only act on direct orders from the Caliph; the merest hint of disobedience or disloyalty automatically incurs the death penalty. Full-scale purges of this Ikhwan are not uncommon.

Rulership

Given Kurga's nomadic ideal of independence, the governing of a star-nation that encompasses (or rather, until recently encompassed) seven worlds — not to mention several moons and countless large asteroids — would appear to be an insoluble problem. But ever-wandering tribes have their leaders just like any other society, and the nomad's notion of leadership has been extended across the Caliphate with surprising success.

The Caliph

If the usuns are the backbone of Kurgan society, then the Caliph is its head. With such ideals of personal freedom, the position of the Caliph as supreme authority would seem to be a contradiction, but to the inhabitants of the Caliphate there is no inconsistency. The Caliph is, above all else, a religious figure, a living prophet, who occupies the intersection where human society reflects the divine hierarchy. Kurgans not only live for their prophet-king, they live through him, using his example to understand their own place in the great scheme of things. Thus, what may seem to be utter tyranny to an outsider is seen by Kurga as the most ennobling aspect of its culture.

The root word khalif originally meant vice-regent, and was used by the “culture handlers” of Bjorn Egon's personnel management division, who re-educated the first generations of employees and worked to maintain and reinforce the “Kurgan” culture in successive generations. Most of these executives were prosecuted when their activities were discovered by Republican authorities, and by the Fall nomads were applying the word to those who — like Sata Natura — fought the hardest against the encroachments of the Republic, now remembered as martyrs. After the Fall the title was given to the local healer, seer, sage or saint whose popular influence extended across kingdoms and tribal boundaries; at this time it became fused with another tradition borrowed by Egon, the Prophetic Succession, which claimed that there was a living prophet for every generation since Zebulon. (Prophetic Succession had been a recurrent heresy suppressed by Palamedes and the Universal Church since the Diaspora.)

The pre-Juhangid khalifs (ca. 4000 — 4473) were folk heroes whose blessing was courted by local rulers to lend spiritual authority to their reign and thus keep peace within their spheres of influence. Some khalifs were very provincial, contributing to the fragmentation and factionalism of the era. Others openly acknowledged each others' validity and used their combined influence to keep peace between kingdoms and to administer justice on a grand scale through preaching revelations and working miracles. Thus began the tradition of the Seal of Prophecy, wherein an elder khalif would confer upon a younger the status of recognized successor to Zaibolu.

After Juhangiz Turhan liberated Irem, the Seal of Prophecy was passed on to him by the overwhelming majority of living khalifs on all the Kurgan worlds, the first person since Sata Natura to be so unanimously acclaimed. (Some few khalifs refused to acknowledge Juhangiz as the true Prophetic Successor; those that actively opposed his rule were persecuted as heretics, but those that acquiesced to his worldly power were allowed to carry on their own traditions among the Ordu Kafiri.) By the time of Sulayman Darumai, the modern institution of the Caliphate had taken its present form as supreme political authority and was wedded to the Seal of Prophecy. The true Caliph was one who received a divine revelation of the future of Kurga and possessed the personal qualities necessary to guide the Ordu'l-Diin triumphantly into that future.

The majority of Caliphs were holy hermits and local saints before being named to succeed the reigning Caliph. It is considered the mark of the true prophets that they have no desire for worldly power, seeking only to influence people's hearts rather than control their minds or command their deeds. Those of a spiritual bent willing to go to great lengths to remove themselves from the hectic pace of the



material world tend to rule with more wisdom, stability and equanimity than those who pursue political power for its own sake. Holy men and women such as these rarely come to power with any agenda other than maintaining the stability and integrity of Kurga, eschewing plans of expansion and conquest for the task of keeping the pilgrimage route intact.

The Caliph, possessed of insight into both the visible and invisible worlds, has the final word on all matters, and only those who agree to submit to his or her word are allowed to exist in Kurgan space. Laws decreed by the Caliph are collected in a book called the *Yasa*, a brief document which is plainly worded and easily memorized. The *Yasa* supersedes all local laws and the strongest penalties are imposed upon those who transgress it. Caliphal commands are transmitted in a written form known as a *yarligh*, written in the Caliph's own hand or printed in expensive gold ink, using a rare parchment which makes the yarligh extremely difficult to duplicate or forge. Most printed yarlighs deal with the appointment of khans or sechenim, while handwritten commands are reserved for individual missions and unique, seldom-recurring actions.

The Secret Pilgrimage

Sulayman Darumai, the fifth Caliph, was known for traveling incognito in order to see for himself the state of the Caliphate at all levels of society, and this has become a tradition for those who came after him. Known as the Hajj-i-Sahrir, or Secret Pilgrimage, this tradition is the source of many stories in which a stranger, bystander, beggar, slave or other innocuous person is suddenly revealed as the Caliph, who then proceeds to punish the wicked or reward the virtuous as events dictate. Every ordu is taught secret signs by which the Caliph can reveal her true identity only to members of that ordu, while maintaining her disguise to the world at large.

Most Caliphs have taken the Hajj-i-Sahrir only once, at the beginning of their reign to assess the state of the Caliphate, but some few undertake the Secret Pilgrimage with great frequency, either to root out widespread corruption or simply to escape the unending stress that comes with their office. It is not uncommon for the Caliph to bring a trusted friend or member of the Kuriltai along on the Hajj-i-Sahrir. Usually, the Ikhwan-i-Sihr is employed to ensure the Caliph's safety, perfect any disguises used, keep the itinerary secret and, when necessary, train a double to take the Caliph's place. Some Caliphs, however, desire an even greater degree of secrecy, and either order off the sahir assigned this duty or elude them through their own devices. (This drives the Ikhwan-i-Sihr crazy, of course, and they still try to follow the Caliph at a discreet distance, poised to rescue their prophet-king at the slightest hint of real danger.)

The Kuriltai

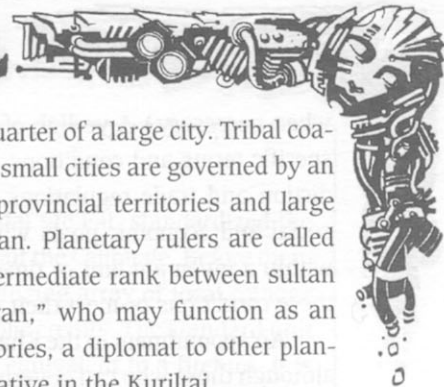
The high court of the Caliphate is the Kuriltai, composed of the highest-ranking members of the Great Ordus and the Ulema, retired khans, close personal friends of the Caliph, and other individuals who display exceptional wisdom, insight or merit. The Kuriltai not only act as companions and advisors, but are empowered, to some degree, to speak and act for the Caliph in her absence. An appointment to the Kuriltai signifies that one has gained the personal trust of the Caliph and, unless that trust is somehow betrayed, the position is held for life (thereby maintaining some degree of continuity when a new Caliph comes to power). Many Caliphal successors are chosen from the Kuriltai or appointed to it before their status as the next prophet is revealed.

The Kuriltai varies in size depending upon the Caliph; more worldly Caliphs usually appoint large numbers of family, friends, lovers, business partners or comrades-in-arms, while the more long-lived hermits and ascetics tend to keep the Kuriltai small, making no new appointments as the previous Caliphs' friends grow old and die off. Ideally, the Kuriltai should be representative of every major group within Kurgan society. In theory, any Kurgan may hold an audience with the Caliph, whether by common petition or upon completion of the Hajj; in truth, those who can gain the sponsorship of a member of the Kuriltai, either through personal contacts or through their ordu's hierarchy, may speak with the Caliph sooner, for a longer period of time, or even in private.

Tradition holds that only a true Caliph can recognize the next in the line of Prophetic Succession, but sometimes — as in the case of Ogadai — a Caliph may die before naming a successor. When this happens, the Kuriltai is charged with the duty of discovering the new prophet, as well as quelling the power struggles and unrest that inevitably arise at such times. The Kuriltai must seek out candidates by their own efforts; anyone who presents themselves as the next prophet is automatically dismissed as too ambitious — likewise for those who seem too eager to accept a candidacy. A candidate is rigorously tested — by the khanate for his political aptitude, by the ordu heads for his understanding of their needs, and by the Ulema for his wisdom. The most favorable candidates are those who show a special link with the All-Maker by demonstrating mastery of a previously unknown theurgic path, one which could not have been taught by another but must have been developed by the candidate herself during her lifetime.

The Khanate

Rulers within the Caliphate are collectively known as the Khanate; unlike the Empire of Alexius, heredity is not a prerequisite, and the divine right to rule is reserved for the Caliph alone. As with their nomadic forebears, Kurgans rec-



ognize only two main factors in deciding who should lead: merit and accountability — the ability to do the job and willingness to take responsibility for decisions that affect large numbers of people. Kurga remembers the bureaucratic excesses of the late Second Republic and has seen the blind unquestioning obedience that Hazat lords seem to demand of their troops; rigid, monolithic power structures, entrenched by generations of mindless loyalty, strike the Kurgan mind as both distasteful and outrageous.

The Khaizak essentially rule themselves as they always have; leaders are chosen from among the tribal elders, some by lineage and some through democratic means, but always mindful of the ability to lead effectively and with wisdom. At the lowest level, the Khirghiz and Uighur function in much the same way, with village, neighborhood and professional leaders emerging through naturally selective processes. Known by the old Khaizak term "shaykh," these leaders speak for their people before higher potentates, but the title is generally considered an informal one as regards the overall political structure of the Caliphate.

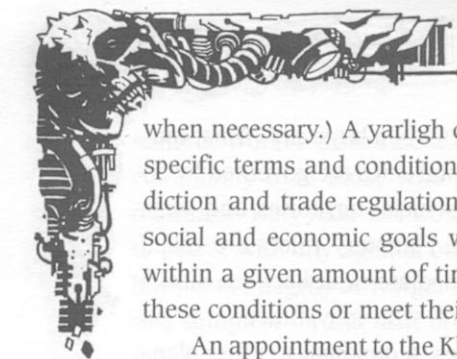
The lowest official rank in the Caliphate is that of khan, the approximate equivalent of an Urthish baronet or baron. (The word, which can literally be translated as "lord" in Urthish, is used informally to denote a ruler of any rank, and is often added to the end of a noble's name.) Khans may rule large tribes, small provinces, a group of closely

allied villages or a distinct quarter of a large city. Tribal coalitions, larger provinces and small cities are governed by an ilkhan, and tribal nations, provincial territories and large cities are ruled by a khaghan. Planetary rulers are called sultans, and there is an intermediate rank between sultan and khaghan called a "noyan," who may function as an administrator of large territories, a diplomat to other planets or the sultan's representative in the Kuriltai.

Rank within the ordus is more problematic, and largely informal, based more upon superior ability in that ordu's field than upon administrative capacity. For practical purposes, the same titles are used but an ordu rank is one level lower than the rulers' equivalent; thus the head of an ordu for a large city is called an ilkhan, a planetary ordu leader is the khaghan, and a noyan represents the entire ordu in the Caliph's court. The Ordu Sechenim and the Ordu Bagatur have their own names for ranks occupying a strict chain of command with the Caliph at the top.

While candidates for khan and ilkhan are usually chosen from among the local shaykhs, their position must be acknowledged by a higher authority, and a khaghan must be confirmed by the Caliph. Noyans are appointed — usually from among retired khans, ilkhans and khaghans by the sultan, who in turn is placed in power only by a yarligh from the Caliph. (The Caliph, of course, may appoint someone to fill a lower rank as well, but only exercises this power






when necessary.) A yarligh of governance always contains specific terms and conditions regarding boundaries, jurisdiction and trade regulations, as well as certain political, social and economic goals which the rulers must achieve within a given amount of time. Rulers who fail to observe these conditions or meet their goals are swiftly replaced.

An appointment to the Khanate comes with a time limit, although those who can govern effectively, maintaining stability and generating the greatest benefit to the populace, may have their term of office extended for life — sometimes against their wishes. Truly exceptional rulers are allowed to pass their title on to their firstborn child, or even to a small number of succeeding generations. These hereditary khans, of course, have the advantage of being trained since birth in the virtues of leadership and the uses of power, but often spend much their reign petitioning the Caliph to extend the appointment for a few more generations. (The only exception is the Turhan clan of Irem, whose firstborn lineal descendants of Juhangiz I inherit a sultanate containing the family's ancestral grazing lands.)

The Kurgan belief in the accountability of leaders has proven the bane of hereditary khans, whose people watch them closely for any sign of decadence or abuse of authority. Theoretically, any member of a subject population — even down to the lowliest beggar — may approach a higher authority to complain about the actions of their local ruler, and, if unable to gain satisfaction, may take their case all the way to the Caliph. In truth, few khans have ever been deposed because of the grumbling of a malcontent; only a massive outcry from the general populace reaching the Caliph's ear is likely to result in dethronement. However, khans are frequently commanded to make reparations to a minority whom they have wronged, and such incidents decrease the likelihood of gaining an extension to their reign. While preventing a complainant from seeking a higher authority is a grave offense, some unscrupulous khans try to silence their oppressed subjects with propaganda campaigns, heavy travel taxes and even spurious quarantines. Fortunately, the Ikhwan-i-Sihr and the Hajj-i-Sahrir ensure that a situation like this does not last long, and fear of discovery keeps most khans in line anyway.

Law



The basis of Kurgan law is the Yasa, a surprisingly brief document which must be memorized by all the Ordu'l-Diin. The Yasa determines what sort of interactions are allowable between worlds, regions, kingdoms, tribes and communities — all designed to preserve the unity of the Caliphate — and gives laws concerning travel in space or planetside — designed to protect the sanctity of the pilgrimage. Constitution as well as lawbook, the Yasa concerns itself primarily with the ordering of Kurgan society, defining the powers

and authority of the Caliph's appointees among the Khanate and the Ulema, delineating the responsibilities and restrictions of the ordus, and establishing guidelines for legal procedure throughout the Kurgan worlds.

Jurisprudence in the Caliphate is in many ways the opposite of its Known Worlds counterpart; apart from the Yasa itself, rigidly codified laws with prescribed punishments are few, and rarely come into play. This reflects the original Kurgan tribes' mistrust of the Republican justice system, with its endless lists of rules (too many for any person to learn in a single lifetime), written in elaborately dense prose (so generalized it can be interpreted to mean anything) and qualified with nitpicking technicalities (usually leaving loopholes wider than most jumpgates).

Caliphal justice rejects the notion that any person or institution is capable of objectively distinguishing between right and wrong (except, of course, for the Caliph alone), and is founded instead upon the old nomadic virtues of individual responsibility and communal interdependence. To the Kurgan mind, any sentient capable of sustaining a conversation is expected to understand the consequences of her own actions (at least to the degree that finite mortal perception allows — a degree which the court must determine) and take responsibility for them. As a result, the concepts of criminal insanity and rehabilitation are not to be found in Kurgan justice. The overriding principle in all cases is the protection of the community and the preservation of order. (For example, isolated cases of outright murder can be excused if the slayer can convince the court that the slain posed a true threat to the lives and well-being of himself, his family or community. Also, mutually declared blood-feuds among the Ordu Khaizak are allowed to proceed as long as non-participants are not threatened in any way.)

Any person or group that has suffered because of the actions of another may approach a qadi and demand justice. The qadi summons all involved parties and may call upon the Ordu Bagatur to keep order, protect victims from further offense and detain those who do not answer a summons. The qadi may also deploy the Ikhwan-i-Sihr to investigate when it is deemed that insufficient evidence has been presented. In those extreme cases where the accused is sentenced to some manner of torture, mutilation or death, it is the qadi's responsibility to appoint a bogatyr or sahir capable of dealing out exactly the punishment required — no more, no less.

A jury is convened, the size and constitution of which depends upon the nature of the case. Always an odd number between three and thirteen, the jury must contain at least one representative of both the accused's and accuser's ordu, rank and gender; half must be approved by the accuser and half by the accused, with the odd member chosen by random drawing of lots. Community standards are the



single most significant factor in deciding cases, and all but the randomly chosen jurist must be from the region, town or even neighborhood where the crime was committed. Whenever possible, the lots for random jurists are taken from outsiders to the community — travelers or recent immigrants — or from those who are not of the same rank and order of either accuser or accused.

All trials are held in public, usually in an amphitheater reserved for that purpose. Testimony may be offered by anyone, or demanded of anyone by anyone at any time — jurists and audience members included. Those giving testimony are not sworn in, but an oath of truthfulness may likewise be offered by anyone, or demanded of anyone by anyone at any time. Brevity and plain speech are not only expected, but absolutely required; the qadi may penalize those who filibuster or persistently interrupt another's testimony, and may use any means to enforce general silence if chaotic squabbling erupts (as it often does).

Local Kurgan laws vary in their specifics from region to region, but all adhere to the principles of "poetic justice" set forth by the pre-Juhangid khalifs, most notably Chagatai the Just of Tsuma. Foremost among these principles are simple reparation, commonly applied to crimes of property and punished by fines, community service or short-term personal slavery, and a more complex ideal which is expressed by the phrase "balance of vengeance."

Cases of reparation tend to be settled quickly and generally leave both parties satisfied with the outcome. A key point in many such cases is whether the offended party can be convinced that a crime was committed out of genuine necessity or by unavoidable accident. For example, the proverbial pauper who steals a loaf of bread to feed his starving family may work off his debt simply by helping the baker prepare another loaf of bread. An oft-cited precedent concerns a man who killed a child — accidentally, but as the result of reckless irresponsibility on his part — and offered his own newborn babe to the family of the child he slew. If the offended party truly believes that the crime was committed with deliberate malicious intent, however, they can call for the balance of vengeance.

Cases where the balance of vengeance is invoked are usually long drawn-out affairs full of appeals, countercharges, fervent negotiations and elaborate recitations of precedents or even hypothetical examples. At the core of this principle is the old Urthish ideal of "an eye for an eye," even to the extreme of "blood for blood;" here the function of the court is to determine that the severity of the punishment equals the severity of the crime, making adjustments for the differing circumstances of the offended and offending parties. To compare with the example given above, a haughty rich brat who steals a loaf of bread — just to see if he can get away with it — may find himself legally enslaved

Money

The third Caliph, Ogadai the Fat, standardized the monetary system throughout the Caliphate. Before then, each world retained a confusing array of local coinage — including Second Republic credits. The standard unit is now the *dinar*, roughly equivalent to a firebird. It is used in most major monetary transactions, especially those between worlds. There is also the *sheql*, 10 of which make a dinar, and the *dirham*, 10 of which make a sheql. As of yet, there is no standard acceptable exchange rate for firebirds to dinars; as trade routes increase, this may change, but if a crusade erupts, neither side will accept the others' coinage as legal tender.

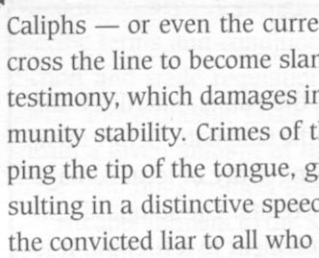
to the baker for anywhere from a week to a year or more, depending on how contrite he can appear to the court and the baker. Often cited is the case of Kriyasut, the richest merchant on Tsuma, who lost his entire fortune to a poor man whom Kriyasut cheated out of his last few coins.

The most common sentence given by Kurgan courts is that of forced servitude; slaves account for nearly a quarter of the total population of Kurga, although most are serving only short terms in the businesses, neighborhoods, or families demanding reparation. Long-term slavery can be demanded by the severely victimized, and murderers may offer their life and even that of their children. Those enslaved for life are branded for identification.

The severest punishments, those which have become infamous outside of Kurgan space, are mostly reserved for recidivists and those who obstruct the business of the courts or the Caliph. Repeat offenders are penalized with the mutilation or removal of the body part used to commit the crimes, enacted as a bloody public spectacle in most regions, although more technologically advanced communities treat it as a matter of "corrective surgery." The main idea here is to prevent the crime from being repeated, and to permanently mark the criminal, usually with an additional tattoo, brand or distinctive surgical flourish, in order to prevent the criminal from claiming that the injury was accidental or occurred in the service of the Caliph (which entitles one to a prosthetic replacement). Common instances include lopping off the hand for repeated theft, chopping off the feet for fleeing from a court summons, snipping off fingers for using firearms or advanced tech in commission of a crime, surgically blurring the vision for forging official documents, genital mutilation for rape, and plucking out the tongue for heresy.

Kurgans seem to be of two minds when it comes to crimes of speech. Hyperbole, poetic license and the telling of "tall tales" are prized skills, especially among the Ordu Kankali (who may be allowed by yarligh to satirize past





Caliphs — or even the current one), but this behavior can cross the line to become slander, libel or the giving of false testimony, which damages individual reputations and community stability. Crimes of this sort are punished by snipping the tip of the tongue, giving it a forked shape and resulting in a distinctive speech impediment which identifies the convicted liar to all who hear his voice.

Incarceration is rare, reserved for criminals too dangerous to be allowed to roam free but possessing too much important information to be executed outright. These include political conspirators, takhiyun who have yet to undo whatever threat their out-of-control machines pose, and serial murderers suspected of crimes yet to be uncovered. Such as these are tortured until they give up their secrets or die in agony. The death sentence is applied only to those for whom society has neither use nor compassion: repeat offenders unwilling or unable to cease their activities even after corrective mutilation, or those who openly defy the Caliph and refuse to repent after they are defeated.

Sexes

Gender seldom becomes an issue in Kurgan society, where sexual roles have been carefully defined in law and custom for centuries. Men and women are accorded equal access to status, property, wealth and rights under law, but practice their professions separately, mixing only when necessary and having no close contact with the opposite sex outside of their own usun. Each gender has its own customs, myths, mysteries and rites of passage, which are never revealed to the other, and those who associate too closely with the opposite sex in public become objects of scorn and scandal. (Exception is often allowed to the Ordu Kankali, and popular rulers or celebrated heroes may get away with some lesser indiscretions.) Young adults are allowed — briefly and under strict supervision — to mingle socially during tribal rituals and rural festivals, and in special quarters of large cities.

The Yasa contains guidelines concerning the differing styles of male or female rulers. Many of the oldest Kurgan kingdoms have a strong historical tradition of matriarchy, and will only accept a woman as their khan; other regions are just as strongly patriarchal. For most Kurgans, local laws — and every other aspect of society — may change drastically when a son inherits a khanate from his mother, or the Caliph appoints a Sultana to replace a corrupt Sultan.

Aliens

Some non-human communities settled on Kurgan worlds during the Second Republic, but few in sufficient numbers to thrive after the Fall. Most species known to the Republic still live on Tsuma, where they are kept as oddities by the rich; pathetic results of centuries of inbreeding due to

their dwindling population, they tend to inspire more pity than wonder. The Ur-Obun community on Khayyam has survived in large enough numbers to escape that fate, practicing a Kurganized version of the Ven Lohji faith. The Ur-Ukar of Beliah are the descendants of laborers brought in by Egon to help construct the underground mining habitats. While some racial prejudice directed against them does exist, their closest neighbors value their metallurgic skills and ability to adapt to subterranean life.

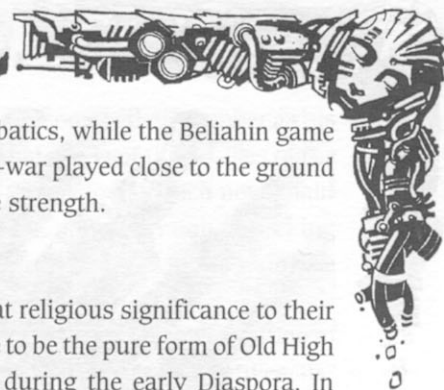
The Vorox, although known to the Second Republic, were not widely seen off their homeworld in that era, and were forgotten in Kurgan space except in legends. Since the end of the Emperor Wars, Vorox warriors hired by the Hazat have been deployed in the crusade on Hira. Jihad veterans have returned home with tales of many-armed beasts that walk and talk and fight like humans.

Technology

The Caliph alone possesses the wisdom to understand the long-term effects of various technologies, and employs the Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun to strictly regulate its uses and investigate its abuses throughout the Caliphate. Only by Caliphal yarligh may a cybernetic device be installed for one who has risked life and limb in the service of the Faith, or an advanced think machine assigned to an enlightened and responsible user, or vastly destructive weapons delivered to the Bagatur defending Kurga's holy jumpweb. Eye surgery, transplantation and prosthesis has advanced to an amazing degree, after an edict by the fifth Caliph that every effort must be made to enable all pilgrims to see the Sahab-i-Simurgh for themselves. Each great ordu has a dispensation for the tools of its trade, with the most advanced devices used only by the khans and under severe penalties for any sort of abuse or misuse. Republican or alien tech and Anunnaki artifacts must, by law, be brought to the immediate attention of the Ikhwan-i-Ghamiz as soon as they are discovered.

Most Khaizak and Khirghiz lands are forbidden to certain types of vehicles for environmental reasons, and the Uighur must abandon much of their conveniences and amenities when traveling beyond their city's limits. However, many Khaizak tribes have begun to appreciate the value of high-speed skimmers or modern medical, communication and surveillance equipment, and now petition the Caliph to have their ancient taboos stricken from the lawbooks as outdated superstition. The Ordu Kibituk are allowed only the simplest of think machines, or djinn-boxes, while the Ordu Kankali have ample license to develop communication, recording and performance-related technologies to an astounding degree. Agricultural golems, long abandoned since the Fall, were resurrected by yarligh to serve in high-risk emergency situations and are becoming more common





as a Caliphal reward to productive Khirghiz khanates, kept as valuable heirlooms or sometimes illegally rebuilt for warring upon neighbors.

Drugs

Nearly every type of intoxicant known can be found in the Caliphate, and the majority of them are legal in most regions, for most ordus. Hedonism aside, most Kurgans feel that for every social occasion, every dreaded chore or pleasant pastime, the Star-Maker has provided a substance to ease bodily discomfort or enhance necessary mental qualities, if one but understands their proper use. Hakim frequently prescribe all sorts of drugs for various conditions and ailments, but just as frequently prohibit their patients from further use of their favorite inebriants. Access to strong drugs is used by some khans as a way to control their populace, and the Caliph may condone such means if the results are pleasing. Consequently, addiction and related behaviors are common throughout Kurga, but are not identified as problems due to the social context in which they occur. (One reason the Caliphate has repeatedly tried to conquer Vera Cruz is to find the source of the wondrous painkiller "silchak" found in some Hazat medpacs. Little do the Hazat realize that, if the Kurgans were to learn how to cultivate and prepare the highly addictive and debilitating selchakah, their society might crumble within a decade...)

Most Kurgans, especially of the Uighur, smoke tubaq, an addictive weed with mild depressant effects, grown in massive quantities in the equatorial zones of Tsuma. Khaizak prefer the stronger and more subtle effects of chewing qoqa beans, a powerful stimulant which may also be prepared as a thick black tea, or smoking qunab flowers, from which potent euphoric hasheesh may be derived. Wine and various liquors are produced by Khirghiz ordus throughout the Caliphate, with the light blue vintages of Irem considered superior to all.

The only drugs uniformly restricted throughout the Caliphate are the Flesh of Satai, which is reserved exclusively for ceremonial purposes, and the ayawuzat vine of Hira, a hallucinogenic so potent that it is believed to be an invention of Erlik Khan (the devil).

The Bazkush

The national sport of the Caliphate is the bazkush, a sort of American football played on horseback or some other mount using the hide of a calf stuffed with sawdust or sand. Enthusiasm for the bazkush eclipses even the renowned religious fervor of Kurga, and the bazkush tournament circuit is responsible for a volume of travel and commerce exceeded only by the Hajj itself. The chief bazkushi rivals are the planetary teams of Beliah and Al Fashir, whose special skills are uniquely adapted to their own respective homeworlds; Fashiri bazkush is a dazzling display of high

leaps, aerial stunts and acrobatics, while the Beliahin game is more of a wrestling tug-of-war played close to the ground and mainly decided by brute strength.

Language

The Kurgans attach great religious significance to their language, which they believe to be the pure form of Old High Urthish spoken by Zaibolu during the early Diaspora. In truth, the Kurgan language is another invention of Egon's, a bastardized reconstruction of Turko-Mongolian with an extensive technical vocabulary of borrowed Arabic and Farsi terms. Egon cobbled it together from the old Urthish adventure tales of Harold the Lamb and Rabur-i-Hawar, which Egon read as an adolescent and which later inspired him to create the Kurgan culture. As a result, Kurgan is highly irregular, with wide regional variances of pronunciation and colloquial usage that form the basis of much wordplay in Kurgan comedies.

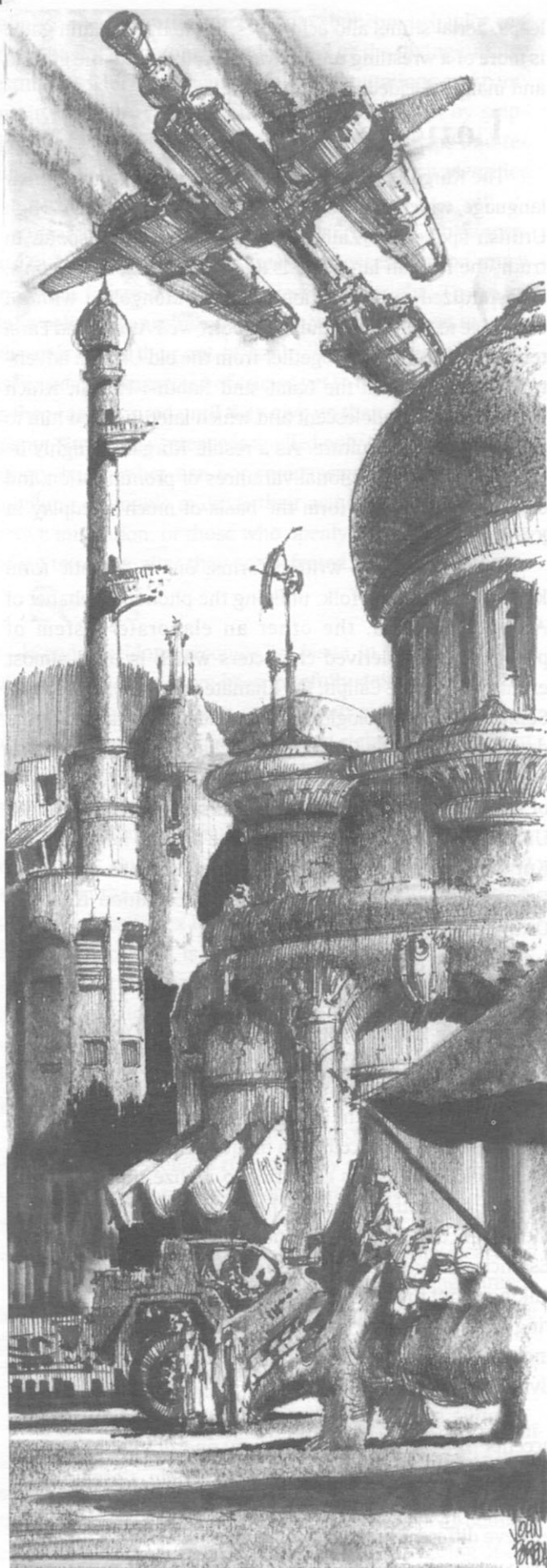
Kurgan has two written forms, one a demotic form known to all literate folk, utilizing the phonetic alphabet of Arabic and Farsi, the other an elaborate system of pictographically derived characters which is used almost exclusively by the Caliph, the khanate and the Ordu Sechen. Some of the numerological correspondences attached to the demotic alphabet has survived in Eskatonic lore, a degenerated version of which was adopted by Draconian Antinomists of the Known Worlds. (This, of course, has reinforced the Universal Church's position on the innate heresy of all Kurgan culture, and proved a severe setback when the Eskatonics were seeking legitimate recognition from the Orthodoxy.)

Pronunciation

Kurgan has many sounds which are absent from Urthish, and further confusion is generated by the fact that phonetic shifts in regional and planetary dialects can change a title of respect into a vulgar epithet without the speaker being aware of what he has said. The many accents found on Hira were influenced from all quarters of the Caliphate, so it took Hazat spies centuries to realize that "jaw-bar" and "zhibel" both referred to the same "mountain." Even in the present day, only a linguistic genius like Esteban Escovar Estancia de Vera Cruz could learn that a Khayyamite gunner talking about the "geh-deev," a Fashiri cavalry officer referring to the "huh-leef" and a Beliahin infantryman professing allegiance to the "kaw-lip" were all speaking of the one living prophet, the Caliph.

Native speakers of Kurgan are familiar with regional accents through their use in poetry and drama, as well as through contact with widely travelled hajjin. Cosmopolitan speakers often adopt a different accent to make puns or achieve different nuances of meaning, intensity or allusion. Even untravelled provincial listeners are familiar enough with





this custom to mentally correct for another's accent through context. Non-native speakers inevitably betray their origins by adhering too closely to the accent they originally learned or confusing the spoken and demotic written forms of words.

The single vowels of Kurgan are essentially the same as those of Urthish and Latin; the major diphthongs are "-ai-" which sounds like the word "eye," "-ay-" which is usually pronounced as in "say" (except on Khayyam), and "-ou-" which resembles the shorter "oo" of Urthish, as in "took." Doubled vowels are the long form of their Latin equivalents; i.e., "-ii-" takes the long "e" sound as in "seen." One of the most common consonants in Kurgan is "-kh-" (also rendered as "-ch-") which is a soft guttural sound halfway between a "k" and an "h," as found in the German "ach" or the Scottish "loch." Correspondingly, "-gh-" is to "g" as "-kh-" is to "k." "-Q-" is like "-k-," only harsher and more deeply guttural. The letter "j" when standing alone is usually a soft "zh" as in French; the harsher English "j" is distinguished by doubling it or putting "d" in front of it. (It is thus easily confused with "-dz-" which has a similar sound.) The English "ch" sound is noted by "-tch-," and is very close to the "-ts-" sound. "-Th-" is always unvoiced, as in "thing" or "thought," while its voiced counterpart, found in "this," "that" or "the other" is rendered by "-dh-." Occasionally, "-ph-" and "-bh-" are used to denote slightly more explosive versions of "f" and "v." The letter "-h-" is always an unvoiced aspirant, and is inserted so liberally throughout the Kurgan vocabulary that only the most practiced ear can detect its presence.

General Terms

Ordu (or-DOO)

Usun (OO-sun)

Uighur (uh-WEE-ghoor)

Khirghiz (KHEER-ghiz)

Khaizak (KHYE-zahk)

Bagatur / bogatyr (BAW-gah-toor / boh-gah-TEER)

Kibituk / kikitka (kih-BEE-tuhk / kih-BIT-kah)

Kankali / kankal (kahn-KAW-lee / KAWN-kahl)

Bachinghai / bachingeh (bah-KHEENG-hye / bah-KHEEN-geh)

Fellahin / fellah (feh-LAW-heen / FELL-ah)

Asmurdlegh / smurd (ahs MOORD-laygh / SMOORD)

Hekelezai / hekelet (heh-KEL-eh-zye / HEH-keh-let)

Kafiri / kafir (kah-FEER-ee / kaw-FEER)

Sechenim / sechen (SEKH-eh-neem / seh-KHEN)

Ikhwan (EEKH-wahn)

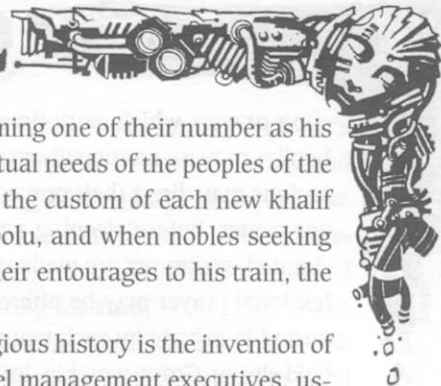
Hakimun / hakim (HAW-kee-moon / hah-KEEM)

Waziri / wazir (waw-ZEER-ee / waw-ZEER)

Qadiyun / qadi (KAW-dee-yoon / kaw-DEE)

Takhiyun / takhi (TAW-khee-yoon / tah-KHEE)

Ghamizi / ghamiz (ghah-MEE-zee / ghah-MEEZ)



Sihir / sahir (SEER / saw-HEER)
 Shaykh (SHAYKH)
 Khan (KHAHN)
 Tarkhan (TAR-khawn)
 Ilkhan (IL-khawn)
 Khaghan (khaw-GHAHN)
 Noyan (noh-YAWN)
 Sultan (sool-TAHN)
 Sahab-i-Simurgh (saw-HAHB-ee-see-MOORGH)

Names

Male

Achmet (AWKH-met)
 Bayazid (Bah-yah-ZEED)
 Heru (HAY-roo)
 Juhangiz (Joo-HONG-iz)
 Mabhu (Mah-VOO)
 Mansur (Mawn-SOOR)
 Ogadai (OH-gawd-eye)
 Palu (PAW-loo)
 Rustam (RUS-tahm)
 Shudekh (Shoo-DEKH)
 Subotai (SOO-but-eye)
 Sulayman (SOO-lay-mawn)
 Zaibolu (ZYE-boh-loo)

Female

Gaimish (GYE-mish)
 Kutukti (Kuh-TOOK-tee)
 Satai (Sawt-EYE)
 Siyurkuktiti (See-YOOR-kook-TEE-tee)
 Turakina (TOO-ruh-KEE-nuh)
 Zeenat (ZEE-naht)
 Zira (ZEE-rah)
 Zulaykha (Zoo-LAY-kha)

Places

Al Fashir (awl fah-SHEER)
 Beliah (Bel-EYE-ah)
 Hira (HEE-rah)
 Irem Zat el-Amad (ee-REM ZAWT el-ah-MAWD)
 Khayyam (khye-YAM)
 Rukh (ROOKH)
 Tsuma (TSOO-mah)

Religion

El-Diin, the state religion of the Caliphate, has in common with the Universal Church the veneration of Zebulon — Kurganized as “Zaibolu” — as the true prophet of the Celestial Sun. Kurgan belief holds that their worlds had already been settled during the early Diaspora, and that Zaibolu and Palu (Saint Paulus) made the first pilgrimage by traversing the jumproads between Hira and Irem. Along the way, Zaibolu befriended holy hermits, local saints and reli-

gious leaders, eventually naming one of their number as his successor to tend to the spiritual needs of the peoples of the sacred jumproute. It became the custom of each new khalif to travel in the steps of Zaibolu, and when nobles seeking the khalif's counsel added their entourages to his train, the pilgrimage was born.

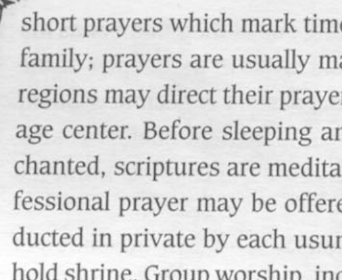
In actuality, Kurgan religious history is the invention of Bjorn Egon and his personnel management executives, using the background of the Universal Church already shared by most of their employees to give a kind of spiritual credibility to Egon's autocratic rule and his efforts to keep the “Kurgan” worlds secluded from the rising Second Republic. Egon's re-educators and cultural indoctrinators were so successful that, when the Republic entered Egon's jumpweb in the 3780s, even the older generations of “Kurgans” chose life as starving refugees over any submission to Republican authority. Since the time of Juhangiz I it has been judged heresy to claim that the artificial Diasporan history written by Egon might be untrue. Bjorn Egon's name is lost to the ages, but survives in the corrupted form “Borjigun,” used to designate the fictitious First Republic settlers on the Kurgan worlds.

By the late Second Republic, foreign influences permeated Kurga such that native beliefs were seldom found in anything like their original form, either borrowing elements of other contemporary religions or being “reformed” by Urth Orthodox missionaries. Outside of urban centers the original faith survived in slightly purer form, taking on almost Gjarti-like animistic qualities as it was adapted for the nomadic lifestyle. While the wildest and most remote tribes eventually degenerated into total paganism (and remain so to this day), the nomads who reconquered the cities after the Fall kept their belief in nature-spirits and other disembodied entities, as a kind of auxiliary to the monotheism of Zaibolu. These beliefs, modified by time, uniquely embellished according to region and endlessly subjected to esoteric interpretation, became doctrine when the Caliphate came to power.

El-Diin has no priests as such, recognizing no intercessor between humanity and divinity other than the personage of the Caliph. For healing, spiritual counseling, confession, inspiration or moral instruction, a Kurgan is most likely to seek out a learned sechen, but in truth no single profession is considered more enlightened than another. The gathering of knowledge can certainly help one to know God, but so can dancing, commerce and soldiering, if practiced with the same piety and devotion. Every ordu has its own saints, martyrs and holy men, who not only serve as role models for those who follow their path but also exemplify the virtues of their ordu to others.

The ceremonial requirements of El-Diin are few and relatively brief. Each day is punctuated at seven intervals by





short prayers which mark time for meals, work, leisure and family; prayers are usually made facing the east, but some regions may direct their prayers at a local shrine or pilgrimage center. Before sleeping and after waking, liturgies are chanted, scriptures are meditated upon, and a detailed confessional prayer may be offered. Worship is generally conducted in private by each usun maintaining its own household shrine. Group worship, including mass prayer, sermons, hymns, chants, dance, spontaneous testimonial and occasional dramatic presentations, can be found on pilgrimage, at the temples of local saints staffed by sechenim and volunteers, and during seasonal festivals.

There is no scriptural equivalent to the Omega Gospels in El-Diin; the stories of Zaibolu and his disciples are an oral tradition, written down only by scholars interested in preserving regional variations. Questions of moral law and social order are addressed in the Yasa. The Caliph-Nameh is a historical record of the sayings and deeds of the Caliphs, and contains relevant tales told of the pre-Juhangid khalifs. The libraries of Khayyam have preserved what are purported to be the works of Saint Horace, written in his own hand.

El-Diin numbers the years of its calendar starting at the liberation of Irem by Juhangiz I in 4473; thus the Holy Terran year 5000 would be 527 according to the Caliphal calendar, and the Day of Revelation and Reckoning, the Kurgan version of the Eskaton, is prophesied to occur in the one-thousandth year of the Caliphate, or 5473 in the Holy Terran calendar.

Cosmology

El-Diin is the worship above all things of the Celestial Sun, called in Kurgan the Mongke Yildiz, or "Everlasting Star." Contrary to the Universal Church's doctrine, El-Diin identifies an actual position in real interstellar space as the home of the one true physically existing Mongke Yildiz, the light of which can be seen from the systems of Hira and Irem. Having this visible manifestation of God's presence has keened the Kurgan sense of idolatry; the Pancreator is never named directly but only referred to by titles, such as Maker of Stars, Light Eternal, Source of Bounty or Wonder of Wonders. Any attempt to personify or anthropomorphise the All-Maker is deemed blasphemous.

Beside existing in physical space, the Celestial Sun also occupies the center of the Mongke Tengri, a transdimensional space corresponding to the Empyrean realm in Urthish cosmology. (Meaning "Everlasting Sky," it is distinguished from the common tengri of interplanetary space.) Surrounding the Mongke Yildiz are concentric coronal layers, collectively known as Nuristan, or "Land of Light," the equivalent of the Empyrean sefiros studied by Eskatonic theurges. Nuristan is home to the *bogdo*, old pagan sky-spirits raised

to the status of angels to fit into the Caliphal monotheism; from Nuristan, the bogdo travel through the Mongke Tengri to enact the will of the Star Maker. Depicted as rays of light emanating from the Mongke Yildiz, the bogdo are identified with the immutable laws of the physical universe, and are believed to deliver visions, signs and omens to those Faithful with eyes to see, and to collect every prayer and oath ever uttered to bring back to the Source of All Things.

Another survival of animism in Kurgan doctrine is the *kelet* (singular: *kele*), elemental spirits of the landscape familiar to any Gjartin. The living souls of mountains, rivers, trees, etc., or sometimes simply disembodied intelligences identified by some striking mental or emotional quality, *kelet* can enter the minds of receptive mortals and teach secrets of power, wisdom and truth. Some people, such as tribal shamans and Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi spiritualist mediums, actively seek communion with the *kelet* but involuntary hosts may suffer from disorientation and derangement — hence the Ordu Hekelezai. *Kelet* who honor the Mongke Yildiz, respect the authority of the Caliph and act relatively benign are called *djinn*, as opposed to the lawless and violent *qfrit* who feed on fear, rage and lust. Humans may also be possessed by *sulde*, the shades of the deceased who have neither returned to the Mongke Yildiz nor been lost to the outer darkness.

Interstellar space, the dark between the stars, is the ultimate abode of evil in Kurgan cosmology as in Urthish. Known as Kanun Khudan, the Land of Dark Gods, it is ruled by the cunning and twisted Erlik Khan and encircled by his mount, the endless serpent Mughai whose coils loop around every star except the Mongke Yildiz. The writhing of Mughai generates the Purga Buran, or Black Freezing Wind, which can cool the stars and dim their light, and causes the hearts of the wicked and faithless to shrivel and harden until the rays of the Mongke Yildiz can no longer penetrate. Erlik Khan is believed to assume a variety of forms — sentient, animal or other — and walk among the world spreading fear, grief and anger until he is recognized and his form is destroyed by the wise and righteous.

The apocalyptic lore of El-Diin states that on the Day of Revelation and Reckoning the Celestial Sun will shine through all systems which hold to the true faith of the Caliphate, filling the cold interstellar void and illuminating the vast coils of Mughai. Then shall the Caliph lead the Ordu'l-Diin into the space between the stars to cut apart the body of the monster and initiate the epoch of Everlasting Peace — unless enough of the endless serpent's body survives in the darkness of non-Caliphal worlds; then Mughai constricts its coils to swallow all of creation, including the Mongke Yildiz itself.



Hajj: Pilgrimage of the Consecrated Jumpweb

If the usuns are the backbone and the Caliph the head of Kurgan society, then the pilgrimage is certainly its lifeblood, in an economic as well as spiritual sense. Since the 38th century, the Hajj has strengthened the communal bond among Kurgans from widely different worlds, encouraged interplanetary commerce and enabled Kurgan culture to flourish on worlds like Hira and Khayyam, which were never subjected to Bjorn Egon's social engineering. To claim the title of hajji — one who has completed the pilgrimage — is a great social distinction, and a virtual prerequisite for appointment to the khanate. To falsely claim the title is a tongue-plucking offense.

The Hajj embodies a mystical belief nearly identical to the Doctrine of Stellar Consecration held by the Universal Church, which states that the Prophet's death in a jumpgate accident was a sacrifice which blessed the jumpweb and made space travel safe for humanity. The Kurgan version of this doctrine focuses on Zaibolu's act of naming a successor charged with keeping the Hira-Irem jumpweb open so the doubled light of the Mongke Yildiz reaching both these worlds could be compounded and circulated via jumpgate to the rest of human space. Sulayman Darumai repeatedly asserted that the first and foremost worldly duty of the living prophet was to maintain the sanctity of the Hajj, to assure safe and free passage to all who desire sight of the Everlasting Star.

Despite what Kurgans believe, the Hajj has its roots in Egon's "underground jumproad" whereby workers were shipped through the Khayyam gate unbeknownst to Republican authorities, with many ultimately taken to what is now Irem Zat el-Amad, where the most intensive social re-education took place. After Egon's crimes were discovered and his corporate apparatus dismantled, something very close to the modern pilgrimage came into being, in the form of a unique and highly profitable tourist route. Some of the huge automated luxury starliners that plied this route are still in use in the 50th century, somewhat the worse for wear but functional nevertheless, devoted exclusively to carrying pilgrims. Such ships are staffed by Caliphal appointment; honorable captains, learned guides and brave guards stand ready to assist all pilgrims.

A short distance from the main spacedock of each world stands the caravanserai, a massive Republican hotel complex where pilgrims are lodged, fed and offered directions and transport to local holy sites, all at the expense of the Caliphate. (A rich hajji is expected not only to pay his own way, but to share his goods and the services of his retinue with all members of the caravan, as an act of almsgiving; for the poorer majority of faithful, an affordable donation earns them a mass transport "package" tour little different

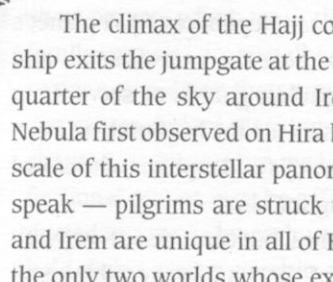
than that enjoyed by middle-class Republicans.) A planet's largest bazaar is usually in or near the caravanserai, and there one can hire freelance guides, guards or servants to follow local routes. Always present are the hajjburat, an ever-growing horde of beggars, runaways and orphans who crowd the pilgrimage roads clamoring for alms.

Ideally the Hajj begins at Hira, but centuries of war with the Hazat has made this leg of the Hajj inaccessible to all but the most adventurous and heavily armed hajjin. When Caliph Sulayman first formulated the modern notion of the Hajj, the Hazat presence in the Hira system posed little threat; as their power grew, however, the Hiran leg of the pilgrimage became more and more hazardous for the average pilgrim. In recent years, the title of hajj has been extended to any who have journeyed to holy sites on Irem and any world other than their own; a special title — mahajji — was created for those few who actually completed the entire circuit between Hira and Irem.

On Hira, pilgrims arrive by watercraft at an island observatory, an ancient structure whose gigantic mechanisms are programmed to follow one single feature across the Hiran sky. One by one, pilgrims are lead to the eyepiece of the observatory's main optical telescope, there to see with their own eyes a tiny smudge of color in the constellation called the Pathfinder (so named by Diasporan colonists because its two brightest stars form a straight line pointing to Kuranese-Tsaddi, the northern Hiran pole star.) Seen through the telescope is a vast interstellar cloud of gas and dust, dubbed RAS-333W89 by the Republican Astrographic Survey and known throughout Kurga as the Sahab-i-Simurgh, or Simurgh Nebula.

From Hira, fortunate pilgrims jump to Khayyam, Al Fashir then Beliah; the majority of pilgrims must content themselves with visits to these worlds only. (In recent years, rebellions on Al Fashir and Khayyam have kept timid pilgrims away, although most of the warring factions involved still honor the tradition of the Hajj and claim to allow pilgrims safe passage, unlike the Hazat.) On each world hajjin visit shrines and temples, the homes, hermitages, birthplaces or tombs of past prophets or various lesser saints, and the sites where miracles took place. Major pilgrimage stops are within a week's travel from the caravanserai, while other sites are considered optional, reserved for those with the time, money, determination and/or faithful devotion to travel extensively planetside. At each site, the pilgrim receives a tattoo which signifies that that portion of the pilgrimage has been completed. Also, distinctive souvenirs may be purchased from local artisans, who inscribe each piece with the pilgrim's name and the date upon which the site was visited. These souvenirs may be presented to friends and colleagues or passed on to succeeding generations; an usun's status is often proclaimed by her display of such souvenirs.






The climax of the Hajj comes the moment the pilgrimage exits the jumpgate at the Irem system, for, filling over a quarter of the sky around Irem is the self-same Simurgh Nebula first observed on Hira by mahajjin. Besides the sheer scale of this interstellar panorama — seen “up close,” so to speak — pilgrims are struck with the realization that Hira and Irem are unique in all of Human Space, in that they are the only two worlds whose exact spatial position relative to each other has ever been known. (Due to the discontinuous nature of jumpgate travel, the actual locations of the stars forming the total known jumpweb have never been determined — where they exist in relation to Holy Terra and each other, or even if they are all contained within the same Milky Way Galaxy. The Republican Astrographic Survey was initiated to solve this vast cosmic riddle, but the task of modeling the skies of every star system and then superimposing the models to find matching patterns proved too great even for the supercomputers of the Second Republic.)

Many pilgrims faint or break down and weep at this point in their journey; its impact upon the sentient psyche cannot be conveyed to those who have not experienced it. The Sahab-i-Simurgh is the central image of Kurga, seared into the memory of all mature Kurgans. Named for a mythical bird which embodied every aspect and quality of all birds, the nebula is composed of billows of vibrantly colored gases forming the wings and tail, with a curl of dark dust forming the silhouette of the head and neck. It is illuminated from within by a protostar — a star in the early stage of formation — hidden behind the dust, which fans its light rays out into a distinct peacock-tail array. This protostar is believed to be the Mongke Yildiz Itself, and its eventual emergence from the dust cloud is said to herald the Day of Revelation and Reckoning.

The Cult of Rustam



The second Caliph, Rustam Khabir, is the patron saint of soldiers, and his worship among the Ordu Bagatur has evolved into an initiatory hierarchy combining the military chain of command with religious authority. The cult recognizes the Caliph as Altai Amir, or Supreme Commander, and through it he can direct the forces of the jihad, assign guards to hajji caravans and create special divisions such as the Qeshik (the Caliphal bodyguard) and the Blessed, a highly trained special forces unit comprised of the most talented members of the Ordu Bagatur, the Ikhwan-i-Sihr and other ordus with useful skills or technical expertise. The Cult of Rustam teaches that perfect mastery of one's chosen weapon is the beginning of the path to enlightenment, and at its highest levels advanced tactics and strategy are studied as arcane mysteries. Cult leaders are charged with administering many of the tests given to Caliphal candidates. Not limited to the Ordu Bagatur, this cult has initiated members of

other ordus, adapting its ethic of focus and determination to other professions.

The Cult of Satai

Sata Natura is remembered as Satai, the greatest of the pre-Juhangid khalifs since Zaibolu himself, and organized worship of her dates back to the beginning of the New Dark Ages, almost eclipsing that of the present Caliphs in remote areas. Past leaders of the Cult of Satai have been instrumental in cementing the power of the Caliphate, especially during Siyurkuktiti's reign, and the cult has its own representation in the Kuriltai. The leadership of the cult has a special role in the Ikhudur el-Diin, or Festival of Faith, which culminates when the Simurgh Nebula reaches its zenith over the dome of Irem Zat el-Amad on the winter solstice. At that time the Caliph, his selected guests and members of the Kuriltai receive a sacrament known as the Flesh of Satai, a powerful and complex mind-altering drug said to dissolve the barrier between the physical world and the Mongke Tengri, resulting in visions, revelations and the spontaneous activation of occult powers. Under the influence of the Flesh of Satai, the Caliph enters a prophetic trance state in which the future of Kurga is revealed, and the full complexity and subtlety of the prophesy is telepathically transmitted to all present who have partaken of the sacrament, thus assuring that the leaders of Kurga are divinely guided to act with one will according to one vision.

The exact composition of the Flesh of Satai is the most closely guarded secret in the Caliphate, and requires chemical technology preserved from the Second Republic, the details of the operation known only to cultists among the Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun. The primary active ingredient is derived from certain fungal matter found only on Sky Tear (the sentient Muazi; see **Lost Worlds: Star Crusade 2** for details). For this reason, the Cult of Satai is instrumental in the Caliphate's diplomatic presence on Epiphany, working to keep the source of their sacrament out of Vuldrok hands. When Sky Tear went dark during the 48th century, Salim Rahman, the 12th Caliph, ceased to invite the potentates of more distant worlds to share the sacrament as reserves of fungi were gradually depleted. The chronic unrest which escalated into the rebellions on Khayyam and Al Fashir dates back to this time.

Occult

The Ordu'l-Diin makes no distinction between psychic powers and theurgy, judging only the intent with which occult powers are used. Psychics who openly act to benefit their community are hailed as miracle workers, while a theurge who abuses her rites can be tried for heretical sorcery. The Sihr and Ghamizi Ikhwans understand the difference somewhat, and make a special effort to recruit, study



and train gifted psychics. Ordu elders often arrange marriages between particularly gifted members, resulting over the course of centuries in usuns with an inherited psychic talent; among the Bagatur and Fellahin, for instance, certain families show a special aptitude for the FarHand and Soma paths. The Favyana and the Invisible Path have no equivalents in Kurga, except in rare isolated covens that emphatically declare themselves for or against the Caliph.

Low-level theurgy rites are found in all ordus throughout Kurgan society, and more powerful rites are taught by the Ordu Sechenim. Most are identical to those of their counterparts in the Known Worlds: Brother Battle rites are found among the Ordu Bagatur (with the Cult of Rustam teaching the higher levels); Sanctuary Aeon among the Ikhwan-i-Hakimun; Eskatonic among the Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi; Avestite among the Ikhwan-i-Sihr and the Qadiyate. The powers of the remote nomadic shaman are the same as the Known Worlds Gjartin, local variants of Manja sometimes come to light, and Antinomy, in even more arcane and bizarre variations, flourishes under the Caliphate just as it does in the Empire of Alexius Hawkwood.

Sathra seems to have made a special place for itself in Kurga; cults are uncovered with alarming regularity, especially among pilgrimage ship pilots. Kurgan Sathraists share

much of the same apocryphal history as the Ordu'l-Diin, believing that the worlds of Kurgan space were discovered during the late First Republic by a mysterious personage they name Hwai Lo, reputed to be a notorious Sathraist from Sathra's Boon (Sutek). Some writings attributed to this Hwai Lo contain details of the construction and programming of the Mongke Yildiz Observatory and lyrical descriptions of the Simurgh Nebula; thus, Kurgan Sathraists honor the Nebula and practice the pilgrimage with the same fervor and piety one finds in El-Diin. Elements of Sathraic belief can be found in certain Kafiri ordus which are prohibited from space travel, and some of the tenets of Sathra, carefully revised and reworded, were included in the Kurgan version of the Doctrine of the Consecrated Jumpweb.

El-Diin Theurgy Rites Bal-Buhlul: Work Song

(Level 1, Passion + Impress or Performance, LG, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

With this rite, a theurge of the Ordu Fellahin can add his victory points to the non-combat physical rolls of all within earshot who synchronize their movements to his song. (The liturgy of this rite contains the lyrics of the Galley-Slave Shanty from the *Jumping To Nineveh* soundtrack.)



Qitub-i-Hafzah: Writing the Pages of Memory

(Level 2, Wits + Observe, GP, sight, prolonged, 1W)

This rite grants the theurge a photographic memory, with perfect recall from a short glance at targeted information and victory points applied to Wits or Introvert rolls for attempting to remember untargeted details. Developed primarily by the Ordu Sechenim, it has seen widespread use by both Kibituk and Kankali.

Nafs-i-Shemshir: Soul of the Blade

(Level 3, Extrovert + Focus, LGP, touch, prolonged, 1W)

This rite is used by a bogatyr to bless her weapon with the victory points from casting the rite. Daily observance of this rite is part of the Cult of Rustam's practice of forming an intense metaphysical bond and union with one's chosen weapon, and a blade or gun which has been blessed regularly for years may have a permanent bonus when used by its proper owner.

Jeldun Ihzim: Satai's Lesser Pleasure Trick

(Level 4, Passion + Physick, LG, touch, temporary, 1W)

Traditionally attributed to Sata Natura, this rite causes the target to enter a state of orgasmic ecstasy so overwhelming that no other action — physical, social, mental or occult — may be taken for at least 10 turns plus the caster's victory points. The target may contest the rite with a roll of Ego or Calm + Stoic Mind. This rite is known only to the Ordu Kankali, who use it mainly for hedonic purposes, despite entreaties by the Ordu Bagatur and Ikhwan-i-Sihr who wish to adapt the rite for use in combat and law enforcement.

Juldna Hazam: Satai's Greater Pleasure Trick

(Level 5, Calm + Vigor, LP, self or touch, prolonged, 1W)

Although similar in nature, this rite has nearly the opposite effect as that previously described; far from incapacitating the target, the Greater Pleasure Trick keeps the target in a suspended state of physical arousal — awake, alert and pumped. Targets gain plus one per victory point on all non-combat physical rolls and ignore wound penalties for the duration of the rite.

Raqs al-Waghe: Dance of Faces

(Level 6, Extrovert + Vigor or Disguise, LGP, touch, prolonged, 2W)

Once credited to Satai but thought lost since, this rite was demonstrated by the current Caliph as part of his tests for candidacy. Similar to the level six Soma power Masking, it enables the theurge to physically alter his appearance;

unlike Masking, the caster may radically change his entire body at once — size, weight, posture, age and even gender. This rite does not alter trait ratings and cannot be used to gain abilities which the caster does not already possess.

Mus'hab-i-Aql: Clouding the Mind

(Level 7, Wits + Sneak, GP, sight, temporary, 1W)

By performing a complex hand gesture in front of a target's face, a theurge can cause a target to "blank out," making him unaware of the theurge's presence for 10 turns plus 1 per victory point. While not unconscious, the target will forget the previous few minutes (number of minutes also equal to victory points), and may even continue with a task the theurge might have interrupted with this rite. Once the duration of the rite has elapsed, the target may realize that something has happened, especially if the arrival, appearance and behavior of the theurge was incongruous enough to merit attention. Targets who are expecting some trickery may resist with Ego or Wits + Focus. Mus'hab-i-Aql was developed and used by the Ikhwan-i-Sihr, and remains their exclusive secret.

Shinjuqa-Dhu: The Invisible Blade

(Level 8, Faith + Melee, LP, touch or throwing distance, instant, 1W)

This rite enables the theurge to use any object as weapon, inflicting damage of three die plus one die per victory point from casting. Tales of Shinjuqa-Dhu are replete with heavily-armored men felled by hair-ribbons, broomstraws and pages torn from books. One theurge on Al Fashir is said to have pierced an enemy's heart with a skillfully flicked grain of sand. Shinjuqa-Dhu was developed and used by the Ikhwan-i-Sihr, but has spread among the Ordu Bagatur by the Cult of Rustam.

Amr al-Djinn: Command of the Spirits

(Level 9, Faith + Impress, LGP, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

The Ikhwan-i-Ghamiz have made extensive study of the kelet, and have learned to invoke the authority of the Caliph and the power of the bogdo to force spirits to do their bidding. This rite exists in many variations, and can be used to materialize servitors, call up sulde, exorcise afrit and even redirect some of the lesser forces of nature. The version given here was made famous by Sulayman Darumai, who was said to command an ever-present entourage of djinn.

This rite calls into being a number of invisible, immaterial servitor-spirits who have no intelligence or will of their own but may carry out complex tasks according to mental instructions from the theurge. These djinn may not attempt any action which the caster does not know how to perform herself, and will only act in the caster's presence. Although invisible and incorporeal, they can manipulate objects —



including technology or weapons for which the theurge has been trained, but are immune to physical attacks or interference. When a djinn is required to roll for an action, the relevant traits of the caster are used. The djinn are susceptible to some psychic powers and countertheurgic rites, and appear in Wyrd vision as undersized surrealistically deformed humanoids composed of vaporous billows.

The number of servitors called — i.e., the number of actions which can be remotely performed through use of this rite — equals one per victory point, plus one per extra Wyrd point spent.

Personalities

Mabhu Baliyam

Once a wealthy merchant of Hira trading in carpets, livestock, drugs and slaves, Mabhu Baliyam's fortune has been decimated by the Hazat war. Now that the Hazat conquest of Hira is nearly assured, Baliyam has chosen to keep himself solvent by doing business with the invaders while pretending to pledge his loyalty to them. Enticing them with his vast knowledge of Hiran politics and economy and his mastery of the impenetrable jungle dialects, he keeps the Hazat safely misinformed about Kurgan culture, always directing them away from the exact location of the Mongke Yildiz Observatory while sending the Caliphate information on the Hazat via the Ordu Kibituk. Meanwhile, he covertly strikes out at the Hazat by getting them addicted to inferior grades of tubaq and qoqa, and offering them the intimacies of his most attractive slaves, whom he has infected with the Hiran pox.

Shaydekh el-Tuqiyya (a.k.a. Esteban Escovar Estancia de Vera Cruz)

To the casual observer, Shaydekh el-Tuqiyya appears to be a tall, handsome Kurgan, probably of Khayyamite descent, who dresses and behaves like a veteran of the Vera Cruz Jihad. In reality, however, he is a highly accomplished spy for House Hazat, a commoner who earned a knighthood for his service during the Emperor Wars. Now he has turned his acumen upon the Kurga Caliphate, and travels the Balif kingdoms of Hira seeking a band of pilgrims with whom he can travel deeper into the unknown Kurgan jumpweb. Esteban is continually astonished at the piety demonstrated by Kurgans who have suffered the most in the war with the Hazat; his own faith in the Universal Church

was crushed by the horrors he witnessed during the Emperor Wars, and the "pilgrimage" he is attempting to undertake has begun to acquire some degree of personal significance.

Caliph Juhangiz XXIV, Khan of Khans, Vice-Regent of the Star-Maker and Reflector of the First Light

Born Juhangiz Urdai Mangu-Batu Turhan, 24th in the direct line of descent from the founder of the Caliphate, this Caliph is the third of his line to be named the living prophet (the previous being Juhangiza XVII, who enjoyed a brief and volatile reign in the 49th century.) Trained to rule since birth, Juhangiz was also rigorously tutored in the mystic arts by teachers from the Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi. When the previous Caliph, Hulagulu the Hekelet (formerly the Beggar-Sultan of Tsuma) perished without naming a successor in a mysterious jumpgate accident after a state visit to Tsuma, Juhangiz was prodded into candidacy by his family and friends among the Kuriltai. Despite initial misgivings and feelings of unworthiness, he passed all the tests with what seemed to him surprising ease, and when the jumprouete to Vera Cruz reopened on the day of his ascension, he had a clear vision of his future: he would be the Caliph who would finish Khabir's Jihad and take Vera Cruz. To this end, he has poured much of his resources into the development of advanced starships and machines of war, and authorized the Ordu Bagatur to carry lasers, blasters and other high-tech weaponry. Unfortunately, the rebellions on Al Fashir and Khayyam have rendered the fulfillment of his prophecy problematic. Although he has offered spectacular rewards to any who can bring these wayward worlds back under his sway, no progress has been made, and the recent near-conquest of Hira by the Hazat has cut him most deeply. Convinced that his military commanders are bunglers and his advisors are fools, Juhangiz XXIV is determined to examine the state of these worlds with his own eyes, and has launched upon the Secret Pilgrimage over the strident pleas of the Kuriltai. Accompanied by a horde of Whisperers and a plethora of disguises, he wishes to look upon the faces of the rebels and the Hazat, in order to see for himself just what sort of opponents these are. He has sworn to himself and to the Mongke Yildiz that he will not be remembered by history as The Caliph Who Failed To Keep The Hajj Intact.



Kurga Caliphate



Kurgan Character Creation

Upbringing

Three factors shape the formative years of the young Kurgan: the planet on which she is born or from which most of her ancestors hailed, the environment in which she grew and the ordu of the usun which raised her. Traits may be traded and mixed to reflect mixed ancestry, parentage and varying influences, but the total of characteristics and skills must be five points each.

Planetary Origin

The Suggested Blessings and Curses at this stage are not required; a character's Usun (below) provides more common Blessings and Curses.

Al Fashir: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1; *Suggested Blessing* — Tall (3 pts: +1 Vitality); *Suggested Curses* — Vain (+1 pt: -1 Perception when being flattered), Rebellious (+2 pts: -2 Calm when following others' orders)

Beliah: *Characteristics* — Strength +1; *Suggested Blessings* — Sensitive Touch (1 pt: +2 Perception to discern touched objects), Thrifty (2 pts: +2 Wits in money matters); *Suggested Curse* — Short (+3 pts: -1 Vitality, base run = 8 meters)

Hira: *Characteristics* — Passion +1

Irem: *Characteristics* — Faith +1

Khayyam: *Characteristics* — Wits +1

Tsuma: *Characteristics* — Wits or Ego +1

Rukh: *Characteristics* — Endurance +1; *Blessing* — Sensitive Smell (1 pt: +1 Per with smell only), Well-Liked (1 pt: +1 Charm); *Curse* — Stench (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among non-Rukhites) or choose a +2 pt. Curse if Scentless (see "The Changed," in *Traits*)

Tengri Igren: *Characteristics* — Tech +1; *Blessing* — Grease Monkey (2 pts: +2 with one Tech Redemption skill); *Curse* — Unnerving (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around superstitious people)

Environment

Hajjburat are children who grew up as part of a pilgrim caravan's retinue, the offspring of a pilgrimage site attendant, or one of the increasing number of orphans and runaways who live off the charity of hajjin; Mujahidin are the family and dependents of those warriors and diplomats who defend the Caliphate's frontiers at Hira, Antioch or Epiphany. Note that khan and slave refer to the status of the character's parent(s).

Uighur (city-dwellers): *Characteristics* — Tech +1, Extrovert +1; *Skills* — Fight +1 or Think Machine 1, Streetwise or Bureaucracy 1

Khirghiz (rural): *Characteristics* — Introvert +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Melee 1, Drive Beastcraft or Ride 1

Khaizak (nomads): *Characteristics* — Passion +1, Ego +1; *Skills* — Shoot +1 or Survival 1, Ride or Tracking 1

Tengri Igren (space nomads): *Characteristics* — Endurance +1, Tech +1; *Skills* — Spacesuit (2 pts) or Drive Spacecraft 2 or Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 2

Hajjburat: *Characteristics* — Faith +2, or choose from other environment; *Skills* — Etiquette 1, Lore (Regional or Kurgan Jumproads) 1, or choose from other environment

Mujahidin: *Characteristics* — Calm +1, Faith +1, or choose from other environment; *Skills* — Speak Hiran dialect, Urthish or Vuldrok (2 pts), or choose from other environment

Khan: *Characteristics* — (choose two) +1 each; *Skills* — Etiquette 1, Social (Leadership) 1, or choose from other environment

Slave: *Characteristics* — (choose one) +2; *Skills* — Charm or Knavery 1, Dodge 1 OR Sneak 1, or choose from other environment

Usun

Ordu Bagatur (soldiers): *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (2 pts: +2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Vengeful (+2 pts: -2 Calm when honor impinged, will never forget a slight)

Ordu Kibituk (merchants): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Impress +1, Gambling 1, Think Machine 1; *Blessing* — Thrifty (2 pts: +2 Wits in money matters) or Shrewd (2 pts: +2 Wits against attempts to fast-talk); *Curse* — Bluster (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert when recounting deeds) or Possessive (+2 pts: -2 Calm when cut out of the action)

Ordu Kankali (entertainers): *Characteristics* — Body or Mind (choose one) +1, Extrovert +1; *Skills* — Charm +1, Arts or Performance (choose specialty) 1, Social (Acting or Oratory) 1; *Blessing* — Curious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert when seeing something new); *Curse* — Vain (+2 pts: -2 Perception when being flattered)

Ordu Bachinghai (crafters): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Tech +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Artisan (choose specialty) 1, Tech Redemption (Craft) 1; *Blessing* — Loyal (2 pts: +2 Passion when following leige); *Curse* — Surly (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert when upset)

Ordu Fellahin (laborers): *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Endurance +1; *Skills* — Vigor +1, Artisan 1, Streetwise 1; *Blessing* — Unyielding (2 pts: +2 Endurance when honor is at stake); *Curse* — Pridelful (+2 pts: -2 Calm when insulted)

Ordu Asmurdlegh ("stinking ones"): *Characteristics* — Introvert +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Beast Lore 1, Empathy 1, Etiquette 1; *Blessing* — Stubborn (2 pts: +2 Wits to not change one's mind); *Curse* — Clueless (+2 pts: -2 Perception to notice social cues)

Ordu Hekelezai ("touched"): *Characteristics* — Perception +1, Introvert +1 OR Faith +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Performance 1, Streetwise 1; *Blessing* — Bold (2 pts: +2 Passion while acting when others hesitate); *Curse* — Delusional (+2 pts: -2 Perception when confronted with something that disagrees with character's delusional belief)

Ordu Kafiri (unbelievers): *Characteristics* — Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Gambling 1, Knavery 1; *Blessing* — Shrewd (2 pts: +2 Wits against attempts to fast-talk); *Curse* — Guilty (+2 pts: -2 on all rolls when opposing Caliphate officials) or Secretive (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around strangers)

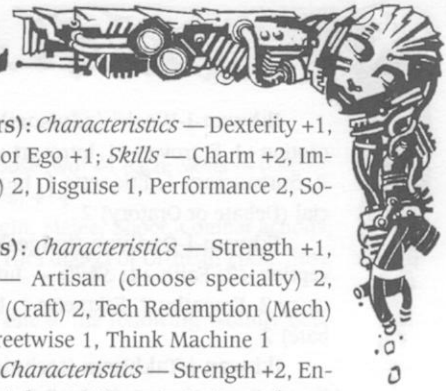
Ordu Sechenim

All born into this ordu are taught Read (Kurgan; 2pts) at an early age.

Ikhwan-i-Hakimun (healers): *Characteristics* — Perception +1, Calm +1; *Skill* — Empathy 1; *Blessing* — Compassionate (2 pts: +2 Passion when helping others); *Curse* — Righteous (+2 pts: -2 Calm when judgment questioned)

Ikhwan-i-Waziri (advisors): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Extrovert +1; *Skill* — Academia 1; *Blessing* — Loyal (2 pts: +2 Passion when following leige); *Curse* — Argumentative (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert in conversations)

Ikhwan-i-Qadiyun (judges): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Perception +1; *Skill* — Social (Debate) 1; *Blessing* — Shrewd (2 pts: +2



Wits against attempts to fast-talk); *Curse* — Condescending (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among the unenlightened)

Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun (technicians): *Characteristics* — Tech +2; *Skill* — Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 1 OR Think Machine 1; *Blessing* — Innovative (2 pts: +2 Tech when trying to invent something new); *Curse* — Subtle (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert when explaining something)

Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi (mystics): *Characteristics* — Introvert +1, Faith +1; *Skill* — Focus 1; *Blessing* — Pious (2 pts: +2 Extrovert among the sinful); *Curse* — Guilty (+2 pts: -2 on all rolls when opposing Caliphate officials)

Ikhwan-i-Sihr (spies): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Perception +1; *Skill* — Sneak +1; *Blessing* — Suspicious (2 pts: +2 Perception when rivals about); *Curse* — Possessive (+2 pts: -2 Calm when cut out of the action)

Apprenticeship

Ordu Bagatur (soldiers): *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1; *Skills* — Fight or Melee +2, Shoot +1, Archery, Crossbow (2 pts) or Throwing 2, Ride or Warfare (choose specialty) 1

Depending on the combat skill chosen, choose one of the following:

Martial Arts Actions: Martial Fist, Martial Kick

Fencing Actions: Parry, Thrust

Ordu Kibituk (merchants): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm +1, Impress +1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Social (Oratory) 1, Streetwise 2, Think Machine 1

Ordu Kankali (entertainers): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Extrovert +2, Passion +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm +2, Impress +1, Arts (choose specialty) 2, Disguise 1, Performance 2, Social (Acting) 2

Ordu Bachinghai (crafters): *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Tech +2; *Skills* — Artisan (choose specialty) 2, Lockpicking 1, Tech Redemption (Craft) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 1, Streetwise 1, Think Machine 1

Ordu Fellahin (laborers): *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Endurance +3; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Vigor +2, Artisan (choose specialty) 2, Gambling 1, Remedy 1, Tech Redemption (choose Craft, Mech or Volt) 1, Streetwise 1

Ordu Asmurdlegh ("stinking ones"): *Characteristics* — Endurance +2, Wits +1, Calm +2; *Skills* — Charm or Dodge +1, Fight or Impress +1, Artisan or Torture 1, Drive (choose any) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) or Ride 2, Science (choose Biology, Chemistry, Geology or Terraforming) or Beast Lore 2, Streetwise or Survival 1

Ordu Hekelezai ("touched"): *Characteristics* — Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +2, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Dodge +2, Empathy 1, Focus 2, Stoic Mind 1, Streetwise 1, Survival 1

Ordu Kafiri (unbelievers): *Characteristics* — Endurance +1, Wits +1, Introvert +1, Calm +2; *Skills* — Charm +2, Dodge +2, Artisan (choose specialty) 2, Knavery 2, Streetwise 2

Ordu Sechenim

Ikhwan-i-Hakimun (healers): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception or Tech +2; *Skills* — Observe +2, Physick 3, Remedy 2, Science (Biology) 2, Science (Cybernetics or Genetics) 1



Ikhwan-i-Waziri (advisors): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert +1, Introvert +2; *Skills* — Observe +1, Academia 2, Bureaucracy 1, Etiquette 1, Inquiry 1, Lore (choose one) 2, Social (Debate or Oratory) 2

Ikhwan-i-Qadiyun (judges): *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Perception +2, Faith +1; *Skills* — Impress +1, Academia 1, Bureaucracy 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 1, Lore (choose one) 1, Social (Debate) 2

Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun (technicians): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Perception +1, Tech +2, Introvert +1; *Skills* — Read Urthtech (2 pts), Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Tech Redemption (High-Tech) 1, Science (choose one) 1, Think Machine 2

Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi (mystics): *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Introvert +2, Faith +2; *Skills* — Observe +1, Alchemy 1, Empathy 1, Focus 2, Lore (choose one) 1, Science (Archaeology or Astronomy) 2, Stoic Mind 2

Ikhwan-i-Sihr (spies): *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Perception +2, Calm +2; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Sneak +2, Inquiry 2, Search 2, Sleight of Hand 1, Stoic Body 1

Early Career

Ordu Bagatur (soldiers): *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Tech +1, Passion +1, Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Melee +1, Shoot +2, Archery 2 or Crossbow (2 pts) or Throwing 2, Warfare (any) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Bashar or Shaykh)

Depending on the combat specialty, choose one of the following:

Martial Arts Actions: Martial Hold, any level 4 action

Fencing Actions: Slash, Fancy Footwork or Draw & Strike

Ordu Kibituk (merchants): *Characteristics* — Body (choose two) +1 each, Wits +2, Perception or Tech +1, Extrovert +2, Passion or Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm +1, Dodge +1, Impress +1, Arts or Artisan (choose specialty) 1, Bureaucracy 1, Drive (any) 1, Etiquette or Streetwise 2, Gambling 2, Inquiry 1, Knavery 1, Social (Debate) 2, Think Machine 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Pri or Shaykh)

Ordu Kankali (entertainers): *Characteristics* — Strength or Endurance +1, Dexterity +2, Wits or Perception +1, Extrovert +2, Passion +2, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Charm +2, Dodge +1, Impress +1, Arts (choose specialty) or Performance 3, Disguise 1, Empathy or Knavery 2, Etiquette 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Social (Acting or Oratory) 2, Streetwise 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Pri or Shaykh)

Ordu Bachinghai (crafters): *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Wits or Perception +2, Tech +1, Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Observe +1, Artisan (choose specialty) 3, Arts (choose specialty) or Science (Chemistry, Cybernetics or Engineering) 1, Drive (any) or Streetwise 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Remedy 1, Tech Redemption (Craft) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech or Volt) 2, Think Machine 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Pri or Shaykh)

Ordu Fellahin (laborers): *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Endurance +2, Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +2, Fight +1, Observe +1, Vigor +2, Artisan (choose specialty) 2, Drive (any) 1, Remedy 2, Science (Engineering, Geology or Terraforming) 1, Stoic Body 1, Tech Redemption (choose Craft, Mech or Volt) 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Pri or Shaykh)

Ordu Asmurdlegh ("stinking ones"): *Characteristics* — Body (choose two) +2 each, Mind (choose two) +1 each, Spirit (choose one) +2, Spirit (choose two) +1; *Skills* — Charm or Dodge +1, Fight

or Impress +1, Artisan (choose specialty) or Beast Lore 2, Drive (any) or Ride 2, Gambling 1, Remedy 1, Science (choose Biology, Chemistry, Geology or Terraforming) or Knavery 2, Streetwise or Survival 2, Tech Redemption (Craft or Mech) 1, Torture or Tracking 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Pri) or Friends (choose 3 pts from among Ally, Contact, Family Ties or Gossip Network)

Ordu Hekelezai ("touched"): *Characteristics* — Body (choose two) +1 each, Wits or Perception +2, Spirit (choose three) +2 each; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Observe +2, Sneak +1, Empathy 2, Focus 2, Knavery 2, Stoic Mind 2, Streetwise 2, Xeno-Empathy 1; *Benefice* — Ally, Protection or Retinue (3 pts)

Ordu Kafiri (unbelievers): *Characteristics* — Body (choose two) +1 each, Mind (choose two) +1 each, Spirit (choose three) +2 each; *Skills* — Charm +1, Dodge +2, Sneak +1, Empathy 2, Knavery 1, Remedy 2, Social (Acting) 2, Stoic Body 1, Streetwise or Survival 1, Tech Redemption (Craft) 2; *Benefice* — Friends (choose 3 pts from among Ally, Contact, Family Ties or Gossip Network)

Ordu Sechenim

Ikhwan-i-Hakimun: *Characteristics* — Body (choose two) +1 each, Mind (choose two) +2 each, Spirit (choose two) +2 each; *Skills* — Observe +2, Empathy 2, Physick 3, Remedy 3, Science (Anthropology or Biology) 3, Science (Cybernetics, Genetics or Xeno-Biology) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

Ikhwan-i-Waziri: *Characteristics* — Body (choose one) +1 each, Wits +2, Perception +1, Spirit (choose three) +2 each; *Skills* — Observe +1, Academia 3, Bureaucracy 2, Etiquette 1, Inquiry 1, Lore (any) 2, Science (any) 1, Social (Debate) 1, Social (Oratory) 2, Think Machine 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

Ikhwan-i-Qadiyun: *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Perception +2, Spirit (choose three) +2 each; *Skills* — Impress +2, Observe +2, Bureaucracy 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 2, Inquiry 2, Lore (choose one) 1, Social (Leadership or Oratory) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Tech +2, Introvert +2, Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Observe +2, Remedy 2, Science (choose two) 2 each, Tech Redemption (choose two) 2 each, Think Machine 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception +2, Introvert +1, Faith +2, Spirit (choose two) +1 each; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Observe +2, Alchemy 2, Focus 2, Lore (choose one) 2, Science (choose two) 2 each, Stoic Mind 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

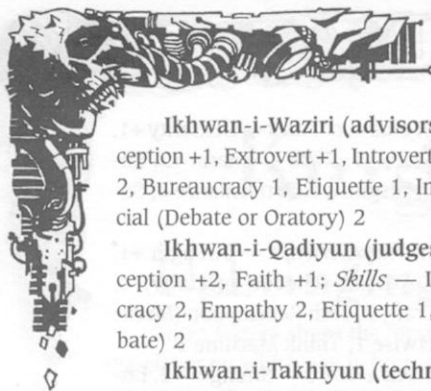
Ikhwan-i-Sihr: *Characteristics* — Strength or Endurance +1, Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Introvert or Extrovert +1, Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight or Melee +1, Observe +2, Sneak +2, Disguise or Torture 2, Inquiry 2, Knavery or Social (Acting) 2, Search 2, Sleight of Hand 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Murid)

Extra Stages

Kurgan characters use the same Extra Stages found on pages 89-90 of *Fading Suns* Second Edition rulebook: Tour of Duty, Another Tour of Duty, Occult Powers and Cybernetics, with some exceptions listed below. Remember that cybernetics are only granted to those who have sacrificed part of themselves or shown exceeding diligence in the service of the Caliph, and that formal training in Psi or Theurgy is only available through the Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi and Ikhwan-i-Sihr.

Hajji

The character has devoted a significant portion of her life to visiting Irem and pilgrimage sites on other worlds, and may take



this stage in place of a Tour of Duty. Because pilgrims may not practice their profession except by order of their caravan captain, note the choice in allotment of skill points.

Characteristics — Faith +1, (choose one) +1; *Skills* — (choose new ones) +14 OR (choose new ones) +7 and (add to existing skills) +7

Worldly Benefits

Choose one of the Worldly Benefits from Tour of Duty, or:

Spiritual rewards: Well-Traveled (1 pt), choose 6 pts from Church Relics (actually Caliphal Relics)

Mahajji

The character has completed the pilgrimage in its original and most sacred form, journeying from Hira to Irem, and may take this stage in place of a Tour of Duty. It is not necessary to buy Hajji before buying Mahajji.

Characteristics — Faith +2; *Skills* — (choose new ones or add to existing skills) +14

Worldly Benefits

Choose one of the Worldly Benefits from Tour of Duty, or:

Spiritual rewards: Well-Traveled (3 pts), choose 4 pts from Church Relics

Mujahidin

The character has served the Caliph by defending the Kurgan frontiers at Hira, Antioch or Epiphany. Suggested skills are given for military or diplomatic service.

Military

Characteristics — Body (choose two) +1 each; *Skills* — (choose new ones or add to existing skills) +14

Suggested skills: Dodge, Fight, Melee, Shoot, Combat actions, Drive (any), Lore (Hira), Speak (Hira dialect or Urthish; 2pts), Stoic Body, Survival, Warfare (any)

From Tour of Duty, choose one of the following Worldly Benefits: High promotion, Friends

Diplomatic

Characteristics — Wits or Perception +2; *Skills* — (choose new ones or add to existing skills) +14

Suggested skills: Charm, Impress, Observe, Sneak, Bureaucracy, Etiquette, Inquiry, Knavery, Lore (Antioch or Epiphany), Social (any), Speak (Vuldrok or local dialect; 2 pts), Stoic Mind, Warfare (Military Tactics)

From Tour of Duty, choose one of the following Worldly Benefits: Promotion and rewards, High promotion, Promotion and friends

The Changed

Characters who chose Rukh or Tengri-Igren as their Planetary Origin during their Upbringing stage may have inherited some genetic modifications. Such characters may spend one or more of their Extra Stages to represent these changes (20 pts per stage). See *The Changed*, in Traits.



Ordu Asmurdleg



Ordu Bachingai



Ordu Bagatur



Ordu Fellahin



Ordu Hekelezai



Ordu Kafiri



Ordu Kankali



Ordu Kibituk

Ulema (placed above sechen symbol to indicate membership in Ulema)



Ikhwan-i-Ghamizi



Ikhwan-i-Hakimun



Ikhwan-i-Qadiyun



Ikhwan-i-Sihr



Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun



Ikhwan-i-Waziri

Traits

The harsh environs of some Kurgan planets have bred heightened physical qualities in their indigenous populations. Natives of Beliah tend to have a higher Strength and are often Short (the Size Curse); Al Fashir natives tend to have a higher Dexterity and often Tall (the Size Blessing); the inhabitants of Rukh tend to have a higher Endurance and are as likely to be giants as dwarfs.

Most Kurgans have a high Faith, but it is not always primary.

The Khaizak tend to have higher overall combat skills, as well as Survival and Tracking; among the Uighur and Khirghiz social and professional skills predominate.

Benefice Rank

	<i>Khanate</i>	<i>Ordu</i>	<i>Ulema</i>	<i>Bagatur</i>
3 =	Shaykh	Pri	Murid	Bashar
5 =	Khan	Sri	Mullah	Tarkhan
7 =	Ilkhan	Ulu	Khwaja	Beg / Bey
9 =	Khaghan	Shah	Murshid	Atabeg
11 =	Noyan	Pasha	Imam	Amir
13 =	Sultan	Padishah	Roshi	Mansur

The Changed

Though rare, the descendants of the genetically altered comprise a slightly larger portion of the Kurgan population, and find a greater degree of acceptance, than in the Known Worlds. Although fear and prejudice still exist, whether privately or in some remote rural and wild regions, most well-traveled or cosmopolitan Kurgans have come into contact with the Changed and feel relatively comfortable in their presence. Many of the Changed have publicly served their communities or the Caliph with such distinction that even those who have not distinguished themselves enjoy a kind of reflected celebrity status.

Bjorn Egon had no qualms about physically modifying his employees to fit difficult work habitats, and before the Fall many of the Changed settled on the Kurgan worlds after fleeing persecution elsewhere. Many of the Animalized found work as entertainers on Tsuma, surviving in sufficient numbers to later migrate to the wilderness areas of other Kurgan worlds. The majority of Changed, however, trace their ancestry back to the Rukh system, where many of Egon's workers were adapted to survive the planet's hostile biomes or to function efficiently in the weightless environs of the orbital refineries.

Rukhites

The complex chemicals which virtually saturate the surface of Rukh have their effects on all living things, and can alter the sequencing of altered and unaltered genes alike. Many of Rukh's first terraformers and miners were given an alternative means of respiration and enhanced immunological systems so they could move freely in the poisons of the world's original atmosphere or the gaseous top strata of the Chemical Sea. Other mutations, benign and malignant, have developed over the years; Rukhites often have mottled varicolored skin and a distinctive body odor reminiscent of petroleum-based chemicals; nearly half the populace is afflicted with giantism or dwarfism.

In addition to Size Blessings and Curses such as Giant or Dwarf and Stench (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among non-Rukhites), Changed Rukhites may have some of the following Changed powers, which are described fully on pages 167-170 of the **Fading Suns Players Companion**: Alternative Respiration, Elongated Fingers, Immunity, Omnidigestion, Special Senses (Infrared, Educated Nose) Chameleon, Eye-stalks, Footpads, Hazardous Breath, Poisoned Bite, Skunk Spray; and the Curse: Oxygen Intolerant.

Also, some new powers native to Rukh follow:

Special Sense (Spectroscopic Vision) (4 pts)

This sense enables the character to determine the chemical composition of most substances at a glance. Some poisons which are otherwise undetectable may be seen in this way, and the gamemaster may, in some circumstances, allow the character to find fault lines and structural weaknesses in objects or diagnose the ailments of living creatures. Spectroscopic Vision does not confer the ability to read auras or detect any type of occult energies. Meta +1.

Scentless (2 pts)

Rukhites may buy this power to counteract their native Stench (see Upbringing, in *Character Creation*; a character may not possess both traits). The character exudes no innate smell whatsoever, and thus may not be tracked by scent nor can animals readily sense her emotional state. Because humans and other sentients still communicate through smell (albeit on a minimal, subconscious level), Scentless characters gain a +1 on Knavery (gamemaster's discretion) in situations involving face-to-face personal contact. However, they suffer -1 Charm due to lack of pheromones in similar situations. Characters with this power need not wear the robes of a smurd when travelling abroad (though many still do nevertheless). Meta +1.



Highly Offensive Odor (varies)

There are two types of Odor: For 4 pts, the character can willfully intensify his stench (must have the Stench Curse) to the point that anyone in a three meter radius — or occupying an enclosed space with the character — suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls unless protected by an alternative means of breathing, noseplugs or the inability to smell. For +2 pts, the Odor is always present or comes and goes involuntarily at inopportune moments. Meta +1.

Chemically Resistant Skin (4 pts)

The character's skin is extra thick and resists the damaging effects of caustics, solvents, corrosives, cleaning fluids and drugs or poisons which must be absorbed through the skin. Due to its insulated thickness, the skin has a normal armor defense rating of 1d, with a rating of 3d against flame and heat-based attacks. Note that Ka oil (used in flamerguns) and frictionless gel will not stick to Chemically Resistant Skin, but will slide off in the space of a turn. Meta +1.

Atmospheric Pressure Intolerance (+3 - +5 pts)

Some miners who work the deepest ravines of the Chemical Sea or the cloud harvesters of the upper atmosphere have difficulty adjusting to the surface-level atmospheric pressure most humanoids enjoy. Those who buy this power at +3 points suffer a -2 penalty on all rolls when not in their native high- or low-pressure environment; at +5 points, the character in a standard atmosphere without a pressure suit or similar protection will take one level of damage per turn until he is crushed or swells up and explodes.

Tengri-Igren

The space-faring nomads are, without a doubt, the strangest and most unnerving members of the Kurgan populace. Seldom seen except by those who trade or fight with them, many are scarcely recognizable as human, and yet strong family ties stretching back for centuries keep them in regular contact with their kin among the Khaizak. The most inhuman-looking Tengri-Igren are descended from Changed astronauts, especially those of Rukhish descent, but some families who chose life in the void later in history were altered through interbreeding and natural adaptation to weightless and confined environs.

Tengri-Igren may have some of the following Changed powers, which are described fully on pages 167-170 of the **Fading Suns Players Companion**: Air-Eater, Omnidigestion, Special Senses (Infrared, Cat Eyes, Fly Eyes), Eyestalks, Extra Limb, Internal Respiration, Tentacle; and the Curse: Unstable Mutation.

Tengri-Igren may also have the following powers, similar to the Gannok species traits found on page 123: Agile

New Traits for the Changed

The **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook did away with first edition rule's Human/Alien set of paired characteristics. Since the Alien trait was used when building Changed characters, we introduce here an alternate system for balancing such characters.

Instead of the Alien trait, Changed characters must purchase a new Occult characteristic called Meta. This gives them no special powers or abilities, but is used to determine the limits of a character's Changed abilities in the same way the Alien trait formerly did. For instance, the Hazardous Breath power requires a character to have Alien +2. Simply change this to read: Meta +2.

A Changed character can begin character creation with his Meta trait equal to 3 for no cost (he can still spend points to increase this during the later stages of character creation). However, in doing so, he must reduce another characteristic that normally begins at 3 to 1. For example, Jarl Grimson reduces his Extrovert characteristic to 1 (even though he originally declared it primary), thus leaving him with both Extrovert and Introvert as secondary traits (both beginning at 1, unless he later spends points to raise them). Alternatively, he could reduce his Tech (or his Wits, or even Strength) to 1.

If a character does not wish to reduce another characteristic, his Meta trait begins at 1 — if he is a Changed character. He must take one of Changed Curses — making him an Inhuman, Animalized, Mutation, Tweaked, Grimson, Metonym or Clone — even if it is worth no points.

Meta can be increased during character creation at the same cost as any Occult characteristic. However, it cannot be increased during play without special gamemaster permission.

Toes (1 pt; Meta +1), Long Fingers and Toes (1 pt; Meta +1), Prehensile Tail (2 pts: Meta +1).

New powers for the Tengri-Igren follow:

Atmospheric Pressure Immunity (5 pts)

A character with this power is unaffected by extreme changes in atmospheric pressure, whether caused by rapid changes in altitude or explosive decompression from a breached starship hull. The character may survive in the void without a spacesuit but would still require Internal Respiration to function. Note that characters with Atmospheric Pressure Intolerance may not purchase this power. Meta +3.



STAR CRUSADE

42

2 points — Shoulders and hips. +2 to resist Grapple attacks and to escape bonds. Meta +1.

The ability to distinguish fine details at great distances can be a tremendous advantage to those who live in space, especially for pilots and navigators. This power enhances the character's vision to the equivalent of a pair of high-powered binoculars; increased levels may be bought if the gamemaster allows. Meta +1.

As the Rukhish Curse above; note that characters with Atmospheric Pressure Immunity may not purchase this power.

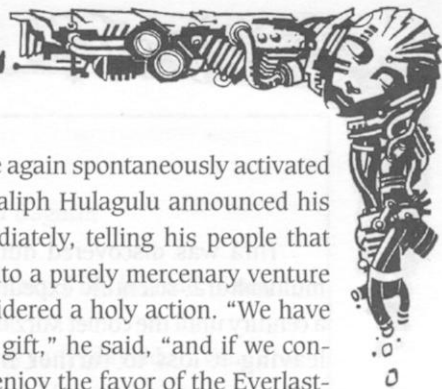
Characters with this Curse are so fully adapted to weightlessness that anything approaching Urthlike gravity adversely affects them. At +3 points the character may still function but suffers a -4 penalty on all physical rolls; those with +5 points who enter a standard gravity environment without an acceleration couch, suspension tank or repulsor field receive one level of damage per turn as they are crushed by their own mass.

The Hazat have come to fear the sudden appearance of one of these raiders. It relies on heat blasters to disable its target's crew, avoiding substantial damage to the hull. While the prospect of dying in the vacuum of space is certainly unpleasant to most starmen, they would prefer it to being cooked alive by a *Mujahidin*.

A detailed illustration of the Starship Enterprise (NCC-1701-A) in a dynamic, angled perspective, showing its complex structure and weaponry. The ship is depicted in a dark, high-contrast style, with a large, dark, and somewhat abstract background. The ship's hull is primarily white with grey and black accents, and it features a prominent, dark, and somewhat abstract design on its side. The ship is shown from a low angle, emphasizing its massive scale and the complexity of its structure. The background is dark and textured, with some lighter, abstract shapes that suggest a starry sky or a nebula. The overall style is reminiscent of a comic book or a pulp magazine illustration, with a focus on dramatic lighting and a sense of motion.

Artifact: The Simurgh-Head

More than any other person, event or weapon, the Philosopher's Stone which grants control of the Hira jumpgate is responsible for the rise and continued reign of the Kurga Caliphate. It is called the Simurgh-Head, bearing a superficial resemblance to the skull of the extinct rukh, widened and somewhat anthropomorphized, mounted on a shattered circular base. A bristle of rainbow colored crystalline rods protrudes from the exposed obverse of the base; when manipulated in proper sequence they can reprogram the Hira gate in specific ways, opening or closing individual jumproutes without sealing the gate entirely. As the first



Caliph demonstrated, the Simurgh-Head could also be used to access Hira's gate from Khayyam through a route long dormant.

The Simurgh-Head was dislodged from the Hira jumpgate by a cometary impact sometime during the early Diaspora, not long after Hira had been discovered and colonized. It is believed that the heart of the comet was then caught in a regular orbit around Hira's sun, becoming its outermost planetary body. It was not until the latter half of the Second Republic that the Simurgh-Head was discovered frozen on the surface of this small planet, but its existence was noted and described in certain arcane writings of the mysterious Hwai Lo preserved in the libraries of Khayyam. Sata Natura must have had access to these writings — and understood their import — when her forces seized the Simurgh-Head and used it to shut down Hira's jumprouete to Vera Cruz during the Fall.

After the Fall, Natura entrusted this Philosopher's Stone, along with instructions for its use, apparently, to a remote tribe of nomads on Al Fashir, to be kept secret until certain of her prophecies were fulfilled. They, in turn, surrendered it to Juhangiz Turhan during his first visit to Al Fashir, believing him to be the one foretold by Satai who would unite the Kurgan peoples in a perfect theocratic society. Juhangiz used the Simurgh-Head to reactivate Khayyam's jumprouete to Hira, thus satisfying the predictions Satai left Hira with before that world was isolated by the sealing of Khayyam's gate four and a half centuries earlier.

After the founding of the Caliphate, Rustam Khabir employed the Simurgh-Head as a key stratagem in his Jihad for Vera Cruz, opening the Hira-Vera Cruz route to send forth troops and spies, and closing it when necessary to cut off Hazat incursions. Ogadai The Fat and later Caliphs used it in much the same fashion, but with greater frequency, allowing raiders and privateers to plunder the Known Worlds for financial gain. Over time, however, the Vera Cruz route developed a tendency to reactivate of its own accord, opening spontaneously and enabling House Hazat to move ships and troops into the Hira system, often when the Caliphate was unprepared to adequately defend the planet. (It was this tendency that enabled the Hazat to gain a foothold on Hira in the early 44th century, when the route reopened briefly just over 300 years after Satai first used the Simurgh-

Head to close it.)

When the route was once again spontaneously activated during the Emperor Wars, Caliph Hulagulu announced his intention to reclose it immediately, telling his people that the Jihad had degenerated into a purely mercenary venture and could no longer be considered a holy action. "We have sorely abused this heavenly gift," he said, "and if we continue to do so we no longer enjoy the favor of the Everlasting Star. I prophesy that if Kurga once again takes up the sword in this arena, its people shall be shown what comes to those who take for granted what has come too easily to them." It soon became clear, however, that the Hazat were too deeply engaged elsewhere to expend much of their force on Hira, and the folk of Kurga clamored for a new Jihad, despite Hulagulu's warnings. For nearly a decade the Caliphate was victorious, but then the Emperor Wars ended and the Hazat turned their full attention to Hira.

The tide of battle suddenly reversed, as more and more Hazat troops poured through the gate and drove the Kurgan forces back. As the Hazat cemented their gains, the Kurgans of Hira cried out to the Caliph, begging him to bring the Simurgh-Head to Hira and shut down the Vera Cruz route. By that time Hulagulu had perished, and when his successor opened the vault in which the Simurgh-Head was kept, he found it gone. Hulagulu had taken steps to ensure the fulfillment of his own prophecy, by hiding away the single most important element in the Caliphal arsenal and leaving Kurga without the means to seal off its most hotly contested border. The present Caliph, a direct descendant of the first, has stoically acknowledged the wisdom of his predecessor and told the people of Kurga that the current Jihad will be the crucial test of their faith and commitment.

(The Simurgh-Head is currently in the hands of the Zirghuzai, a reclusive tribe of Tengri-Igren, who have hidden it deep within a natural cavern in an asteroid orbiting Shiraz in the Rukh system. Hulagulu delivered it to their care himself, telling none of his staff nor any member of the Kuriltai what he was doing. He asked the Zirghuzai, who are renowned for their piety, not to reveal the whereabouts of the Simurgh-Head until the Kurgan people regain the essence of their faith and fully realize how blessed they are to inhabit a region of space that lies in the full and direct view of the Maker of Stars.)

Kurgan Worlds

The worlds of the Caliphate and Kurgan cultures are listed as they are traveled on the Hajj: from Hira to Irem. Jumps are numbered from Irem (from which all worlds are considered nightside). The number of jumps to Byzantium Secundus are given in parentheses.

Hira

Hira was discovered during the early Diaspora by a multicultural scientific expedition and colonized for nearly a century until the comet Mirzabah collided with its jumpgate, leaving it lost to further human contact for nearly a millenium. (Attempts to identify Hira as the "lost Nineveh" cited in the Omega Gospels, however, have failed.) Cut off from their support shipments before they had developed to a self-sufficient state, settlements became isolated and fragmented, battling over remaining resources and tech, with most eventually degenerating into utter savagery over the next several centuries. A major force during this period was the M'Ballah culture, an Iron-Age society which rose to become a rudimentary empire on the southern continent Juruta.

The jumproute to Hira from Khayyam reactivated during the Second Republic; industrialists found little use for the jungle planet, whose resources were too scarce or difficult to harvest, but scientists flocked to Hira in interest. Xenobiologists stalked new lifeforms with nets and holocameras, and cultural anthropologists, census-takers and missionaries disappeared into the wilderness to study the primitive descendants of the original Diasporan colonists. Xenotechnologists studied the high-incomprehensible jumpgate mechanisms exposed by Mirzabah's impact ages before, and a missing piece of the gate was discovered on the outermost planet of the system.

Amidst all this, the discovery of the nebula RAS-333W89 in Hira's northern winter sky excited only passing notice in intellectual circles. When the same nebula was discovered filling the sky in the Irem system decades later, Hira became a favored destination for tourists and scientists working to renew the near-lost pursuit of astronomy. The tourist trade proved to be the only major industry to thrive on Hira during the Second Republic, and with it came Iremites who settled on this new world which looked out upon their home, believing that in traveling there they had encircled the universe. As Kurgans from all worlds journeyed between Hira and Irem to experience the close and distant views of the Simurgh Nebula, a kinship grew among the peoples who lived on the route between the two systems, a national identity which set them apart from the rest of the Republic.

This national identity tipped the balance of power when the Hazat usurped House Chauki just before the Fall. The Chaukis were one of the controlling interests in Hira's economy, having supported and capitalized on the flow of tourism. When Hazat troops hunted down the last Chaukis on the planet and threatened to blockade the tour lines, Sata Natura led a cadre of Kurgan nationalists who seized the jumpgate fragment, convinced that it was a powerful Philosopher's Stone destined to aid their cause. Calling upon

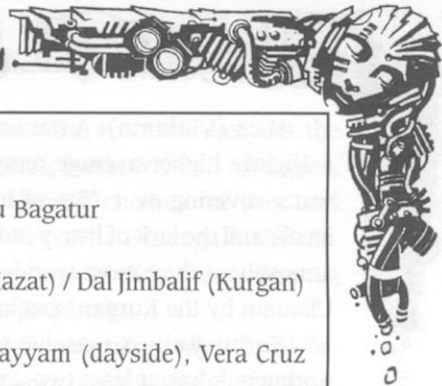
practitioners of arcane sciences, Natura used the artifact to take control of the jumpgate and seal off the route to Vera Cruz. Cut off without support from their other worlds, the local Hazat were besieged and eventually defeated by a coalition of Kurgan nationalists and Hiran freedom fighters.

After the Fall, Hira lapsed back into the isolation it suffered in the Diaspora because of Khayyam's decision to seal its gate. Kurgan leaders on both worlds, fearful of being cut off from their families on Irem and the rest of Kurga, pleaded with the populace to reconsider, but the rash actions of militant extremists only confirmed Khayyam's desire to isolate itself from the chaos of the Fall. Sata Natura was allowed one last vist to Hira before Khayyam sealed its gate; during a legendary tour she assured the Kurgan folk of Hira that on some future date their brethren beyond Khayyam would return to welcome them into a reunited Kurga.

The early Dark Ages saw most of Hira descend back into the savagery of its late Diasporan age. Cities deprived of the influx of offworld wealth degenerated into squalor and primitives advanced from the wilderness to prey upon refugees. This period saw the rise of the Balif kingdoms across the fertile lowlands stretching away from the disused spacedock at Dal Jimbalif, a thriving Republican seaport of Daanyu. In the latter days of the Republic Dal Jimbalif became the center of Kurgan culture on the world and, in effect, its capitol city, dominating the planet through the time of the Caliphate until the most recent Hazat invasion.

In 4327, when the damaged gate spontaneously reopened the jumproute to Vera Cruz for approximately one year, Don Gonzago Justus took several legions through to re-establish his house's control of Hira, only to have the gate close before he could complete his mission. Reuniting with the downtrodden remnants of the Hazat left on Hira since the Fall, Don Gonzago managed to seize a fief in the mountains of Imbuk, the planet's southernmost continent. When, over a hundred and fifty years later, the second Caliph declared his crusade for Vera Cruz, he had a large military garrison and spacedock built on the ruins of the old M'Ballah imperial city in order to keep troops within striking distance of Andalus, the Hazat holding.

In 4467 Juhangiz Turhan reactivated Hira's jumproute to Khayyam using the Philosopher's Stone believed lost since the time of Sata Natura. Hailed with messianic fervor as the fulfillment of Natura's prophecy, Juhangiz was welcomed by the Balif peoples and invited to speak at more civilized kingdoms around the globe. It was on Hira that the title "khalif" was first applied to Juhangiz. His natural charisma and the urgency of his warnings against the Vuldrok earned him the hearts of many non-Kurgan Hirans as well, especially those



who had fought the Hazat in the south.

Hira suffered greatly when the rise of Vladimir's empire turned the tide of Khabir's crusade, and even worse during Ogadai the Fat's mercenary attempt to renew the jihad. While some Hirans prospered during the mercenary campaigns of plunder mounted against Vera Cruz by Bayazid and Zeenat Amina in the 49th century, the bulk of the planet has always borne the brunt of Hazat retaliation. This has polarized the relations of many Hiran kingdoms with the Caliphate; by the time of the Emperor Wars, a number of regions had declared their independence in rebellions which met with varied success. The combined might of the Balif and the M'Ballah garrison were only barely able to maintain the Caliph's tenuous hold on this world.

The turning point came in 4987 when Baronet Teikorc took the M'Ballah garrison, after which it was renamed Fort Omala by the Urthish-speaking Hazat who flocked to the shrine where the baronet had given his life for the glory of his house. With the heavily fortified spacedock as their base of operations, the Hazat were able to secure more ground and win more kingdoms to their cause. Once the Emperor Wars were over, the Hazat were able to send more troops and resources to Hira to cement their gains. Many Hiran khans have petitioned the current Caliph to deploy the Philosopher's Stone to close the Vera Cruz route, and are baffled as to why this has not been done already. By the end of 4998, Hira had essentially become a Hazat world, with the Balif nearly surrounded by hostile or unsympathetic forces and the pilgrim traffic reduced to an adventurous few willing to brave enemy territory for their faith, but who rarely manage to reach their destination.

Culture

Although the cosmopolitan culture of Kurga has permeated the main cities of Hira for centuries, most of the world is a cultural patchwork that reflects the fragmentation of the original Diasporan colonies. Most prominent are the Balif kingdoms of the northern continent Daanyu, where most of the original agricultural tech was preserved and local culture flourished to some degree, even through the Second Republic and the steady influx of Kurgan pilgrims after the Fall. The Balif peoples are devout followers of El-Diin, and pilgrims could spend years exploring the saints' temples maintained on every khan's estate, and the shrines in every village and byway marking the sites of miracles dating back to Zaibolu's era.

At the opposite extreme are the Djipugah pygmies of the equatorial rainforest, who have only Stone Age-level technology and worship the dark and savage spirits of the jungle. Many of the rainforest tribes practice headhunting and cannibalism, and may be allowed to do so free from prosecution provided they restrict their hunting to avowed enemies of the Caliphate. Not all jungle folk are savages,

Hira Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ordu Bagatur

Garrison: 8/7

Capital: Fort Omala (Hazat) / Dal Jimbalif (Kurgan)

Jumps: 4 (3)

Adjacent Worlds: Khayyam (dayside), Vera Cruz (nightside)

Solar System: Falai (0.68 AU), Hira (0.96 AU; Ulalumn), Korbuchuk (14 AU), Eslemiel (31 AU), Mirzabah (37), Jumpgate (38 AU)

Tech: 2

Human Population: 400,000,000

Alien Population: Unknown

Resources: Contraband, relics

Exports: Tubaq; qoqa; Ayuwarzat vine; threads from Zaibolu's robe; jewel chips from the pommel of Rustam Khabir's scimitar; blood and knucklebones of martyred crusaders; Satai's eyelashes; Siyurkuktiti's fingernail clippings.

Landscape: Hira's land area is comprised of five continents: Imbuk and Juruta in the southern hemisphere, Givral and Daanyu in the north, and Halalaj straddling the equator. Hira's main geographical feature — immediately noticeable from orbit — is its equatorial rainforest, spanning three continents with a canopy five layers deep at its center.

however; the Oyin-Igren are a gentle tribe whose strongly animistic mysticism is accepted as a valid expression of the El-Diin and whose shamans are credited with working miracles of weather and soil for farmers.

Farming communities border the rainforest across Juruta, Givral and some of Imbuk, some prospering in the past well enough to become small plantation kingdoms in their own right. While the largest of these, the Nadhiyin of Givral, continue to thrive, many have fallen to famine when off-world merchants convinced them to forego the planting of food staples in favor of the highly profitable crops tubaq and qoqa.

The continent of Halalaj has kept one homogenous low tech culture under a strict isolationist regime since the Diaspora, staying neutral in planetary politics and paying its sizable tributes — first to the Republic, then the Caliphate and now the Hazat — in shipments of millrice, salt, spices, perfumes, incense and exotic pharmaceuticals.

Solar System

Falai: This small planet is perpetually enshrouded in dense clouds, its barren rocky surface scoured by winds averaging around 500 kph.



by the battle-chaplains of the Hazat, commemorating the man who took the fort and held it against Kurgan forces outnumbering him ten to one. Since the end of the Emperor Wars, the nearby village of Arada has swollen to become a barracks town as young knights making their rite of passage flock to the Teikorc shrine.

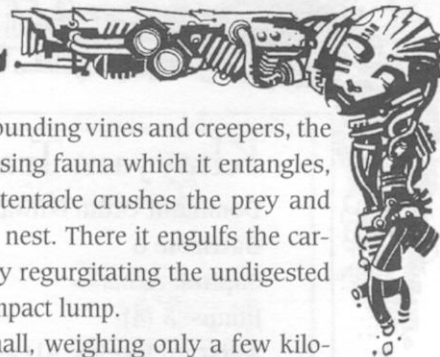
The Pilgrim's Boulevard leading out of the spacedock at Dal Jimbalif winds over a thousand kilometers across Daanyu, passing millirice terraces and fields of cornegranate, and grazing ground for cattle, sheep and goat, and folk whose way of life has remained essentially unchanged since the Diaspora. Temples and shrines dot the landscape at every turn, and the rustic inhabitants regale visitors with sermons and impromptu passion plays while hawking a seemingly inexhaustible supply of relics.

Having reached the end of the Pilgrim's Boulevard at the seaport of Hyderabad on Daanyu's eastern coast, pilgrims proceed by boat along the Hwilayt Archipelago and out into the Sea of Fashan, eventually arriving at a steep spur of rock jutting out of the vast empty ocean. Perched atop this craggy island is the Mongke Yildiz Observatory, the ultimate destination of all who would follow the Hajj. Within, pilgrims are lead one by one to the eyepiece of a massive antique optical telescope which the mechanisms of the observatory, keeping a clockwork program uninterrupted for centuries, hold trained upon a tiny smudge of sky barely

Places

Fort Omala is the Latinized name given by the Hazat to the M'Ballah garrison, a spacedock perched on a mountain plateau overlooking the mouth of the Kawthar river which seperates Andalus on the continent of Imbuk from Juruta. Southwest, toward the source of the Kawthar, rise the mountains of Jebal Salid, rich in uranium, where House Shelit ruled in secrecy since the Fall, until its discovery by the Hazat. Within Fort Omala is a shrine to Baronet Teikorc maintained





noticeable to the naked eye on clear nights — a smudge which is revealed to be RAS-333W89, the Simurgh Nebula.

Flora/Fauna

Hira is host to a wide variety of native plant and animal species, mostly clustered in and around the rainforest region, where many types of monkeys, parrots, reptiles and large insects abound. In the temperate zones, like the mountains near Fort Omala, swift hallah rabbits dart through the underbrush while brightly colored tracha lizards bask on sun-warmed rocks.

Chervin

The chervin is a large cloven-hooved mountain goat indigenous to the region south of Fort Omala, useful as both a pack-beast and riding mount, as well as for its wool, milk, cheese and meat. Chervins can be trained as fine war-mounts and have been used as such by Kurgan cavalry, although the source of these well-trained beasts remains a mystery. (For more information on chervins, see Kurga: Valley of the Chervins in **Weird Places**.)

Body: Strength 11, Dexterity 13, Endurance 10

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 2

Skills: Fight 3, Vigor 9

Weapons: Horns (Dexterity + Fight, 3d DMG; with sharpened metal tips 4d DMG)

Armor: Leather hide (2d)

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Polyconstrictor (Tree Squid)

This strange creature inhabits the equatorial rainforests of Hira, and most closely resembles a land-faring version of the octopi found in the seas of many worlds. An arboreal predator, the polyconstrictor nests the flabby bulk of its body in the low branches of large trees overlooking "high-traffic" jungle sites — watering holes, riverbanks, cross-paths, salt licks and fruit-bearing bushes. Dangling its long slender

tentacles in imitation of surrounding vines and creepers, the polyconstrictor waits for passing fauna which it entangles, then using its strong main tentacle crushes the prey and drags the carcass up into its nest. There it engulfs the carcass with its body, eventually regurgitating the undigested hide and bone paste in a compact lump.

Most tree squids are small, weighing only a few kilograms with thin tentacles between one and two meters long, suitable only for small game. (Small ones like this are harmless, and are kept in hanging cages in kitchens and food storage areas to feed on vermin in densely populated cities on Tsuma and Irem.) Legend holds that in the deep jungle polyconstrictors grow to monstrous size in their old age, with bodies of hundreds of kilograms and tentacles ten to fifteen meters in length. Although its dangling tentacles can move quickly enough to grab game, the polyconstrictor has great difficulty moving its body, only doing so under duress, dragging its bulk across open ground and up trees at a rate of several meters per hour. In water, the tree squid can swim nearly as well as its aquatic cousins, having spent the earliest part of its life as a marine amphibian.

(Traits below are for a giant, deep jungle polyconstrictor; the smaller "domesticated" variety have a Strength of 2/1.)

Body: Strength 9 (main tentacle)/4 (lesser tentacles), Dexterity 4/7, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 1

Skills: Fight 4, Vigor 5

Weapons: 5-11 tentacles (each tentacle may make a separate grapple roll without multiple action penalty. The strong but slow main tentacle cannot be used until the lesser tentacles have successfully grappled the prey. Lesser tentacles may take 3-5 points of damage before they are severed.)

Armor: Slick leathery hide (3d)

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Khayyam

Khayyam required no terraforming, being naturally habitable by Urthish and similar lifeforms, but environmental engines were installed during the Second Republic to counteract the previous millenium's buildup of industrial pollution. The planet has only a slight axial tilt, with mild seasons, small polar ice caps and broad temperate zones. Khayyam's landmass comprises just under 30 percent of its surface, and is divided into six continents: Dekko and Thurim in the northern hemisphere, equatorial Silvana and Al Burekduhr, southern Galalia and antarctic Hybor.

Solar System

Umar: This tiny innermost planet has no atmosphere, but rotates slowly; the gradual transition between extremes of temperature causes regular cataclysmic shifts in its surface.

Sisharu/Kaduls: Twin planets with dense volatile atmospheres orbiting a common center of gravity. Doramos predicted that within 50,000 years these two planets would collide, resulting in an explosion that could threaten the stability of other planets in the system.



Khayyam Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ikhwan-i-Waziri

Garrison: 6

Capital: Azhar

Jumps: 3 (4)

Adjacent Worlds: Al Fashir (dayside), Hira (night-side)

Solar System: Umar (0.38 AU), Sisharu/Kaduls (0.73 AU), Khayyam (1.2 AU; Nizam, Hasan), Esmarit (3.2 AU), Bulayik (7.8 AU), Nitzech (17 AU), Kwaiddo (33 AU), Buruz (59 AU), Alyut (71 AU), Jumpgate (88 AU)

Tech: 6

Human Population: 1,200,000,000

Alien Population: 200,000 (mostly Ur-Obun)

Resources: Industry, weapons

Exports: Processed food, fabric, textiles and carpets, tools and appliances, vehicles, firearms, energy weapons

Landscape: Naturally Urthlike with an almost idyllic climate, covered in grassland plains and light forests.

Khayyam (Nizam, Hasan): Khayyam's atmosphere has a dull grayish-brown tinge resulting from two and a half millennia of heavy industry. Of its two moons, Nizam is brilliant and luminescent while Hasan is dark and irregular, marked with craters, ravines and internal canyons.

Esmarit (Dhaun, Mahr-Lu, Baakun): A massive dead world with a thick opaque yellow atmosphere compressed to liquid form by its crushing gravity. The few surface features that periodically emerge have defied analysis by the finest Republican planetologists, including Doramos himself. Its largest moon, Dhaun, retains much of its original terraforming, and its two others are spotted with numerous environmental domes, both active and defunct.

Bulayik (Bayroun, Tcheli, Al Qiits, Khulrij, others): A tremendous orange gas giant blotched with blue-green "continents" of great storm systems which gradually change shape over the course of centuries. Many of its huge frozen moons were mined and used for storage vaults, quarantine colonies or sealed laboratories; nomads and pirates now inhabit much of the looted ruins.

Nitzech: A smallish planet out of place amid the gas giants, Nitzech has a corrosive atmosphere boiling with incessant storm activity. It is believed that Nitzech was once a moon belonging to one of its neighboring gas giants.

Kwaiddo (rings, Uwarid, Alif Rimaan, Furaydeh, Qalindargul, others): This vast royal blue and purple banded gas giant has the broadest rings ever found, and

when seen from the airless surface of one of its many moons appears half submerged in a plane of concentric prismatic circles. The moons hide the subterranean homelands of the Badi Jazir, a fiercely pagan nomad tribe of Kafiri sworn to protect pilgrim caravans from pirates, in return for a seasonal wage of fresh fruit and livestock from the Caliphate.

Buruz: Enigmatic and inscrutable, this pale violet featureless moonless gas giant emits arrhythmic electromagnetic pulses that play havoc with starship sensors.

Alyut: Larger than most outer worlds, Alyut is a sterile frozen waste.

History

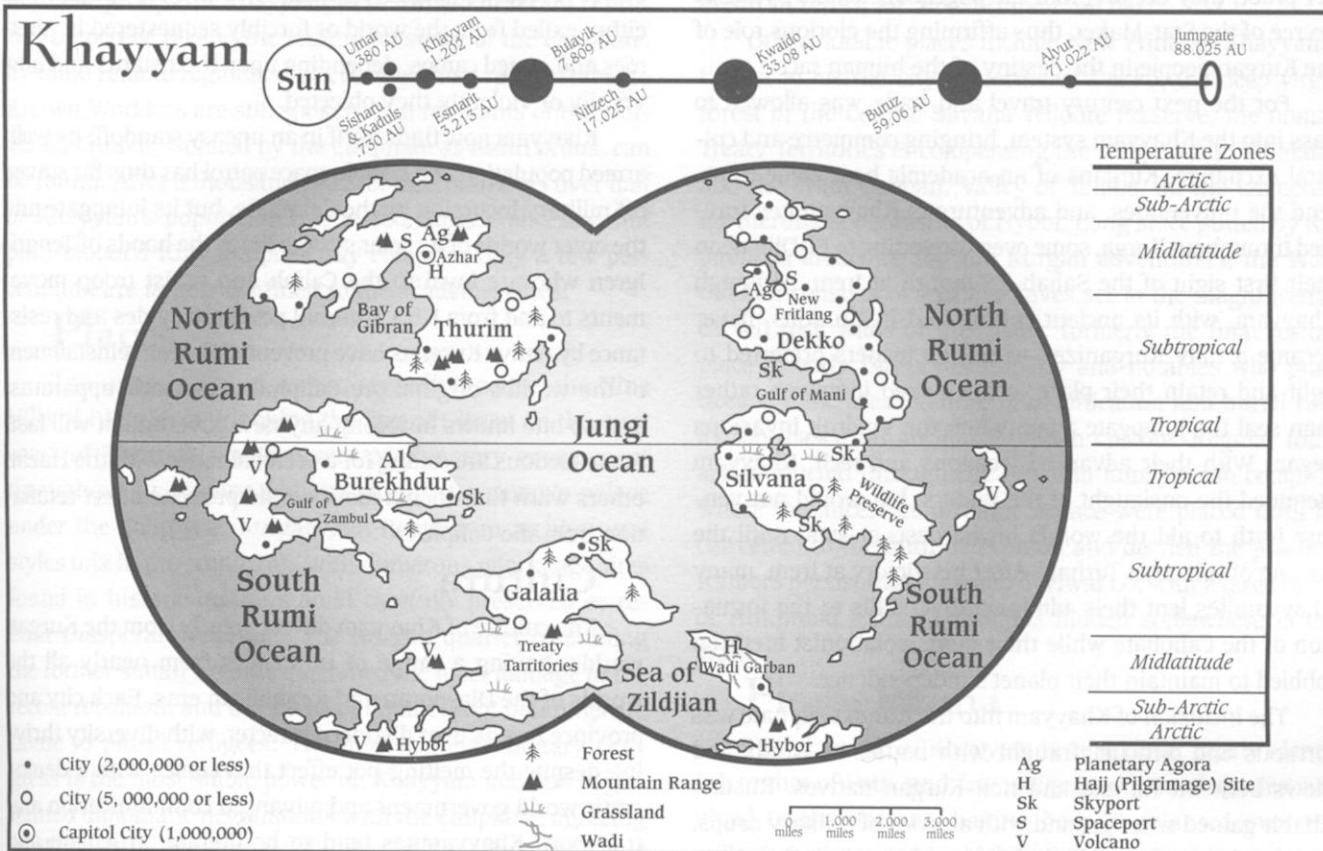
Khayyam has the longest history of any world that was ever part of the Caliphate, even more densely entangled with myth and legend than the Kurgan culture itself. It is known for certain that Khayyam was discovered from Sathra's Boon (Sutek) near the end of the First Republic. Lore relates that its gate was activated by a shadowy figure known as Hwai Lo, who is further credited with the first jump to Hira and the building of the Mongke Yildiz Observatory there. This has been disproven but radical revisionist historians of the Second Republic and Kurgan scholars made much of the fact that the architectural style of the Observatory is consistent with that of the late First Republic or early Diaspora.

The world was settled by the first waves of Diasporan migrants seeking a place where they could live free from the restrictive corporate society that characterized the First Republic. Finding a gentle climate and an abundance of resources, humans thrived on Khayyam and soon the world was dotted with colonies of artists, poets and other free-thinkers. (At this time the major bodies of the solar system were named after old Urthish literary and philosophical figures, and the Kurganized versions of these names are still in use today.) Despite wide variances in their philosophies and lifestyles, these disparate colonies communicated freely and cooperated in planetary efforts, such as agreeing upon a representative world government which prevented Khayyam from falling under the full sway of the rising Diasporan nobility. As the colonies grew into nations, industry flourished and a large number of academic institutions were founded, giving wealthy Khayyamites the intellectual edge they needed to maintain stability amid the chaos of the early Diaspora.

Local history asserts that the largest university, Madrasa al-Azhar, was the home of Heru Abdalim, the man remembered by Known Worlders as Saint Horace, the patron of Wisdom and disciple of the Prophet Zebulon. While some evidence exists which might support this, other worlds have made the same claim. It is known that followers of Palamedes' Universal Church were making pilgrimages to Khayyam as early as the 30th century; until recently, a major stop of the Kurgan Hajj was the site where Heru and



Khayyam



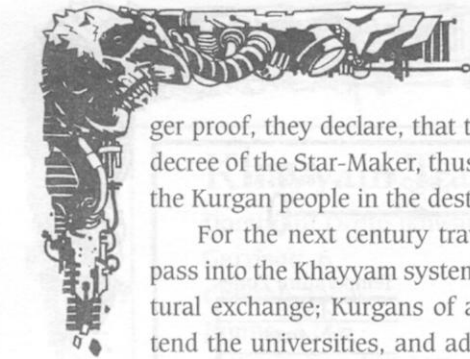
Zaibolu supposedly met and debated in the agora at Azhar. One of the reasons given for continuing to pursue Khabir's Jihad — whenever the jumproute between Hira and Vera Cruz reopens — is the discovery, generally credited to Ogadai Dzakan, although it more likely occurred during Siyurkuktiti's reign, of a historical text accusing House Chauki of taking Horace's Staff of Teachings away from Khayyam to be enshrined at one of their own worlds. Members of the Ordu'l-Diin fervently believe that the Hazat still hold the Staff, called Al Asa'l-Haalam in Kurgan, which is the Caliph's rightful property. (The Kitab al-Fathiya, a sealed antique book held to be Heru's original Book of Revelings, was enshrined at the Madrasa until 4719, when Kutukti Baghira, the Sultana of Khayyam, entrusted it to Caliph Bayazid for safekeeping during a period of civil unrest. The Kitab has remained in the Caliphal library at Irem ever since, and may only be opened by the reigning Caliph.)

Even though other planets made equal claim to being Horace's homeland, the reputation of Khayyam's schools grew, attracting wealthy and influential students throughout the Daisporan age. Many of the liberal ideologies espoused in the universities eventually contributed to the formation of the Second Republic, whose representational government was partially modeled on Khayyam's own. Bjorn Egon was a student at Ravonhearst Academy, across the world from Azhar, and it was while visiting his old alma

mater that he acquired the jumpcodes which would ultimately lead him to create the "Kurgan" culture. Khayyam was a vibrant force in Republican politics, but by the time of the Fall it had become a haven for troublesome dissidents and rabble-rousers, some of whom were descended from early Kurgan pilgrims who would have settled on Hira were it not so hot or primitive.

Khayyam was one of the first worlds to seal its jumproute during the Fall, having become disillusioned with the Second Republic and threatened by the turmoil engulfing neighboring worlds. During this period, territorial battles broke out between the schools and industrial centers, and most of Khayyam's intelligence and technical expertise was turned to weapon-making and the waging of war. In 4317, a militant Kurgan nationalist group seized one of the tourist starships that had been docked at Khayyam when the gate was sealed and attempted to reopen the jumproute using the ship's keys. Legend tells that they succeeded in jumping to Al Fashir on their first try, which cynics ascribe to the mercurial nature of the Anunnaki mechanisms that control the gates; the Faithful, however, are quick to point out that, aside from the route to Hira later opened by Juhangiz using the Hiran Philosopher's Stone, none of Khayyam's other known jumproutes — of which there were over a half-dozen in its Republican heyday — has ever been accessed, despite the recovery of some original jumpcodes. There can be no stron-





ger proof, they declare, that the pilgrimage exists by direct decree of the Star-Maker, thus affirming the glorious role of the Kurgan people in the destiny of the human race.

For the next century travel and trade was allowed to pass into the Khayyam system, bringing commerce and cultural exchange; Kurgans of an academic bent came to attend the universities, and adventurous Khayyamites traveled throughout Kurga, some even converting to El-Diin upon their first sight of the Sahab-i-Simurgh at Irem. Although Khayyam, with its ancient culture and institutions, never became a fully Kurganized world, its leaders preferred to fight and retain their place in the sacred jumpweb rather than seal the jumpgate again when the Vuldruk invasions began. With their advanced weapons and tech, Khayyam stemmed the onslaught of the raiders, but would not venture forth to aid the worlds hit hardest, at least until the coming of Juhangiz Turhan. After his victory at Irem, many Khayyamites lent their administrative skills to the formation of the Caliphate while their more isolationist brethren lobbied to maintain their planet's independence.

The inclusion of Khayyam into the Kurga Caliphate was tortuous and difficult, fraught with battles of words and blows between Kurgan and non-Kurgan natives. Rustam Khabir gained some ground with a series of military coups, and Ogadai Dzakan did a little better through devious economic maneuvering, but it was the fourth Caliph who finally brought about a peaceful solution. Siyurkuktiti initiated the world's leaders into the mysteries of the Cult of Satai and established policies of intellectual and social tolerance which were endorsed by Sulayman Darumai. This would prove troublesome to later Caliphs, who often found their religious pronouncements questioned by campus sophists and their lawful edicts ignored in the poor quarters of the industrial nations. When the Cult of Satai found its sacramental supplies dwindling in the mid-48th century, it was decided not to initiate new appointees to the khanate and by the 4770s even faithful khans who had served for decades were no longer invited to participate in the mystery rites.

The increasing disloyalty of Khayyam's leaders which resulted was countered with more stern and strict laws curbing the autonomy of the khanate, restricting the subject matter taught in the universities and denying non-Kurgan Khayyamites the open celebration of much of their native culture. Campus activists and community leaders who voiced strong objections were imprisoned or met with suspicious ends. Unrest continued to escalate until Hira practically fell to the Hazat, at which time Khayyam collectively decided that the Caliphate was in decline, and declared its independence. The sultan was ousted by a paramilitary student coalition and a universal rent and tax strike was enacted in khanates where Caliphal appointees refused to relinquish

power to local democratic leaders. The Kurgan populace was either exiled from the world or forcibly sequestered in ghettos and armed camps, depending upon their status and how vocally or violently they objected.

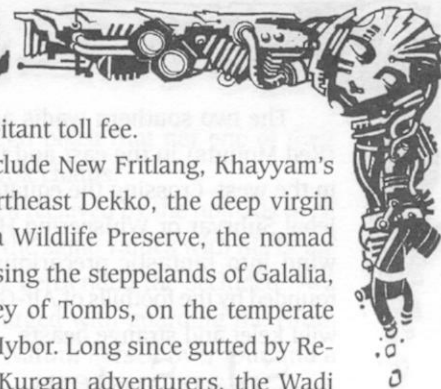
Khayyam now finds itself in an uneasy standoff; its well-armed population and sizable space patrol has thus far staved off military incursion by the Caliphate, but its jumpgate and the outer worlds of its solar system are in the hands of Tengri-Igren who are loyal to the Caliph and assist troop movements to and from Hira. Internal power struggles and resistance by native Kurgans have prevented the full reinstallation of the world's original pre-Caliphal democratic apparatus, and no one knows how long any new government will last. Some factions are calling for a secret alliance with the Hazat; others warn that such a move would provoke direct retaliation from the Caliph.

Culture

The culture of Khayyam differs greatly from the Kurgan worlds, having a range of influences from nearly all the worlds of the Diasporan and Republican eras. Each city and province has its own distinct character, with diversity thriving despite the melting-pot effect that comes with a democratic world government and advanced communication and transport. Khayyamites tend to be literate, articulate and sophisticated, with a love of debate cultivated by a long history of participation in local and global democracy. While sophistication and a talent for reasoned argument are qualities highly regarded by Kurgans, when coupled with the somewhat condescending attitude of a much older culture toward a younger one, they are often seen as being bigoted and quarrelsome.

The majority of Khayyamites are city-dwellers, most of them living in high-rise tenements near factories, laboratories and other industrial centers, areas that retain much of the character they had during the Second Republic. The remainder live in the slightly less crowded campus suburbs, occupying single-family dwellings on tree-lined streets ranging over well-tended landscapes. Khayyam's folk benefit from many of the same conveniences familiar to 20th century Americans, such as public schools and transportation, telecommunications and broadcast entertainments. Slum-like areas do exist, but are more of an inexpensive alternative preferred by social misfits and dropouts rather than the result of widespread poverty.

Khayyam has more farmland than any Kurgan world, a fact which gave the world considerable economic leverage within the Caliphate but resulted in the subjection of the rural populace to the comparatively backward edicts applied to Khirghiz ordus. This was a contributing factor to civil disturbances, as large portions of the planetary harvest were routinely appropriated by the Caliph to feed less productive worlds. In striking contrast to the rest of Kurga, the few



nomadic groups on Khayyam were formed in recent centuries by people fleeing the stifling presence of the Caliphate. In some remote regions, dialects of Urthish recognizable to Known Worlders are still spoken, and remnants of the Universal Church, isolated by the Caliphate as Kafiri ordus, can be found. After a thousand years of intermarriage, over half of Khayyam's population has mixed Kurgan ancestry, but pure-blooded Kurgans presently comprise only a few percent and are largely confined to the academic cities.

Places

The campus city of Azhar, sprawling across the Nine Hills of Khatim overlooking the Bay of Gibran on the west coast of Thurrim, was the seat of planetary government throughout its history and the site of the sultan's palace under the Caliphate. Kurgan and Republican architectural styles mix in the scenic city, with numerous pilgrimage sites found in historic quarters amid carefully preserved or rebuilt Diasporan buildings. The Kurgan quarter containing the former sultan's palace sustained the most damage in the recent rebellion, and the shells of bombed-out buildings are home to pitiful refugees. The Interim Revolutionary Congress is the most stable power on Khayyam and has begun limited diplomatic negotiations with the Caliphate, agreeing to allow the pilgrimage to continue under a heavily armed

escort in return for an exorbitant toll fee.

Other notable places include New Fritlang, Khayyam's largest industrial city in northeast Dekko, the deep virgin forest of the Central Silvana Wildlife Preserve, the nomad Treaty Territories encompassing the steppelands of Galalia, and the Wadi Gabban, Valley of Tombs, on the temperate northernmost peninsula of Hybor. Long since gutted by Republican archeologists and Kurgan adventurers, the Wadi Gabban consists of artificial caves set in the magnificently carved rock walls of the valley, formerly the final resting place of early Diasporan nobility and notables who practiced cryonic preservation, mummification and burial rites loosely based on ancient Egyptian custom. Regular tours are conducted through the Abdalim family tomb complex, where the ancestors of Saint Horace were placed until he converted to the faith of Zebulon and decried the practice. Rumors persist that the tomb of Hwai Lo, with a large cache of Anunnaki artifacts, remains hidden somewhere in the Wadi.

Flora/Fauna

The plant life of Khayyam is very close, nearly identical, to that of Urth, and few indigenous animal species survived to the present, having been supplanted over the millennia by imported Urthish and Known Worlds stock.

Al Fashir

The surface of Al Fashir is ninety percent desert, half of that being the Dasht-i-Marghu — Desert of Death — which blankets the world's broad equatorial belt. The polar caps alternate drastically in size as they are frozen and melted by the harsh Fashiri seasons; in spring the great river plains, or wadis, flood to create vast grasslands and nourish the pockets of jungle hidden in the foothills of the mountain chains that radiate outward from the polar seas. Mountains rise high and wild in Al Fashir's weaker gravity, nearly vertical fluted summits and knife-edge ridges carved by eons of gritty wind; the Tangrud Kush range extending from one polar sea to the other, has dizzying equatorial peaks which can be seen from high orbit.

The Northern Sea, or Bahr ash-Shamaal, feeds the mighty Aanoh, a wadi reaching almost to the equator in the shadow of the Kush, protected on the other side by the Jebal Sayiin (Gold Mountains). From the Bahr al-Ganoub in the south, the wadis called Uwand and Agaad stretch away from Djazir Djambyah ("Dagger Point") where the Tangrud Kush cuts into the Southern Sea to form a narrow rocky archipelago.

Al Fashir Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ordu Fellahin

Garrison: 2

Capital: Rub al-Harim

Jumps: 2 (5)

Adjacent Worlds: Beliah (dayside), Khayyam (nightside)

Solar System: Koba (0.53 AU), Al Fashir (0.93 AU; Gasim, Da'ud), Zamzara Asteroid Belt (3.1-4.7 x 0.32 AU), Hatar (7.9 AU), Jamshid (18 AU), Ziri (31 AU), Jumpgate (47 AU), Ranzim (17.8-62 — currently 18.3)

Tech: 3

Human Population: 70,000,000

Resources: Metal, slaves, contraband

Exports: Light alloys and compounds, unpaid labor, poisons, subversive heretical literature, violent and perverse holopornography.

Landscape: Almost entirely desert broken intermittently by steep mountain ranges, with narrow temperate zones around the small polar caps.



The two southern wadis are bounded by the Kizalkoh (Red Mounts) in the east and the Karakoh (Black Mounts) in the west. Crossing the equator opposite the Kush are the Jebal Suhryar or Whispering Hills, an old range eroded by wind into fantastic precariously top-heavy shapes, surrounded by the foothills of Alf-Ghulistan, said to be the abode wild kelet and strange beasts.

Solar System

Koba: A small dead inner planet with no atmosphere and few minerals worth mining.

Al Fashir (Gasim, Da'ud): Barely qualifying as a naturally Urthlike world, Al Fashir appears tan and brown from orbit, with very few clouds obscuring its atmosphere. Small open bodies of water and sparse vegetated regions cluster around its arctic zones. Composed mostly of lighter metals, its gravity is slightly less than Urth standard. The two moons are dead and airless, but extensively honeycombed with long-disused mining colonies.

Zamzara Asteroid Belt: One of the thickest asteroid belts ever discovered, Zamzara's largest bodies are home to over a hundred nomadic clans and various pirate groups inhabiting ancient mines and installations.

Hatar: Lifeless and moonless, this barren desert world is cloaked in a thin poisonous atmosphere. A few pressurized Republican domes cap still-active mines.

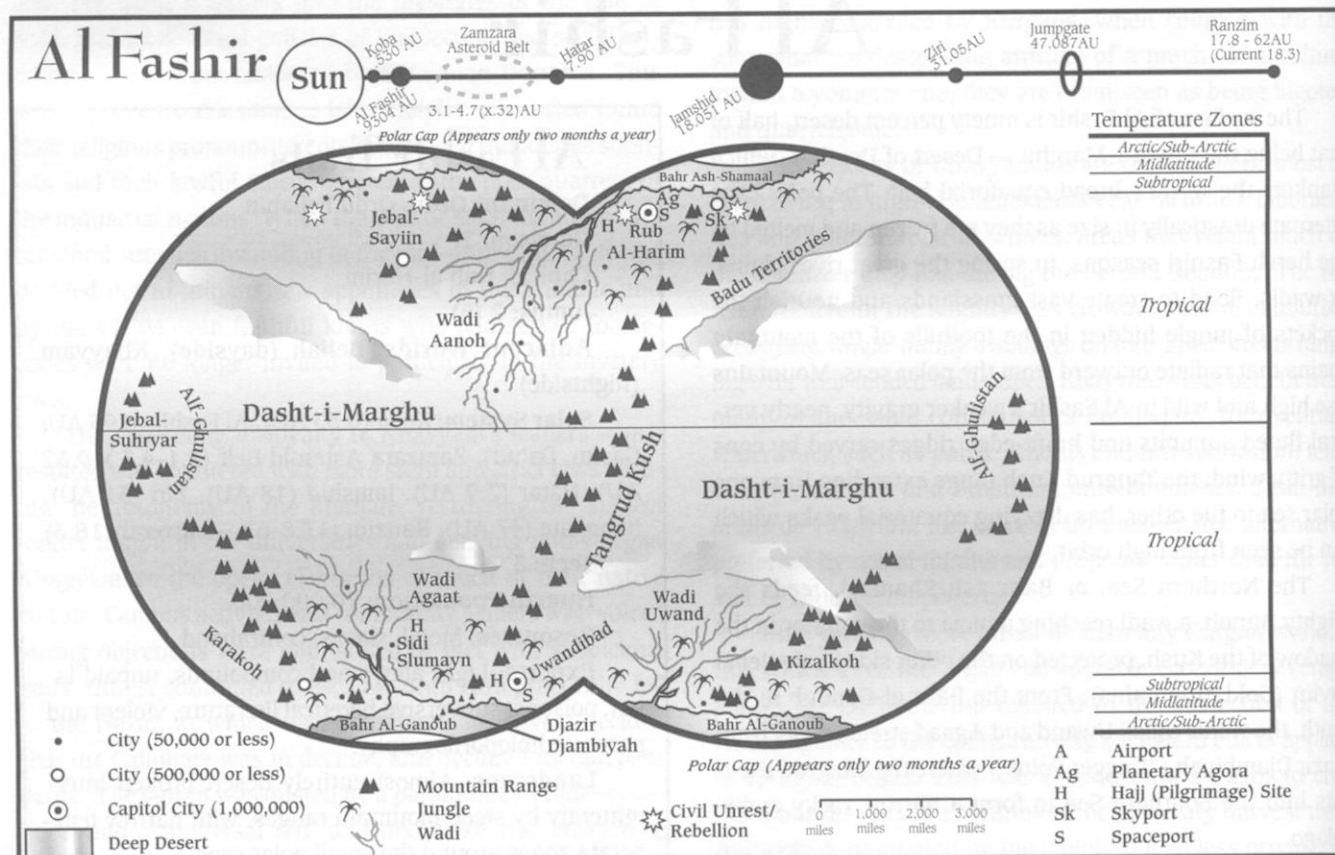
Jamshid (many moons): A turbid red-orange gas giant, some of Jamshid's larger moons were initially terraformed but their environments have degenerated over the centuries.

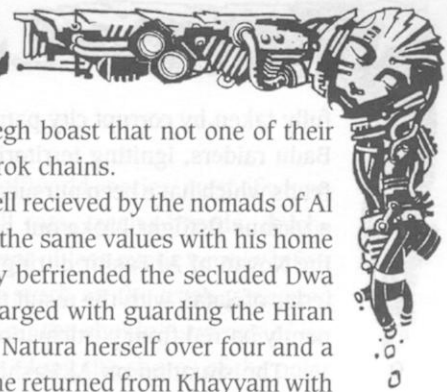
Ziri (rings, many moons): Encircled by thin ice rings barely visible from a distance, Ziri has a thin translucent outer atmospheric strata veiling deeper bands of gaseous blue and green. Ziri's moons were mined at various times in the past, but are too small and cold to be extensively inhabited.

Ranzim: Small dark blue icebound Ranzim occupies an eccentric, almost cometary, elliptical orbit that intersects Ziri's at its closest approach but mostly extends beyond that of the Al Fashir jumpgate. The inner swing of its orbit, which it presently occupies, is said to herald an increase in the Purga Buran and a rise in *qfrit* activity. (Occurring approximately every six to seven hundred years, this previously coincided — approximately — with the discovery of Kurga by the Second Republic, and later the Vuldrok invasions.)

History

Al Fashir is in many ways the "most Kurgan" of all the Kurgan worlds, being the first planet discovered and kept hidden by Bjorn Egon, where miners were initially subjected to extreme cultural re-education programs, and the home of the earliest refugees from the Republican takeover who





formed bands large enough to survive as the nomadic forebears of modern Kurga. The first mines at Jebal Sayin had the harshest conditions that ever came to light during the Second Republic, with living quarters and technology that barely qualified as Iron Age equivalent; modern mines with laser cutters and burrowdrill engines were installed when diamonds were found in the Karakoh, and more were sunk for radioactive veins in the Kizalkoh.

When the Republic disbanded the re-education programs, five or six generations of miners had been raised speaking and hearing nothing but the invented Kurgan language, and resisted — sometimes violently — the Republic's mandatory Urthish classes. Especially outraged by the Universal Church priests who denied and fervently worked to disprove their long and glorious, but fake, history, these first true Kurgans fled the mining towns along the wadis, following the mountain chains into the equatorial desert believed to be uninhabitable by humans. While many died on these sweltering migrations, enough survived that by 3900 they had multiplied into several dozen tribes known together as the Badu, who lived at the edge of the desert, hunting the wadi grasslands in summer and raiding mining towns and farms in winter.

The Badu of the northern and southern hemispheres remained entirely separate, for nobody dared to cross the Dasht-i-Marghu on the ground. In the last decades before the Fall came the first rumors of a tribe living in the deep desert, a task of survival hitherto deemed impossible. Much of Sata Natura's mystique stemmed from the belief that, before she was found as a small child and adopted by her Badu clan, she had been separated and driven by a dust storm from her deep desert family, which she named the Dwa Regh. Leased at an early age to a brothel in exchange for food after several drought-ridden summers, Natura escaped, eventually making a name for herself as a dancer and singer. Returning to Al Fashir years later as an interstellar celebrity, she lobbied against the crude heavy-handed political attempts to "civilize" and "domesticate" the Badu nomads, and worked to keep the existence of the Dwa Regh hidden from the planet's Republican governors, dismissing them as a colorful myth invented by her press agents.

After the Fall, the numbers of the Badu and Dwa Regh increased steadily, and by the time of the Vuldrok invasions Badu hordes were overrunning villages and storming cities as they were pushed up the wadis by the encroachments of the warlike Dwa Regh. Weak post-Republican dynasties were toppled and cities suffered as their rule was usurped by nomads who could not comprehend urban life and were in their turn ousted by heavily armed Vuldrok colonists. Trying to compete with the slave trade out of Irem, the raiders enslaved whole cities and financed large hunting excursions into the desert to round up captives; many Badu families

were taken, but the Dwa Regh boast that not one of their number has ever worn Vuldrok chains.

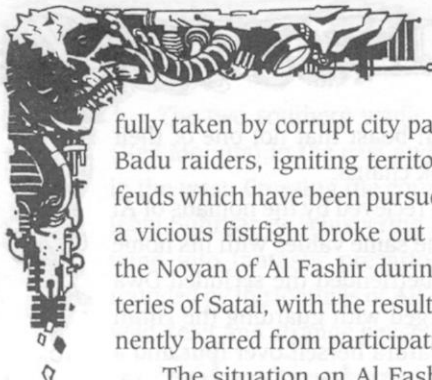
Juhangiz Turhan was well received by the nomads of Al Fashir, who shared many of the same values with his home clan on Irem, and eventually befriended the secluded Dwa Regh tribe that had been charged with guarding the Hiran Philosopher's Stone by Sata Natura herself over four and a half centuries earlier. When he returned from Khayyam with firearms and energy weapons, that was just the edge the nomads needed to take the fight back to the Vuldrok. In the five years he spent on Al Fashir, Juhangiz rode with both Badu and Dwa Regh tribesmen and gained the friendship of most of the living khalifs who held sway among the desert nomads.

In the later years of his life, however, it was mostly the Fashiri khalifs who declined to acknowledge Turhan with the Seal of Prophecy, an action which angered Rustam Khabir but was endorsed and even praised by the first Caliph. (A secret tradition shared by the Cult of Rustam and the Dwa Regh tells of Juhangiz Turhan's deathbed exhortation to his successor urging him to take no action against the unbelievers, to allow them to follow their tradition in exchange for calling upon them to protect the pilgrimage custom they shared with the rest of the Caliphate. Cynical Khayyamite historians are fond of pointing out the Khabir's Jihad technically allows the Caliph to draft Fashiri warriors for service under bogatyr commanders at virtually any time.)

By the time of the fifth Caliph, the nomad khalifs seem to have realized the strength of unity and coordinated their divergent prophetic traditions into agreement upon a single candidate, Kubilai ibn al-Hansur Abu Ilghazai, a scion of the Bani Hawat, a Dwa Regh tribe. To everyone's astonishment, Sulayman Darumai welcomed this rival prophet with a permanent seat in the Kuriltai and the title of Agha Khalif, a position defined as being equal in spiritual insight to the true Caliph but spared the corrupting influence of worldly power. Amid outraged controversy and scandal, the two men became close friends after Darumai initiated Abu Ilghazai into the rites of Satai, and seemed to treat the religious conflict surrounding the question of whether two living prophets can occupy the same historical era as a private joke. Although scarcely tolerated by some later Caliphs, the institution of the Agha Khalif enabled the Caliphate to maintain peace on Al Fashir for centuries by allowing the nomads their own spiritual tradition in return for their political acquiescence.

While the warrior nomads were cultivated into a valiant and reasonably loyal fighting force, the cities and farming villages of polar Al Fashir were left to their own devices, ruled by petty khans and sultans jealous of the power and respect commanded by the Agha Khalifs. Villages already short of farmland had large portions of their harvest force-





fully taken by corrupt city patrols and often lost the rest to Badu raiders, igniting territorial wars and extended blood feuds which have been pursued for centuries since. In 4764, a vicious fistfight broke out between the Agha Khalif and the Noyan of Al Fashir during the culmination of the mysteries of Satai, with the result that both parties were permanently barred from participation in the cult.

The situation on Al Fashir has deteriorated since that incident; skirmishes happen almost continuously as Badu raiders follow game in toward the seas, and Khirghiz ally with Uighur for mutual protection then turn on each other in internecine jurisdictional squabbles when the raiding season ends. It is said that at any given moment a border war is occurring somewhere on the world, with violence escalating as hajjin and drafted Jihad veterans return home with weapons, tech and new ideas about how to deal with troublesome neighboring kingdoms. From 4900 on, waves of Dwa Regh have descended on the Wadi Uwand plains, urging the local Badu to join them in the invasion of the fertile valley that leads to the second largest city on the planet, Uwandibad.

In 4974 the city fell to a protracted siege by allied Dwa Regh, Badu and Khirghiz forces under the command of the Agha Khalif. The Caliph-appointed Khaghan of Uwandibad was taken hostage, and the ilkhans of the other southern polar cities were coerced into pledging their support of the Agha Khalif over the next two decades. Meanwhile, the Dwa Regh have begun to pursue the same course of invasion in the northern hemisphere, taking command of Badu tribes too intimidated to resist. There have been reports of outlying villages that attempted to withhold provisions and supplies from the invaders and were burned to the ground. Some northern cities, seeing the Caliphate's presence on Al Fashir dwindling, have begun secret negotiations with the Agha Khalif. The sultan of Al Fashir, Kosru Ak Bogha, has been all but a prisoner in his capitol at Rub al-Harim, resting unsteadily atop a volatile populace heavily armed by Caliphal permission. In desperation Ak Bogha has tried damming the Wadi Aanoh's major tributaries to put as much desert between himself and the southern hemisphere as possible; a side effect has been the encroachment of the jungle out of the mountains and across the flooded wadi mouth.

Culture

Due to its lighter gravity, natives of Al Fashir are taller than average and tend to have slender builds, with distinctive large-eyed, wide-cheeked, full-lipped and small-nosed faces — regarded as a standard of beauty in all Kurgan cultures since the days of Satai — predominating among the nomadic population. Khaizak account for well over half of Al Fashir's population, and even the largest cities have fallen to conquering nomads at one time or another. The nomadic values and principles enshrined in Kurgan culture are stron-

gest on this world, and can be found in their purest original form among the peoples of the desert. Badu are the most frequently encountered of the desert folk, often venturing into the plains and cities to trade, raid or get laid. Small isolated tribes reverted to pure paganism long ago, and their shaman-leaders are said to command the dangerous kelet of desert and jungle.

The Dwa Regh are almost universally considered the heart of the Kurgan heritage, even by the enemies of the Agha Khalif, who in truth only holds the loyalty of about two thirds of all the Dwa Regh tribes. A solitary people, the Dwa Regh seldom visit the cities, speaking or interacting with only those with whom they have business when they do, but occasionally undertake to travel offworld as pilgrims or soldiers, and to visit cousins among the spacefaring nomads. Badu are renowned for their hospitality, but gaining admittance to a Dwa Regh encampment is a difficult and often humiliating process, and it is virtually unheard of for the Dwa Regh to place trust or respect in any outsider to the deep desert. The Dwa Regh have a legendary reputation for honesty and a sense of personal honor that would put the Hazat to shame; many stories are told of Dwa Regh who spoke out truthfully even at the cost of their lives. All Dwa Regh worship the Mongke Yildiz as revealed by Zaibolu, and honor the Hajj, regardless of which living prophet they are aligned with, and will allow peaceful caravans to pass through their territories uncontested.

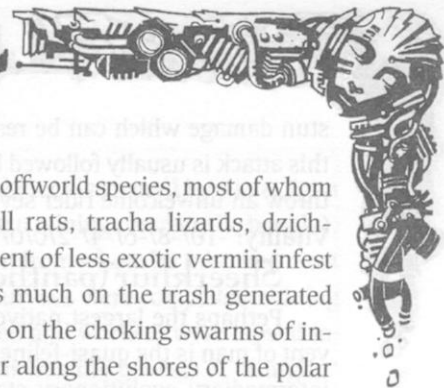
The Khirghiz of Al Fashir have lives as squalid and oppressive as the most miserable serf in the Known Worlds, having grown sullen and fatalistic in response to endless waves of conquest that have swept their lands throughout the centuries, but still count themselves more fortunate than the Uighur of this world. The largest cities are filthy overcrowded cesspools of diseased humanity where retrofitted Republican structures clash with grandiose but usually ill-tended Kurgan architecture. With the Hajj business slowing to a trickle in the past century and the mines showing considerably less productivity than during the Second Republic, the Uighur have turned increasingly toward crime for financial stability, and any illegal commodity or service imaginable can be found in the city for a relatively modest price.

In the past hundred years a dangerous new tribe of desert folk has appeared; called Kipchaks, they are believed to be the descendents of Khirghiz and Uighur refugees whose homes were overrun in Khaizak invasions. Lacking the survival skills of the older tribes, they have taken to banditry and wild unrestrained raiding, frequently attacking pilgrims in addition to merchant caravans.

Places

Rub al-Harim is the nominal capitol of Al Fashir, where an aging Sultan Kosru Ak Bogha broods upon the sultanate swiftly eroding away around him. This first and largest city





was originally called El Siddigh Al Fashir after a Khayyamite professor of transformational economics whom Bjorn Egon regarded as a mentor. Its blocky unadorned early Republic style skyscrapers housed incoming worker families awaiting assignment, as well as the cultural re-education centers and rapid underground mass transport to the nearby spacedock. Thriving as the planetary capitol under Egon and the Second Republic, El Siddigh degenerated after the Fall as utilities like water, power grids, lighting and ventilation fell into disrepair and social order crumbled between external invasion and internal corruption. Organized crime replaced the city government and survived the Vuldrok invasion by facilitating the slave trade, leading the nomads and surrounding villagers to give it the name by which it is known to this day: Rub al-Harim, the Thieves' Quarter. In 4889, Sultan Juruk ibn Hachmet moved the seat of the sultanate from southern Uwandibad to Rub al-Harim, having allied with the city's criminal overlords against the Agha Khalif's nomadic supporters.

Throughout the age of the Caliphate the planetary capitol has been Uwandibad, where the tarnished brass turrets of the sultan's former palace overlook the shores of the Bahri-Ganoub. Built largely through the influence of Sata Natura as Al Fashir's only tourist stop, the city combines late Republican construction tech with the classic Kurgan style invented by Egon's designers for Irem Zat el-Amad to create the most impressive gravity-defying native Kurgan architecture extant. Its distinctive skyline of wide domes, soaring minarets and broad mushroom-shaped towers convinced the Republican Tourism Commission to build a small spacedock and caravanserai there, bringing much-needed business to the poverty-stricken world in the last days before the Fall. With large carefully-tended public gardens, numerous fountains and artificial waterways, Uwandibad was subjected to repeated invasion by desert nomads until Shaddan Abu Melech, the first Sultan under the Caliphate, erected massive walls across the Wadi Uwand to seal the city, the spacedock and its nearest suburbs against tribal incursions.

Today the Agha Khalif rules most of Al Fashir from Uwandibad, and allows pilgrims to pass through the spacedock only after close search and questioning, having narrowly avoided several assassination attempts in recent years. Pilgrims are forbidden from carrying weapons and almost every sort of technology onto the planet, but are assured of safe passage and hospitable food and lodgings. The only major pilgrimage site on Al Fashir is Sidi Slumayn, a large mining village on the Wadi Agaath which can be reached easily by ship in summer, but only by crossing the perilous Tangrud Kush in winter; there, hajjin may visit the brothel to which Satai was sold as a youth and the dance-hall stage where she gave her first public performance as a free woman.

Flora/Fauna

Al Fashir is host to a few offworld species, most of whom arrived unintentionally: hull rats, tracha lizards, dzich-roaches, and a wide assortment of less exotic vermin infest the polar cities, surviving as much on the trash generated by the human population as on the choking swarms of insects spawned every summer along the shores of the polar seas. In the wadis and mountains, native plant and animal life is largely analogous to that found in the deserts and veldt regions of Holy Terra; local varieties of gazelle, giraffe, zebra and oxen-like herd beasts breed seasonally on the floodplains, avidly hunted by Khaizak and Khirghiz alike. Large carrion bats from mountain caves tirelessly patrol the wadis and near desert for carcasses, while the sparse jungles in the lower slopes of the mountain ranges hide the deadly gliding cobra.

The remote Jebal Suhryar in the deep desert is the source of many stories told by pagan Badu describing giant insects, arachnids and saurians, all thoroughly dismissed as mythic by Republican expeditions although the tales persist in the Caliphal age. The Dwa Regh report glimpsing in the foothills the ghul-byaban, a hairy cannibalistic anthropoid scavenger they believe to be the devolved remnants of ancient Kurgan tribes who chose not to follow the faith of Zaibolu.

Oontah (3-humped camelbrutes)

This strange and unpleasant creature is believed to be indigenous by the Dwa Regh who succeeded in domesticating it, but Republican xenobiologists decided that it was a genetically engineered hybrid of camel, brute and other species, probably developed by Egon to carry ore from deep desert mines and then abandoned to the elements when its foul temperament effectively negated its use as a work animal. The oontah of the Dwa Regh will only consent to be mounted by full-blooded members of that tribe, although tortured and demusked specimens have been beaten into working slaver caravans. The Badu are fond of saying that the Dwa Regh are the only people created who can stand living with the oontah, and even they are not happy about it.

With three pairs of long camel-like legs with widely splayed toe-pads and three corresponding humps of stored fat rising two and half meters off the ground, the oontah is the only animal capable of crossing the equatorial desert unaided. Its face resembles that of a thin gaunt brute with a prehensile overhanging lip, with musk glands ten times more virulent than its cousin's firing backwards out of its lower jaw to engulf unwanted riders.

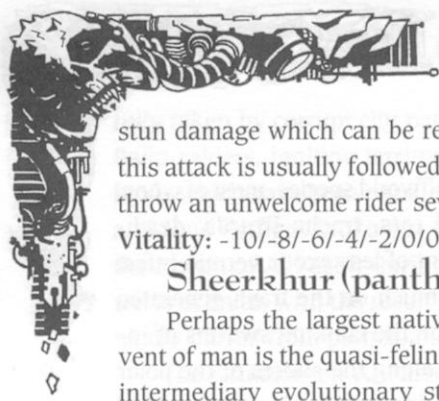
Body: Strength 9, Dexterity 5, Endurance 15

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 3

Skills: Fight 4, Vigor 7

Weapons: Bite (4d DMG), Kick (5d DMG), Musk shot (3d





stun damage which can be resisted by Endurance + Vigor; this attack is usually followed by violent bucking which can throw an unwelcome rider several meters into the air)

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Sheerkhur (pantherwolves)

Perhaps the largest native predator to survive the advent of man is the quasi-feline sheerkhur, the product of an intermediary evolutionary stage combining reptilian and mammalian qualities. In general shape, the sheerkhur resembles a long-tailed great cat, about a meter long and just under a meter at the shoulder, and hunts in an intelligent feline manner. Perched atop a slightly elongated serpentine neck is a long narrow-jawed face lined with teeth like a crocodile's. Wild sheerkhur have a distinctly canine social structure however, with strong pack bonds formed around

small pockets of surface water found in the high mountains, required for egg-laying. The Dwa Regh have tamed packs and trained them to guard and herd oontah; these "domesticated" breeds are intensely loyal to their tribes and will automatically attack any outsider if not commanded to heel by their masters. A guest of the tribe will only be accepted by the beasts after a thorough roll in the communal latrine hole shared by both human and sheerkhur.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 7

Skills: Fight 7, Sneak 8, Vigor 6, Tracking 5

Weapons: Bite (5d DMG), Tail Lash (5d DMG; 1.5 meters long, the tail has a hardened point at the tip formed from dead scales which can break off and fester in wounds)

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Beliah

Beliah Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ordu Bagatur

Garrison: 5

Capital: Akenosh

Jumps: 1 (6)

Adjacent Worlds: Irem (dayside), Al Fashir (nightside)

Solar System: Dagoth (0.87 AU), Beliah (1.3 AU; Jabar, Achmet), Adagasca (4.3 AU), Chadash (13 AU), Ginugul (29 AU), Jumpgate (37 AU)

Tech: 5

Human Population: 230,000,000

Alien Population: 3,000,000 (Ur-Ukar)

Resources: Metal

Exports: Raw ore, complex alloys, semi-precious gems, highly trained soldiers

Landscape: Desert, with numerous low volcanic mountains.

involved freeing oxygen from the polar caps to make the atmosphere breathable for humans.

Beliahin natives mostly concern themselves more with the world's subterranean geography, since that is where the majority of the population has always lived. The shafts of extinct volcanoes were capped and built into habitations and industrial centers, with natural and artificial tunnels leading away to cavern complexes and mines. Ambitious Republican engineers and architects exploited the strength of native metals to reinforce suitable caverns against earthquakes and renewed vulcanism. Although many of these underground habitats have since collapsed or been breached by magma flows, the fact that many remain intact and inhabited attests to the skill of their designers and builders.

A planetary feature noticeable from orbit is the Bahr-i-Rimal, the Great Sand Sea, a broad featureless expanse of desert near the equator opposite Akenosh. To the untrained eye, the footing here looks as solid as anywhere on Beliah, but the metallic grains of sand are suspended by electrostatic repulsion and even the lightest object touching its surface will sink until it hits bedrock, as much as five kilometers deep at the center. This same phenomenon can be found elsewhere on the planet in smaller pockets, where the protruding tips of large stones and outcroppings render them indistinguishable from the surrounding terrain (indistinguishable to all but the Khaizak, that is). Any creature that sinks into the Bahr-i-Rimal or a similar pocket will quickly suffocate without a self-contained breathing apparatus or some sort of alternate respiration, and the electrostatic effect short-circuits shields and related force-field tech. Submerged objects are perfectly preserved, however, and some

The greater portion of the surface of Beliah resembles that of the planet Mars in the Holy Terra system, although Beliah's greater gravity, geological activity and more complex elemental composition results in some significant differences. Most noticeable is the profusion of conical volcanic mountains, which cover more area but do not rise to equivalent altitudes. Beliah has very little surface water, and the few open bodies of water that do exist — a handful of small lakes and a network of evenly spaced oases — are the result of terraforming. Most of the terraforming on this world





of Beliah's spacefleet is composed of salvaged Vuldrok landers that Khabir tricked into landing on the Bahr-i-Rimal.

Near Beliah's northern polar cap are the Implastrite Extrusion Fields, an eerie sterile landscape of surreal shapes crowded against one another to form some of the wildest terrain in human space. Implastrite is an amazing substance found only on this portion of Beliah; it combines the strength of the hardest metal alloys with extreme elasticity, making it useful in starship construction and especially well suited for the architectural reinforcement of large cavern dwellings in this seismically challenging world. Implastrite must be mined and transported in its natural molten state since it cannot be reformed into a new shape once it cools; mining can only be accomplished with advanced Republican tech, trapping the raw lava-like ore in a superheated plasma field until it can be shaped. The Extrusion Fields, known locally as the Raab al-Zagug, formed when raw implastrite was forced through fissures and weak points in the ground by volcanic pressures and cooled into an incredible variety of droplets, spatters, long winding coils and flowing liquescent shapes impossible to describe.

Solar System

Dagoth: This smallish planet is perpetually enshrouded by a cloud of asteroid, the condensed ejecta of its intensely violent volcanoes. Most fall back to their source, but some escape Dagoth's gravity and become a hazard to interplanetary travel.

Beliah (Jabar, Achmet): Small but dense, Beliah is prone to volcanic and seismic activity of its own, and its gravity is greater than the Urthish norm found elsewhere — enough to cause health problems for some visitors from other worlds. Of its two moons, crimson Jabar, the larger, has a thin atmosphere (too thin to support any known lifeforms) and occasionally exhibits seismic disturbances as well. Achmet is a dead airless ball of dust, its bluish surface pocked with innumerable meteoric impacts.

Adagasca: This massive world is covered with ice and believed to harbor immense mineral wealth, but no mining mission has ever succeeded in overcoming its incredible gravity. Great shapes have sometimes been reported moving beneath its thick cloudy atmosphere, but this is interpreted as a geological, rather than biological, phenomenon.

Chadash: The murky blue-gray atmosphere of this relatively small gas giant is periodically marked by stormy turbulence. For the past century, a single coriolis hurricane has dominated the face of this planet like a vast bluish-purple bruise. Chadash has over a dozen moons, and, though none are able to support life, space nomads have occupied ancient Republican environmental domes on the larger ones for centuries.

Ginugul: Larger than most outer planets, Ginugul's dark brown icy surface has a glittering, granular quality.

History

Beliah was the second planet discovered by Bjorn Egon (or rather, by the long-forgotten mining company he bought), and was named after the aunt from whom he inherited most of his initial fortune. After surveys were completed, mining installations were constructed and workers were moved in; the social re-education which was the genesis of "Kurgan" culture was first applied to these miners, who were effectively a captive populace in their subterranean homes beneath an uninhabitable environment. At first, no attempt at terraforming was made, but it was later decided that a breathable atmosphere was more cost-effective (not to mention better for morale) than the elaborate system of freight elevators, sealed hangars and silos, airlocks and robotic loading platforms required to move raw ore from the mines to the surface and thence to orbit.

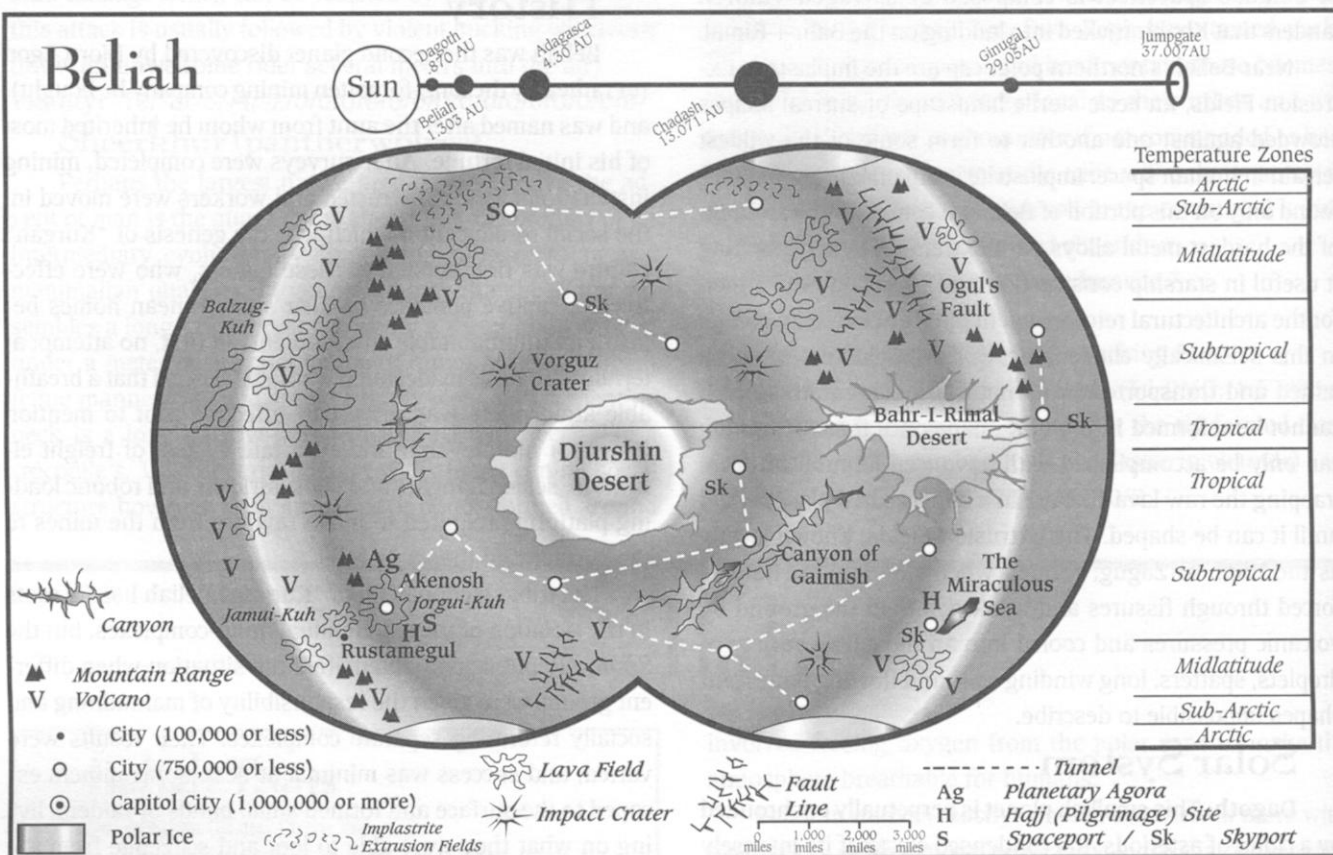
The tribal factionalism of "Kurgan" Beliah has its roots in the isolation of these individual mine-complexes, but the Second Republic only intensified the situation when different groups were given the responsibility of maintaining and socially reforming separate complexes. Their results were varied, and success was minimal at best. Some miners escaped to the surface and formed small bands of raiders, living on what they were able to loot and scavenge from the spacedocks until they learned the subtleties of surviving in the open wilderness. While these early nomads cultivated independence, those that remained underground were subjected to the ideological whims of their Republican "liberators."

When the Fall came, war swept Beliah as each subterranean complex became a kingdom unto itself and took to invading neighboring complexes for needed resources. Those with productive hydroponic farms were hardest hit, being the only sources of food planetside, and many used explosives to trigger quakes that would collapse the natural caverns and artificial tunnels which were the primary mode of travel between complexes. Mine-burrowing engines were outfitted to deliver troops into sealed caverns, and every manner of mining tool, from the common pickaxe to the heavy laser drill, found use as a weapon. Aboveground, the nomads pursued their solitary desolate existence, heedless of the battles which shook the very ground beneath their feet, and their numbers gradually increased as packs became clans and clans became tribes.

Such was the state of Beliah when the Vuldrok came raiding; ignoring the nomads except when they could easily be rounded up and enslaved, the pillagers from space applied their superior knowledge of siege-craft to the fortified surface docks and spilled into the larger central underground kingdoms. While the invaders were always met with fierce resistance, some kingdoms soon surrendered, trading their own sovereignty for skilled military leadership and more



Beliah



advanced weaponry to use against their neighbors.

Caliphal historians are fond of stating that Juhangiz Turhan "tamed the underground population of Beliah" during the return leg of his historic first pilgrimage; it is more true to describe his efforts on this world as diplomatic, introducing the nomads and the unconquered kingdoms to their Kurgan-speaking brethren from other worlds. Most significant is Turhan's meeting with Rustam Khabir, a tarkhan — warlord — of Akenosh who had already gained worldwide fame by keeping the largest kingdom on the planet out of Vuldrok hands. Khabir courted the nomads and coordinated their movements with those of the forces Juhangiz brought from Hira, Khayyam and Al Fashir, fighting the Vuldrok on the surface and in the skies.

United by their shared hatred of the Vuldrok, embittered enemies and outlanders from distant star systems joined forces and drove out the invaders. The subsequent history of Beliah derives directly from this period, which lives yet in the memory of its peoples. Subject populations were treated according to their actions — those that fought for their foreign overlords were slaughtered or enslaved, those that attempted to rebel from within were honored and granted status in their native kingdoms. Every family is known for the part it played in the Vuldrok wars and its standing in the community reflects this. Old enmities were replaced with the alliances formed by the first and second

Caliphs, the nomads were hired to drive caravans to and from isolated kingdoms and interplanetary trade commenced.

Culture

Most Beliahin are Uighur, living urban lives in their subterranean caverns and supporting themselves primarily through working the mines. Of these, nearly ten percent are Ur-Ukar, descended from those Bjorn Egon brought in to teach metallurgy and deal with the problems of underground living. The Khirghiz comprise a special class among the subterraneans, with some degree of privilege and close ties to the Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun who help them maintain their hydroponic farms. Some Khirghiz ordus occasionally move to the surface and attempt to grow crops on the barren, sandy Beliahin soil; they are dismissed as simpletons or hailed as miracle-workers, depending upon their success.

The Khaizak of Beliah are generally left to their own devices, although kingdoms isolated by a lack of underground transport and collapsed tunnels will go to great expense to enlist the nomads' aid in moving their goods to the spacedocks of larger kingdoms. Some Khaizak have left the planet entirely, jumping to other systems or settling on the moons of Chadash.

Although Beliah has enjoyed relative peace under the Caliphate, old habits die hard and the culture of this world is still essentially warlike. Conflict often erupts between bor-



dering kingdoms, between subterraneans and surface-dwellers or amongst Khaizak tribes. Some Caliphs will not tolerate this and impose costly martial rule until fighting ceases; others plainly side with one group or another, sending aid and arms to their favored ones. Most, however, simply adopt a neutral laissez-faire policy, allowing the war to run its course, content that the survivors will make the strongest recruits for the next Jihad.

Generations of living out of sight from the sun has given the folk of Beliah the palest complexions to be found in Kurga, and the planet's higher gravity has given them a squat, stocky, heavily muscled stature. These traits can still be found among surface-dwelling and spacefaring Khaizak.

Places

The first settlement on Beliah was the mining colony of Akenosh, which still occupies the crater of Jorgui-kuh, an extinct volcano dominating the topography of the southern hemisphere. Akenosh sports the largest spacedock on the planet, and its exposed portion has been built into a stunning city of glittering domes and burnished spires. Underneath, the hundred-plus tiers composing the kingdom are the cleanest and most spacious in the world; pilgrims and other visitors rarely leave the confines of Akenosh. A secret tunnel stretches from the city to Rustamegul, a sealed fortress squatting defiantly in the shadow of Jamui-kuh, the still-active twin of Jorgui-kuh. Here the leaders of the Ordu Bagatur, the Ikhwan-i-Sihr and the Cult of Rustam gather the finest warriors from the furthest ends of the Caliphate, training them in all the arts of war and watching them grow strong in Beliah's oppressive gravity.

Rumors persist that a cavern exists deeper within the planet's crust than any other known, where a heretical enclave of degenerate humans and Ukar conduct blood sacrifices in blasphemous worship of a squat hideous jewel-eyed idol called Mu'olaakh.

Flora/Fauna

Originally thought to be lifeless, the addition of oxygen and moisture to the Beliahin biosphere allowed for the proliferation of native flora and the introduction of some Urthish plants and animals. The surface supports only the simplest of plant life — mosses, lichens and molds — and a relatively small variety of insect and arachnid species, with a local type of bugbat at the top of the food chain. Below ground, Beliah boasts a wide variety of giant earthworms and a type of mole-like reptiloid.

The most populous lifeform is the dzich, or beetleroach, which most closely resembles the common Urthish cockroach with the addition of a rigid carapace and specialized horns or pincers like the Urthish stag or rhinoceros beetle. This virtually omnivorous scavenger was originally considered a pest, but was soon found to be a positive complement to enclosed subterranean dwellings, feeding on the ever-present and ever-growing amount of dust formed from the dead hair, nail and skin cells incessantly cast off by humans and other large animals. Since then, dzich colonies have been used for the same purpose on starships, and generations of selective breeding has yielded varieties with brightly colored and intricately patterned carapaces. Most specimens are no more than a centimeter in length and live only a few days at a time, but successful breeding queens may live for years and grow up to 10 or even 15 centimeters long.

Yildugh — Cave Scorpions

The most dangerous subterranean lifeform on Beliah is the *yildugh*, or cave scorpion, a large arachnid with an armored exoskeleton, long nimble legs, anywhere from two to five pincer-arms and a deadly stinging tail. Its body can grow as much as a meter long and its tail, normally kept coiled, can stretch across its back to just over one and quarter of its body length. A cave scorpion can run almost as fast as an adult human and leaps of up to three meters have been reported. The yildugh is mainly a solitary hunter, but since the arrival of humans has been known to work in small packs to bring down larger prey.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 2

Skills: Fight 6, Sneak 4, Vigor 5

Weapons: Pincers (small and weak, they can deliver only 1d of damage apiece, but a successful grappling roll enables the yildugh to strike with its tail); Tail (a strike from the stinger only does 2d of damage in itself, but injects an organic corrosive that breaks down soft inner tissues, which the yildugh then sucks out with its hypodermic mandible. Damage is 5d, but a critical roll means the bloodstream was hit, resulting in instant death unless medical nanotech can be applied immediately.)

Armor: 4d

Vitality: -8/-4/-2/0/0/0/0



Irem

Like much of the rest of the solar system, Irem itself was heavily terraformed, and looks decidedly unnatural from orbit, with blue land masses evenly shaped by an artist's hand standing out against the even deeper blue of the oceans. Water covers only a little over 50 percent of the planet's face, and its land mass is dominated by the giant continent of Hugartha, with vast well-irrigated plains of pasture and farmlands and scenic mountain ranges placed so as to channel only the best weather conditions into the wide Beqaa Valley, where sits the domed city of Irem Zat el-Amad itself. The remaining 20 percent of the surface is about evenly divided between the continents of Atalan, which is mostly forest, and arctic Limuru.

Solar System

Azmut: This tiny airless world always keeps one side facing the sun, giving it an asymmetrical appearance, the dayside baked and the nightside frozen.

Irem (artificial rings, Ubar, Ilderim, Ayin-i-Simurgh): The capitol planet of the Caliphate was not only terraformed by Bjorn Egon, but "astro-formed" as well. It is encircled by man-made rings of iridescent plastic confetti, a spectacular sight whether seen from orbit or planetside. Reckless pilots sometimes flew directly through the rings before the Caliph outlawed this action, and slight mathematical inconsistencies in the initial placement of the confetti have grown noticeably visible over the centuries; as a result, the artificial rings now have a somewhat wrinkled and moth-eaten appearance. Of Irem's two natural moons, Ubar is large and white with a negligibly thin atmosphere while Ilderim is a slightly smaller irregular asteroid with a wild spin trapped in an eccentric orbit. The outermost satellite, Ayin-i-Simurgh ("The Eye of the Simurgh"), is a tiny hollow ball with a polished silvery surface that requires constant maintenance to keep smooth. It was manufactured by Egon and placed in an orbit timed so that, as seen from the domed city on the winter solstice, it would appear directly in front of the "head" of the Simurgh Nebula, as though the silhouetted bird-face had opened a single shining eye.

Dzimbulu (Zoth, Koth): Not quite large enough to qualify as a gas giant, Dzimbulu is huge nonetheless, enshrouded in deep layers of opalescent multicolored clouds. Its twin moons are large enough to support breathable atmospheres and were terraformed during the Second Republic, but Zoth's engines failed after the Fall and Koth's habitable status has begun to decline in recent centuries.

Cambalu (rings, many moons): A vast gas giant with rings and fluorescent bands sporting all the colors of the rainbow, Cambalu is orbited by over two dozen moons, some

of which are large enough to have been terraformed, although with an admittedly arctic climate. These include Ophir, Sikandergul and Zamurkind.

Bagai (rings, many moons): A slightly smaller gas giant than Cambalu, Bagai has a featureless violet face and varicolored rings. Its larger moons are too cold to have been terraformed, but environmental domes were built on Karnak and Meru; some are still intact and are used as havens by space nomads.

Ayiza: A tiny unremarkable ball of dark olive-green stone.

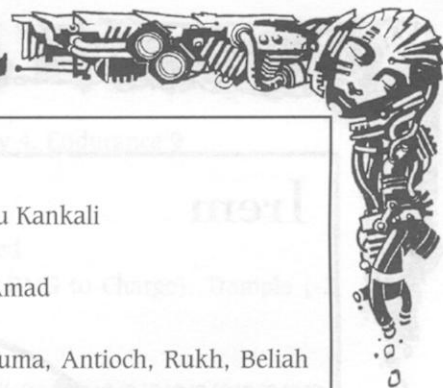
History

This world was originally called Egonia and, as the name suggests, Bjorn Egon considered it the centerpiece of his private empire. This was where he brought employees who required a special degree of cultural re-education — administrators, scientists, the intelligent and educated — to ply them with drugs, hedonism and the advanced brainwashing techniques of the day. The earliest religious veneration of the Simurgh Nebula stems from his activities in this respect. This and the luxuriant excesses committed here by Egon and his successors elicited the greatest outrage when the "Kurgan" worlds were discovered in the mid-Republican era. The domed city was subjected to the most intense cultural deprogramming, driving over half of its population to escape into the virgin countryside of the recently re-formed planet.

The "magic" of the place seems to have lingered, however, as those authorities entrusted with the governance of Egonia fell into much the same pattern, ruling an abjectly servile populace amidst a beautiful exotic landscape within what was being called the most scenic solar system in the jumpweb. Sata Natura was a frequent visitor both before and after the Fall, and her presence is still felt throughout the city. The Republican governor at the time of the Fall had already succumbed to the spirit of the city, and founded a weak and decadent dynasty which remained in place for three centuries, having no local political rivals.

The arrival of Vuldrok raiders was an event both cataclysmic and catalytic, changing forever Irem's place in human history. The post-Republican nobility were ousted with minimal effort, some perishing in futile resistance and some fleeing to live as refugees among the pastoral nomadic herders now scattered across the planet. Most simply acknowledged the obvious superiority of the Vuldrok and traded their noble status for administrative posts with only a slight decrease in the luxurious lifestyle into which they were born. The usurpers, meanwhile, developed a taste for being waited





upon hand and foot, and the export of skilled servants back to Vuldrok territories quickly expanded into a thriving slave trade.

This practice would eventually seal the doom of the entire Vuldrok presence in the Kurgan worlds, when slave raiders took the family of Juhangiz Turhan. In one sense, the creation of the Caliphate can be seen as a mere byproduct of his efforts to free his clan, as the Kurgan worlds were united under his banner to drive out the Vuldrok. This union was maintained to protect the Hajj and celebrate the shared heritage of the Kurgan-speaking peoples, and has lasted over five hundred years. In this time, native Iremites have enjoyed a perpetual peace and ever-increasing prosperity unparalleled elsewhere.

Culture

The flavor and tone of Iremite culture adjusts itself to complement the personality of each succeeding Caliph, but one factor remains constant — all the natives, and in particular the Uighur of the domed city, proudly consider themselves to be the personal servants of the Caliph. This attitude manifests itself as a gracious hospitality extended to all visitors on Irem, but is often seen by others as haughtiness whenever Iremites travel abroad. The entire city of Irem Zat el-Amad is the Caliph's palace, and the khans of other kingdoms and rural districts across the planet see themselves merely as the groundskeepers and householders of the living prophet. The only possible exception to this might be the Turhan tribe, the descendants of the first Caliph's family, who were granted hereditary noble status in perpetuity (the only family in the entire Caliphate so honored) and, while owing fealty to the reigning Caliph, rule over the steppes and ancestral grazing lands of northwestern Hugartha.

The Uighur are all highly educated and cosmopolitan, having been raised to entertain guests from all of Kurga and beyond, and their refined courtesy sometimes seems almost obsequious to outsiders. Those of the domed city still live with most of the comforts and conveniences preserved from Republican times. Relations between them, the Khirghiz and the Khaizak are the most civil to found in the Caliphate; the rurals and nomads share their devotion to the Caliph, and annually bring their finest crops and livestock to the city to offer to the Caliph. Border wars and tribal feuds sometimes break out, but such skirmishing is infrequent and quickly resolved.

Places

The domed city of Irem Zat el-Amad is, of course, the centerpiece of the entire planet, although other impressive cities exist — the heavily fortified Vuldrok spacedock of Al Qahir on Limuru, and black-walled Karakorum and the circular well-planned Shahr Aflatunis on Atalan. Egon never

Irem Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ordu Kankali

Garrison: 9

Capital: Irem Zat el-Amad

Jumps: 0 (5)

Adjacent Worlds: Tsuma, Antioch, Rukh, Beliah (all nightside)

Solar System: Azmut (0.7 AU), Irem (2.1 AU; artificial rings, Ubar, Ilderim, Ayin-i-Simurgh), Dzimbulu (4.4 AU), Cambalu (9.8 AU), Bagai (27 AU), Ayiza (46 AU), Jumpgate (53 AU)

While not technically part of the solar system, the Sahab-i-Simurgh is the most predominant feature of Irem's skies, its outermost extremities filling half of the space seen from the jumpgate. The system actually occupies an outer lip of the nebula, and Doramos predicted that Irem would pass through one of its dust whisps over the course of the next several thousand years.

Tech: 6

Population: 1,500,000,000

Resources: Weapons, luxury, relics

Exports: Fine blades of Beliahin or Fashiri steel, firearms inscribed and inlaid with precious metals and stones, skilled servants, silk, cloth-of-gold and other fine fabrics, vintage foodstuffs, wine and drugs, objects actually handled by past Caliphs and pilgrimage souvenirs (including palm-sized hologram viewers of the Sahab-i-Simurgh and portraits of the Caliphs on karakul chamois-skin)

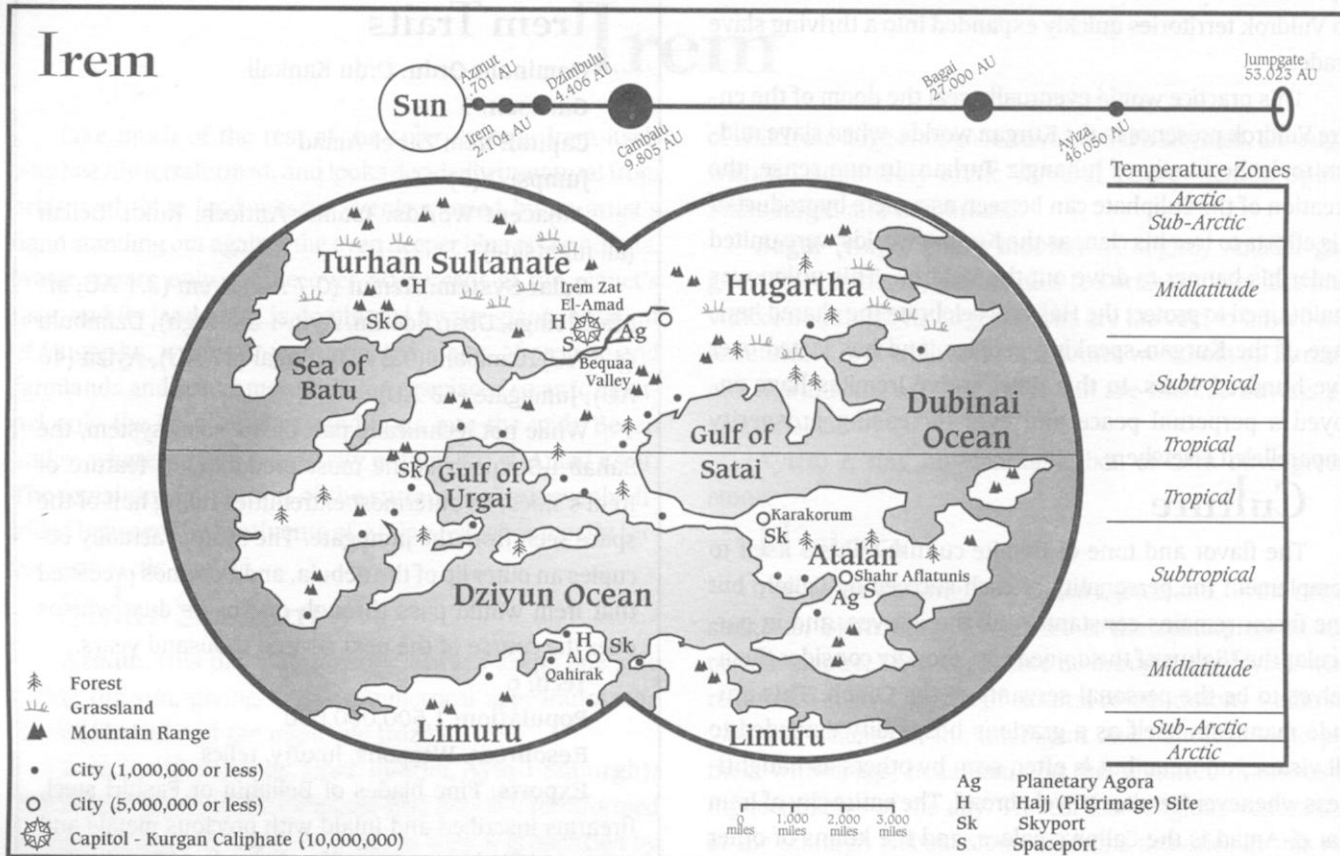
Landscape: Artificially beautiful, colored entirely with shades of blue.

lived to see the completion of Egonia's elaborate terraforming but spent his latter years enjoying the view from the huge arcological dome he built to house his secret garden retreat. The dome was left standing after the surface of the world became habitable, and high arches were cut from its ground level and finished with ornately carved gates to allow for ventilation and easier access to its interior. At the apex of the dome is a crystal-clear observation bubble built by Caliph Zeenat Amina in 4851; it is used as a private sanctuary where the Caliph and selected guests may meditate upon the Sahab-i-Simurgh.

Despite the reinforced addition of the gates, the dome was considerably weakened by the bombardment it received during the Vuldrok wars, and the third Caliph had giant columns erected to support it from the inside. These columns gave the city its surname Zat el-Amad, "the Many-Pillared." The name Irem dates from the city's days as a Vuldrok holding, and is derived from the inscription found on the dis-



Irem



used climate engine that originally maintained the atmosphere within the dome — Independent Regulated Environmental Module. The planetary name Egonia was replaced by the Republican Tourism Commission's equally absurd designation Nebulonia, Kurganized after the Fall into Naibolu. Since the foundation of the Caliphate, the name Irem has been used colloquially to signify the world as a whole, with the addition of Zat el-Amad designating the domed city itself.

Flora/Fauna

The incorporation of large quantities of oxygen into Irem's ecosystem had a result which, while bizarre in appearance to outworlders, nonetheless allowed for the successful transplantation of many Urth-derived species of plants and animals onto the planet. The flora of Irem has a mostly bluish hue, visually echoing the blues of its uppermost rock strata. Variety exists, of course, with flowers and fruits showing a wide range of color, but from space the most densely foliated regions appear different shades of cerulean and cobalt, changing to purplish, then red and finally brown with the approach of winter. The fauna seems unaffected, but Kurgans on other worlds often claim to detect a faint bluish tinge in the hides and skins of Iremite humans and animals traveling abroad.

Urthish livestock has thrived on Irem, with plentiful

herds of sheep, oxen and beefalo providing sustenance for the Khaizak. Common predators like wolves, bears and great cats can be found, and the highly adaptable polygoat has flourished and developed a number of wild strains including jungle, mountain and semi-aquatic variations which have been successfully bred on other worlds. Irem is famous for its karakul sheep, the black wool of which is usually described as being as black as interstellar space itself. One of Egon's executive heirs seems to have had a special fondness for giant mammals of prehistoric Urth, but his genetically reconstructed species did not prove as viable as more conventional animals. Many, however, have survived to the present day and whenever giant elk, beaver, tapir or sloth are discovered, the Caliph imposes severe penalties for hunting or capturing them. Many large prehistoric animals are kept in well-tended preservational parks and some are trained to serve the Caliph.

Fayilu: Iremite War- and Pack-Beasts

The elephant exists in several varieties on Irem, and the Kurgan term *fayilu* has broadened to include a number of large mammals bred for both battle and burden. While the more common Urthish-type elephants have adapted to other worlds (especially Hira and Khayyam), the examples given below are rarely deployed offworld as they require ungodly amounts of bluestraw feed and quickly succumb to the harsher climates of other Kurgan worlds.

Rukh



Rukh Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun

Garrison: 4

Capital: Simoriah

Jumps: 1 (6)

Adjacent Worlds: Irem (dayside), Sky Tear (nightside), Egg (nightside)

Solar System: Marduq (15.7 AU; Rukh), Shiraz (29 AU), Ghulistan (53 AU), Jumpgate (71 AU)

The sun of the Rukh system is a red supergiant which entered its dying phase and engulfed its inner planets millions of years ago. The disc of the Kizil Yildiz (literally "Red Star") can be seen with the unaided eye from the jumpgate; dimmed by age and the fading suns effect, its profile and surface features are clearly visible though swathed in clouds of coronal condensation. Short narrow spicules radiate thickly from its outer edge, broken here and there by erupting flares and gassy prominences; across the interior of the disc, vast sunspots connected by dark filaments play against patches of bright faculae in slow "continental" drifts. The combination of escaped layers of drifting gas and the intense electromagnetic "noise" of its sweeping solar winds makes piloting through the system tricky; all navigation and sensor-related rolls begin at -2, with that penalty increasing during periods of intensified solar activity. (Upon first jumping to this system, Doramos confessed utter bafflement as to why the Anunnaki would build a gate in such an obviously uninhabitable system, unless their history stretched hundreds of millions of years further back than Republican scientists had estimated.)

Tech: 5

Human Population: 150,000,000

Resources: Chemicals

Exports: Raw industrial chemicals, refined fuels, plastics, synthetic fabrics, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, survival gear

Landscape: Enigmatic, eerie and forboding.

will ignite Marduq, transforming it into a second sun.

Rukh: Rukh itself is not a true planet, but one of the largest moons of Marduq, Urthlike in size and gravity but made habitable only by exhaustive terraforming. From orbit it has a mostly purplish hue caused by the many artificial atmospheric layers required to protect the surface from the excessive radiation from the Kizil Yildiz. Marduq's other moons house mining colonies and refineries, but were never terraformed.

Shiraz (rings, few moons): The system's smaller gas giant is Shiraz, whose unmarked yellow-green face is a peaceful mask covering a world in its death-throes. With an abnormally fast spin, Shiraz has been stretched into a severely flattened ovoid, its cloudy atmosphere so diffuse that, on a near approach, the molten core can be seen glowing in its center. Its thick yellow rings seem to grow directly out of its equator, formed from its outer atmospheric strata lost to centrifugal force.

Ghulistan: This airless irregular outer planetoid has a jet-black surface, covered in dust that seems to swallow all light it receives.

History

By the time he had established his corporate headquarters at Irem Zat el-Amad, Bjorn Egon had assembled the largest and most aggressive geological survey team in history. The discovery of Rukh, with its widely varied chemical deposits, he hailed as their greatest achievement, and launched a full scale colonization of the harsh desolate world in the turbulent decaying system. Enthused by the ease with which Beliah was made habitable and the ongoing transformation of Egonia, he poured the bulk of his considerable fortune into the terraforming of Rukh with a minimum of forethought, ignoring the warnings of his scientific staff not to tamper with this exceedingly strange world.

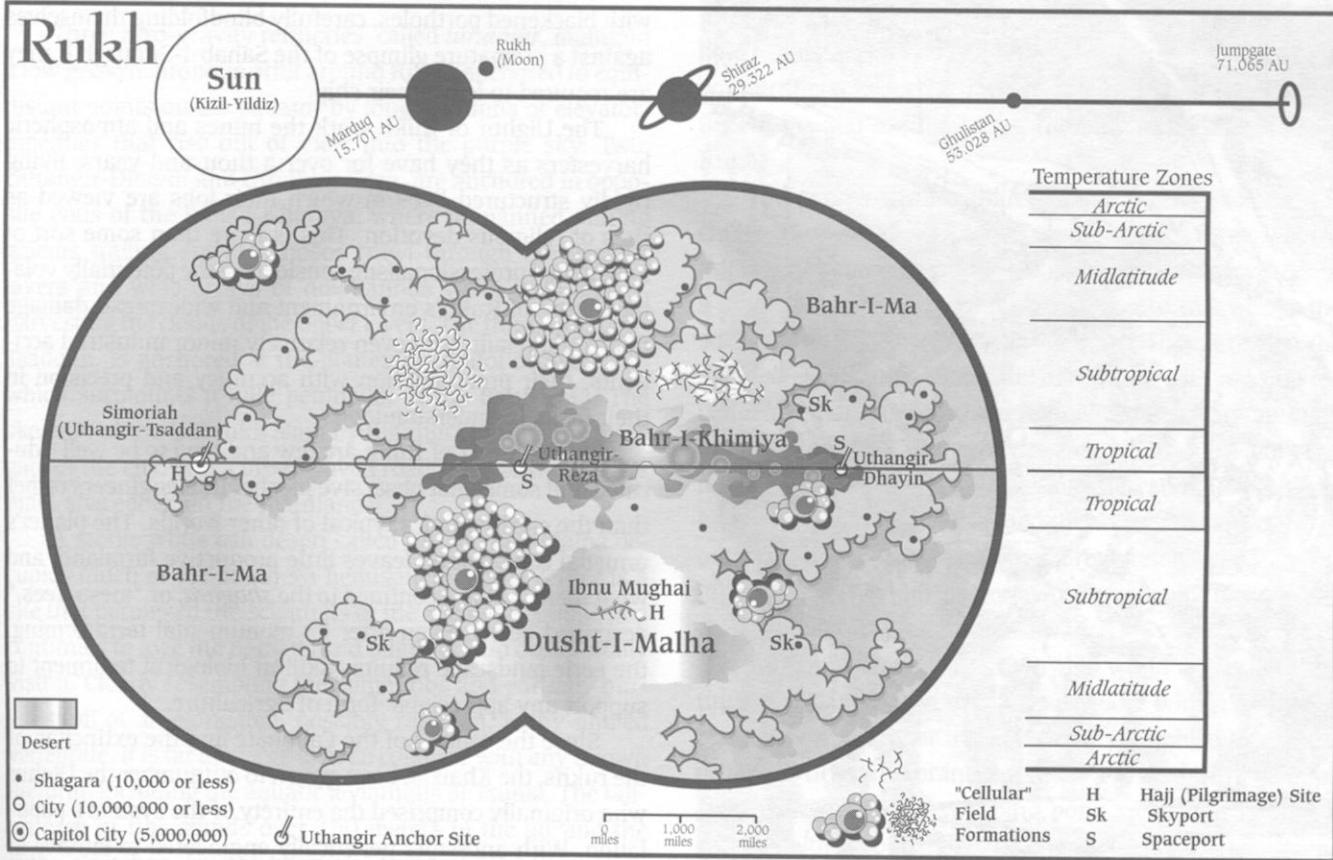
The project was hampered not only by its sheer scale but by the indigenous lifeforms, many of which grew to such monstrous size that they not only posed a threat to human colonists but to large craft and environmentally sealed installations as well. The terraforming of Rukh took centuries to complete and was a true battle, both against the elements and the native fauna, fought with heavy artillery and energy weapons as well as the planetscapers' tools. The executives who succeeded Egon joked that Rukh was transformed by "sheer brute strength and fluent profanity." When Doramos visited the system years later, he expounded by calling the terraforming of Rukh "an abomination, the most pointless and thoughtless misuse of the worldcrafter's art." (By then the advanced technologies of the Second Republic had become dependent upon the world's chemical harvest, so, of course, the master terraformer's recommendations for planetary healing were ignored.)

Solar System

Marduq (Rukh, other moons): The innermost planet of this system is the larger of its two surviving gas giants, the orange and purple banded Marduq, which boasts a single reddish tornado comparable to that on Jupiter in the Holy Terra system. From Rukh, where Marduq's bulk fills over a third of the sky, one can easily distinguish the fractal swirling storm systems that form the borders between its brightly colored bands. Local legend says that the Day of Revelation and Reckoning will be heralded by a massive solar flare that



Rukh



The Fall isolated Rukh almost as completely as if its jumpgate had been sealed; Marduq's orbit had carried it beyond the far side of the Kizil Yildiz, and the few raiders and nomads who jumped into the system saw nothing there to entice them to stay. The Rukh system was believed to be uninhabited, both by the majority of Vuldrok raiders who passed through on their way to Irem and by the Kurgans themselves. In the absence of interplanetary trade, mines and refineries gradually emptied of all but the few "faithful" who tried to maintain the sites as a matter of religious duty. As native monsters slowly perished in the human-tailored biosphere, colonists struck out to explore the world their forefathers worked so hard to build.

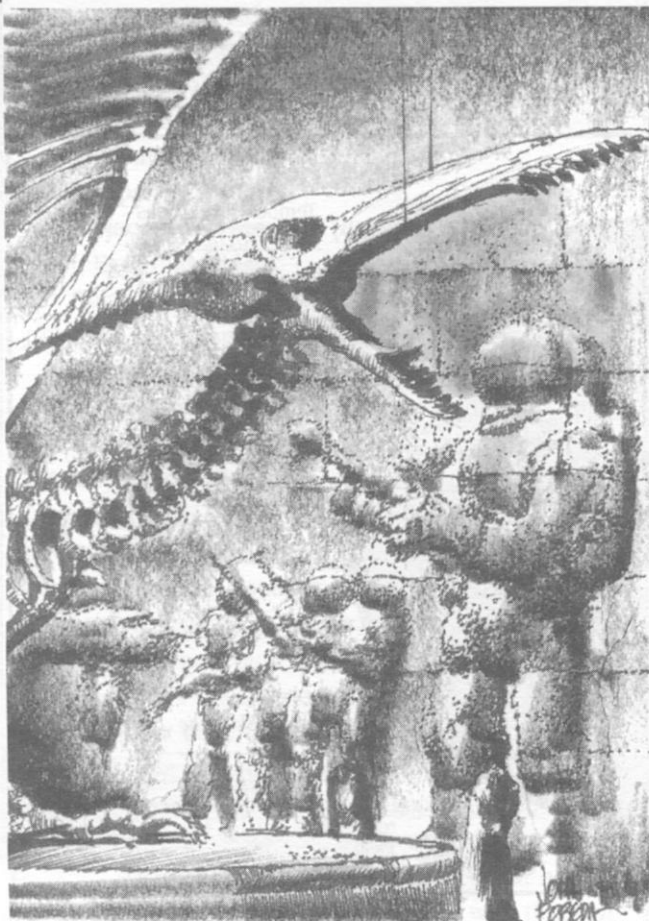
After his victory at Irem, Juhangiz Turhan continued to wage war against a new wave of Vuldrok invaders that had arrived at Rukh via Epiphany and Sky Tear. In the course of driving back the Vuldrok, Juhangiz discovered that Rukh was indeed populated — by a Kurgan-speaking populace, no less. There were some Vuldrok on Rukh as well, stranded when their ships crashed, who had been warring with the natives over the industrial centers they needed to repair their ships. The forces of Juhangiz crushed the Vuldrok with relative ease, and he was hailed as a liberator by the natives of Rukh.

Juhangiz spent much of his later years on Rukh; the world's eerie beauty and exotic wildlife appealed to the fron-

tiersman in him, in a way that the stark deserts of Beliah and Al Fashir or the dense jungles of Hira never could. A true nomad born and bred, he grew up hunting the great prehistoric beasts on the steppes of Irem, so the alien monsters of Rukh presented a challenge he could not ignore. Rukhites were hired to take him on long hunting excursions across the planet's face, teaching him the tricks and nuances of surviving in this bizarre environment. High-power energy weapons were deployed against the dangerous giants, while arrows, spears and slings were brought into play when game of a more conventional size was sighted.

The last safari of Juhangiz is legendary. By then the hunt had become a crusade to rid the world of the large destructive animals that had hitherto prevented the extensive colonizing of the world by humans. The last major nemesis of the settlers was a huge flying reptile for which the planet was named, the rukh. Though few in number, the rukh's great size and strength, coupled with a devious cunning that seemed to border on sentience, had long posed a danger not only to scattered settlements but to the heavily fortified mining installations as well. The rukh was the bane of the Caliphal safaris, swooping in from the skies to snatch up hunted and hunters alike. Juhangiz had come to consider the monster a personal enemy, and resolved to eliminate his foe once and for all. Encased in a reinforced suit of powered armor, he provoked an attack from the rukh, slash-





ing and blasting ineffectually at the monster's scaly hide until it seized him in its jaws and swallowed him whole. For days the increasingly erratic flight of the rukh was followed by observers until it plunged deep into the Bahr-i-Ma, its bloated carcass finally surfacing as the first Caliph hacked his way out of the swollen upturned belly.

No rukh has been reported on the world since that event, and the inhabitants gave thanks to the Star Maker for sending its vice-regent to rid their home of its greatest peril. The people of Rukh have been the loyal devoted subjects of the Caliphate ever since, distinguishing themselves in war, the sciences and even the arts to show their appreciation. Industry has flourished as settlers explore the farthest corners of the planet, finding new uses for the unique resources to be found. Rukhite forces were a major factor in holding back Vuldrok invaders at Epiphany and Sky Tear, and their incredible survival skills have made them indispensable scouts in the Jihad for Vera Cruz.

Culture

The people of Rukh are renowned for being the most devout practitioners of El-Diin in all of Kurga, and their often self-sacrificing loyalty to the Caliph may be partly responsible for the reputation of fanaticism ascribed to Kurgans in general. Nearly all Rukhites take the Hajj upon reaching

the age of majority, making their first jump to Irem in ships with blackened portholes, carefully blindfolding themselves against a premature glimpse of the Sahab-i-Simurgh if they are required to leave their ship.

The Uighur of Rukh work the mines and atmospheric harvesters as they have for over a thousand years, living rigidly structured lives in which their jobs are viewed as rites of religious devotion. This is more than some sort of heightened professionalism; considering the potentially volatile nature of Rukh's environment and widespread damage that could result from even relatively minor industrial accidents, their preoccupation with accuracy and precision in their tasks is understandable.

The Khirghiz of Rukh are few and tend to be well-educated and somewhat obsessive biochemical engineers rather than the earthy rustics typical of other worlds. The planet's unusual composition leaves little productive farmland, and what there is of it is confined to the *shagara*, or "mesa trees," described below. Even after its monumental terraforming, the eerie landscape requires skillful biological treatment to support any appreciable form of agriculture.

Since the coming of the Caliphate and the extinction of the rukhs, the Khaizak have grown to outnumber the Uighur who originally comprised the entirety of the system's population. With ancestors genetically engineered to survive in extremely hostile environs, most nomadic Rukhites would be considered members of the Changed in the Known Worlds. Enhanced senses, toughened skin, special immunities and alternate respiration or digestion, while not common, tend to predominate in certain tribes well-adapted to their region. Khaizak and Khirghiz alike are especially sensitive to changes in climate or terrain, as they often have only moments in which to seal themselves into their sturdy dome-like environmental tents, called yurts, when poisonous clouds descend from ionospheric breaches in the sky, or caustic fumes spill over the shores of the Bahr-i-Khimiya to drift across the landscape, or swarms of unknown insects and vermin migrate from unexplored territories.

In general, Rukhites exhibit a mottled skin pigmentation and have a distinct body odor that resembles the smell of most flammable liquids. (This odor may disappear in natives who live exclusively offworld for seven years or more.) A wide range of body types can be found with odd postures and proportions exaggerated by bulbous features; the most reclusive Tengri-Igren of the system are only barely recognizable as human. While foreigners usually find their physical appearance disturbing and even horrifying, Kurgans from all worlds consider Rukhites, with their courteous demeanors, pious devotion and friendly dispositions, to be not only familiar but — after a fashion — exotically beautiful.

Places

Three zero-gravity refineries, called *uthangir*, maintain a low geosynchronous orbit around Rukh, anchored to equidistant points on the equator by long columns of elevator-pipelines that rise out of view into the purple sky. Two, Uthangir-Dhayin and Uthangir Reza, are anchored in opposite ends of the Bahr-i-Khimiya, where unmanned mining golems trailing shielded hoses crawl through the deepest layers and wide arrays of diaphanous vanes spin slowly, harvesting the clouds of the upper layers. The third, Uthangir-Tsaddan, is anchored at the planetary capitol of Simoriah, which surmounts a hilly peninsula in the Bahr-i-Ma. The skeleton of the last rukh slain by Juhangiz I forms the main gate of the city, and a broad paved road leads to the world's main spacedock on the mainland.

A sterile white salt desert called the Dusht-i-Malha occupies much of the southern hemisphere. At its center is a site that perplexed the scientists of the Second Republic and continues to awe the nomads and pilgrims who occasionally visit it. Clearly resembling the spine, ribs and partially buried skull of an elongated, possibly reptilian, many-limbed vertebrate, it is far too large to even compare with any known lifeform, including the aquatic leviathans of Tsuma. The tallest arch of ribs stands over 150 meters in the air and the spine stretches several kilometers and can be seen from space. The Khaizak of Rukh call it Ibnu Mughai, the Spawn of the Serpent, claiming that it roamed the planet in ancient times until it was struck down by a bolt of plasma that shot forth from the eye of Zaibolu when it tried to attack the Prophet on his first visit to the world.

Flora/Fauna

None of Rukh's indigenous plant life was studied by Egon before he destroyed it all when he terraformed the world. The only real trace left is the shagara, or mesa-trees, the petrified remains of huge tree-like growths which cluster along the shores of the Bahr-i-Ma and are found with less frequency further inland. The shagara roots extended deep into the planet's crust and may even have drawn upon geothermal energy for sustenance; its branches spread wide at heights of 50 to a 100 meters or more, with the largest examples reaching almost two hundred meters. The broad petrified trunks have been scoured by winds for untold eons, carving the shagara into precariously balanced top-heavy shapes. The branch systems caught airborne dust and volcanic ash — especially during the stormier phases of terraforming — until flat solid plateaus of nearly level ter-

rain, some measuring a kilometer or more across, were formed. The resulting elevated ground was originally unable to support imported crops, but has since been enriched with artificial imported nutrients, changing the mesa-trees into farms and even gardens, the only true agriculture on Rukh.

The surviving animal life is mainly insectoid, and includes the gigapede, a colonial creature which forms when a number of subterranean beetles interlock their carapaces in a single file column several meters long to trek across the surface in search of a new burrow site. There are also the dreaded carpet ants, voracious omnivores with a group intelligence that enables them to surround and entrap large animals. In recent years, carpet ants have begun storming the shagara in search of food. Small descendants of the giant monsters that once plagued the world sometimes crawl out of the Bahr-i-Khimiya — scabrous crustaceans, writhing reptiloids and undifferentiated protoplasmic blobs which only present a danger to the unwary.

The emblematic creature of this world is the now-extinct rukh, an enormous flying reptiloid with a wingspan reaching 50 meters or more. Its skull resembled that of the primitive Urthish pteranodon, with a long narrow pointed jaw and a backward-sweeping bony spike that is almost echoed in the profile of the Simurgh Nebula. No specimens have been sighted since the first Caliph's kill, and some historians have been executed as heretics for pointing out that the rukh were already dying off due to the radical terraforming that obliterated their natural habitat.

Hwuluf

This smaller relative of the rukh was genetically altered to live in the terraformed environment and is bred for use as transportation by the shagara Khirghiz. Ideally suited for prolonged journeys, it is not nearly as strong or as maneuverable a flier as the Known World urroc. Its 20 meter wingspan enables it to glide for long distances while carrying heavy loads, but it is awkward and ungainly when not airborne and has difficulty taking flight from level ground. An individual transplanted to another world may live out its 10 to 15 year lifespan, but attempts to breed the hwuluf outside of the Rukh system have met with uniform failure.

Body: Strength 11, Dexterity 5, Endurance 12

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 7

Skills: Fight 3, Vigor 7, Fly 5

Weapon: Bite (3d DMG), claw (4d DMG)

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0



Tsuma

Tsuma is a naturally Urthlike world, with nearly all of its populace packed onto one supercontinent, Khwarezm, comprising more than 80% of its total land area. Numerous subcontinents, larger islands and archipelagos extend away from Khwarezm, with small isolated groups of volcanic islands marking the edge of the Bahr-i-Qudhwan, a vast empty ocean occupying most of the southern hemisphere. Tsuma's very slight axial tilt gives it a mild seasonal cycle, with a balmy tropical climate prevailing year-round except for the equatorial and polar zones.

When Doramos visited Tsuma, he noted that, although the planet seemed quite stable and ideally suited to human habitation, there was a slight rotational "wobble" in the planetary axis which would eventually result in global cataclysm, "perhaps as soon as a thousand years from now." (I.e., sometime around the year 5000.) Plans were made to install gravitational engines, but the Fall prevented the completion of the plan. Many Tsumans remember Doramos's "prophecy" and speak, some in awed reverence and some in defiant flippance, of "The Deluge To Come."

Solar System

Tamuz: A swiftly spinning lump of molten rock, smaller than most moons.

Dzilbuq: A small sun-baked world with a thin poisonous atmosphere.

Tsuma: Centuries of heavy industry have dulled Tsuma's face with a grayish-brown tinge which has cleared only slightly since the enforcement of strict environmental laws by the Caliph. Tsuma has no moon, but is orbited by StarPort Xanadu, a Republican space station.

Barida: A lifeless world of ice with a thin atmosphere, caches of Republican tech and goods have been found on its surface.

Zurfan and Gharfan: Composed of vivid bands of violet and orange, these twin gas giants share their outermost atmospheres through an elongated tidal strand stretching across their common center of gravity, and are encircled by a chaotic network of moons and asteroids.

Dzahab: This tiny ball of frozen rock has long been rumored to have a core of solid gold, as a number of long-abandoned mining sites will attest.

History

The first colonists of Tsuma were servant populations installed to maintain private resort compounds for Bjorn Egon and his successors. Later, larger public versions of the resorts were built to house and entertain Republican tourists, many of whom eventually retired to the pleasant scenic world.

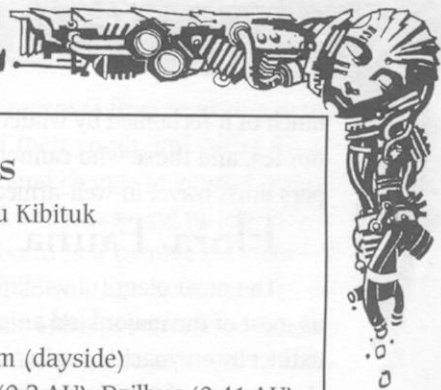
By the end of the Second Republic, the population had grown to accommodate a substantial degree of industry, and Khwarezm was dotted with large cities surrounded by interminably sprawling tracts of cheaply mass-produced suburban housing for worker families.

Its fertile lands soon destroyed by pollution, Tsuma suffered the worst of all the Kurgan worlds during the Fall. The population had increased beyond its food-producing capacity and the planet had become dependent upon the Republican welfare system. Cities sealed themselves against the starving hordes that roamed the derelict suburban countryside, venturing forth only when depletion of their own stores drove them to lay siege to other cities or harry the few remaining farmlands. Some refugees fled the continent entirely, spreading out to the islands as they learned to sustain themselves on the rich bounty of Tsuma's marine life.

When the Vuldrok began raiding Tsuma in the mid-44th century, they found a fractious world of warring city-kingdoms too entrenched in their feuds and rivalries to unite against the new enemy from space. Settling into the countryside, the Vuldrok laid siege and were able to occupy dozens of smaller cities over the course of the next hundred years. Tsuma might well have remained a Vuldrok world in the face of the arrival of the Caliphate, had not the conquerors "gone native," abandoning further conquest to enjoy the comfortable benefits of their labors and engaging in petty rivalries with other occupied cities. The victories gained by the first two Caliphs were as much diplomatic as military; by playing on the near-universal fear and hatred of the Vuldrok, they were able to unite the unoccupied cities where Kurgan culture still survived.

Since becoming part of the Caliphate, Tsuma has strived to rebuild itself into an economic power, but has been hampered by its depleted resources and ongoing factional struggles between Kurgan-speaking natives and immigrants, and the descendants of Vuldrok settlers (mainly Drenjar and Zetol), who survived repeated attempts at wars of extermination by taking to the ocean as pirates. Republican ideals and traditions have also survived the centuries, though only as dimly-remembered customs in isolated cultural pockets. For this they have Sulayman Darumai to thank, as he brought some measure of peace to the world by creating the legal designation of the Ordu Kafiri, "acceptable unbelievers" who were allowed limited participation in the planetary economy in exchange for political acquiescence and total segregation.

Republican mercantile savvy has proven to be Tsuma's strength and saving grace. Despite their lack of resources, Tsumans retain enough scientific and technological lore to make use of the resources found on the other worlds of



Kurga. Although the Caliph imposes strict controls, research and development continues, mostly under the aegis of the Ikhwan-i-Takhiyun but much of it in secret. Trading for resources with other worlds has made Tsuma the merchant center of the Caliphate, where Kibituk high and low haggle and negotiate in crowded bazaars and suqs or quaint picturesque seaports.

Culture

Uighur account for over 90% of Tsuma's population, and the urban sprawls of Khwarezm are overcrowded fleshpots kept bearable only by preserved Republican tech. Much of the suburban areas of Khwarezm have been rebuilt and refurbished, and the majority of Uighur enjoy a lifestyle only slightly less comfortable than that of the late Republican lower-middle class. Khirghiz ordus claim most of the smaller islands, and have found it more profitable to raise crops of qoqa and tubaq than to try to feed the rest of the overpopulated world.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the higher standard of living afforded to most Tsumans, Kurgans from other worlds tend to consider the people of Tsuma greedy, boorish and vulgar. Indeed, the morals of Tsuma are the morals of the marketplace; culture and spirituality are discarded for the hard realities of profit and loss. The fact that most of Tsuma's trade consists of commodities illegal on other worlds has done nothing to improve its reputation (and nothing to halt the tremendous influx of wealth Tsuma receives from those worlds for those commodities). In the last century, urban Tsumans have developed an even more decadent fin-de-seicle attitude as the time of global disaster predicted by Doramos draws nearer.

This attitude has affected the pilgrimage itself, as nearly all Tsumans who travel off-world are considered quite wealthy by Kurgan standards, and custom dictates that their wealth be shared with their fellow pilgrims. Many who claim the title of hajji have done so only after a single jump to Irem and back; this practice is acceptable on Tsuma itself, but all other Kurgans regard such a brief and easy pilgrimage as an act of hypocrisy and impiety. Tsuma's own Hajj sites are few and unremarkable, overtly commercialized tourist traps where leering vendors hawk obviously fake relics to the few "completist" pilgrims that take the trouble to visit.

The descendants of the refugees that still maraud Khwarezm's suburban wastes have always been treated as outlaws and bandits, but since the rise of the Caliphate their numbers have increased to the point where they now send representatives to the Caliph, petitioning him to have them declared a Khaizak ordu. If they can gain this recognition, they may claim the right to legally raid caravans traveling between the cities. Among the Khaizak of the islands, dialects of Urthish can still be heard and remnants of Vuldrok culture still exist in small isolated communities. Most is-

Tsuma Traits

Dominant Ordu: Ordu Kibituk

Garrison: 4

Capital: Khorasan

Jumps: 1 (6)

Adjacent Worlds: Irem (dayside)

Solar System: Tamuz (0.2 AU), Dzilbuq (0.41 AU), Tsuma (1.1 AU), Barida (5.6 AU), Zurfan/Gharfan (36.9912-37.0082 AU), Dzahab (48 AU), Jumpgate (55 AU)

Tech: 7

Human Population: 3,000,000,000

Alien Population: 370,000 (Ur-Obun)

Resources: Contraband, forbidden tech

Exports: Strong tubaq and qoqa extracts, aphrodisiacs, longevity and rejuvenation sera, cybernetics, think machines, vulgar magic lantern shows

Landscape: Naturally Urthlike, with less than 50% of its surface covered by water.

landers live peaceful lives of primitive tropical splendor, but some occasionally take to war in retaliation when their idyllic islands are invaded and annexed by continentals looking for resources or a secluded getaway spot.

Places

Pious Kurgans from other worlds who must travel to Tsuma for business purposes will sometimes refuse to set foot on the world they consider unclean and lacking in faith. Such as these may lodge aboard StarPort Xanadu, an enormous orbital space station built during the late Republican period, preserved nearly intact with all comfort systems kept in good repair. The Caliphate takes great pains to keep Xanadu as clean, presentable and trouble-free as possible for visitors, and uses the station as a base from which to patrol the Tsuma system for ever-present smugglers.

Planetside, the two largest cities are Khorasan and Ispahan, which dominate the eastern and western coasts of Khwarezm, respectively. Khorasan has perhaps the most recognizable skyline in all of Kurgan space (aside from the dome at Irem Zat El-Amad), composed mainly of surviving Republican towers built in a stylized imitation of the "Kurgan" architecture found in the background mattes of *Jumping To Nineveh*. A large bustling well-tended spacedock is near the port of Khorasan, and the local caravanserai has been mostly converted into a market only seldom invaded by pilgrims. Khwarezm is blanketed by rebuilt suburban sprawl, and one can travel from Khorasan to any other eastern city by landcraft without ever leaving paved road or losing sight of human habitation. The suburbs of Ispahan and the west coast, however, are little more than a vast ghetto,



much of it reclaimed by wilderness or infested with brigand hordes, and those who cannot afford to hire flitters or hoppers must travel in well-armed caravans.

Flora/Fauna

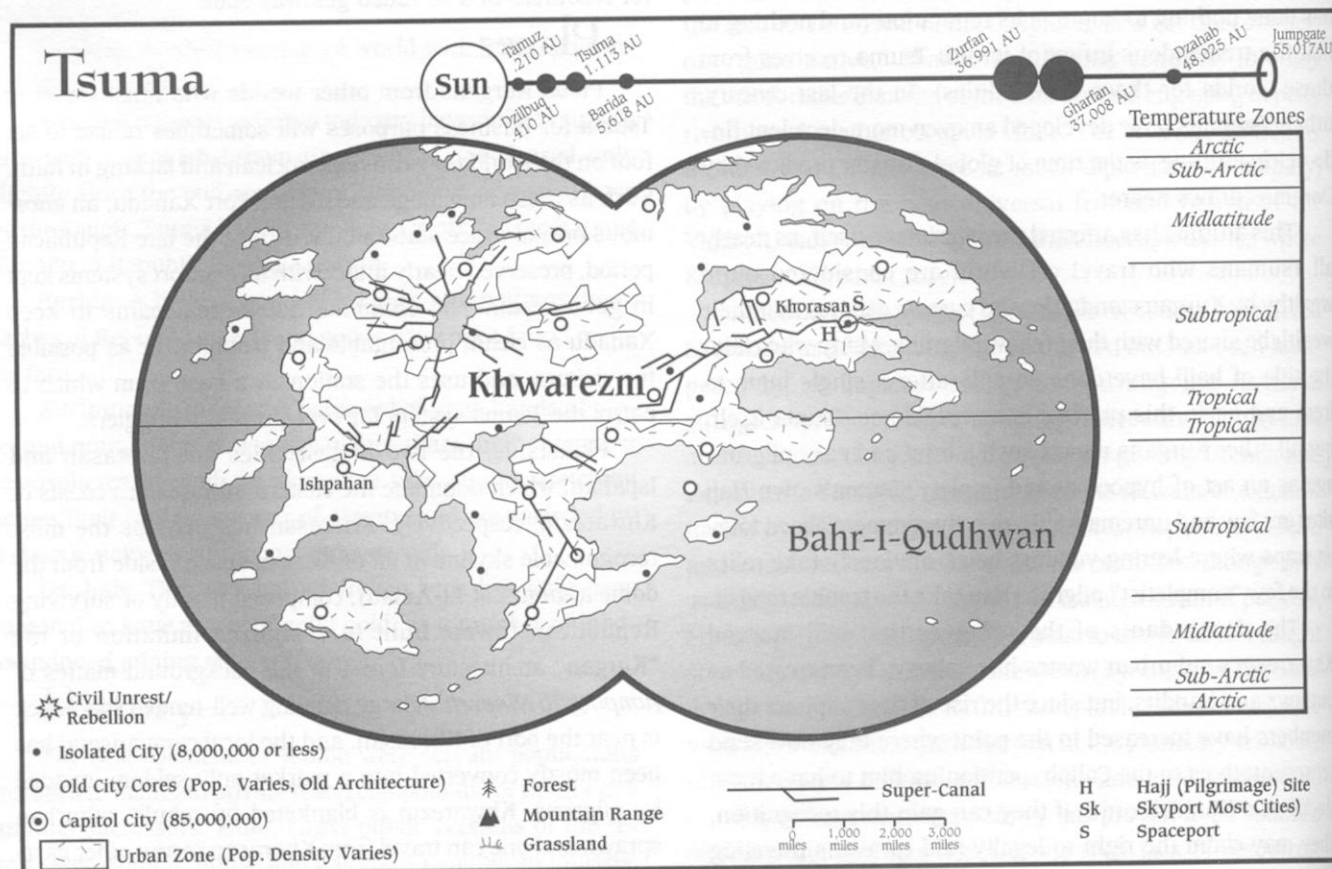
The most plentiful wildlife on Tsuma is its marine life, as most of the major land animals were long since rendered extinct by encroaching urbanization. By the time of the Fall, the interior of Khwarezm had been but scantily explored, and all its coastal habitats were razed for farmland, highways or housing tracts. Some records exist of the large mammalian predators and birds of prey that once ruled inland, but the only species known to have survived in numbers is the *danghu*, a small canine scavenger. Thought extinct by the Fall, since the rise of the Caliphate reports have increased of danghu packs raiding outlying suburbs, carrying away unguarded food or trash, small livestock and even children.

In the cities, the only animals found are either the puny short-lived pets kept by the rich as status symbols, or vermin. As a nexus of interstellar trade with a vast, densely populated urban habitat, Tsuma has become the adopted homeworld of nearly every pest, parasite and small scavenger known to the late Second Republic. Roaches, ants, mice, common rats and amen'ta carry a plethora of diseases

through the sewers, backalleys and crawlspaces of the world's urban sprawls.

Republican xenobiologists had catalogued over a million varieties of fish, crustaceans and invertebrates, estimating that they had found less than a tenth of the total aquatic species. Spidercrabs, sea scorpions, fluorescent bass and cloudy schools of nanoshrimp provide sustenance for the divers and fishers of the Khirghiz and Khaizak; puffer sharks and stiletto eels lurk in bays and inlets waiting to drag down unwary swimmers. Many-hued gulls, terns and albatrosses migrate across vast stretches of ocean, even venturing far inland to pick at the trash-heaps of the cities. In the arctic seas swim the *mughong*, walrus-like cetaceans with elongated serpentine bodies packed with highly prized blubber.

In the Bahr-i-Qudhwan, some species grow to enormous size, posing a threat to small vessels and occasionally climbing out of the ocean to harass island-dwellers. Reports of sea-serpents, giant squid and huge flying fish go back to the Second Republic. A favorite myth of the Tsuman Khaizak describes Bortu-Khan, the first of the sea turtles placed upon the world by the Star-Maker, now grown to such monumental girth that its shell is mistaken for an island by unwary ships.



Danghu

Smart and persistent, this hyena-like scavenger presents little danger alone, but large packs may be bold enough when hungry to attack human-sized prey. Food scarcities in the continental interior have driven more and more danghu to forage among the trash heaps of the sprawl outskirts.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 7

Skills: Fight 4, Vigor 5

Weapon: Bite (3d DMG)

Vitality: -9/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0

Bortu

The "state animal" of Tsuma is the *bortu*, a giant sea turtle with an elaborate life cycle and migratory pattern that drives the young to circumnavigate the globe as they mature. Born amphibious, their adolescent phase is land-faring, and every autumn sees herds of young bortu trekking across Khwarezm's equatorial subcontinents. Ordinarily, the bortu takes on its adult aquatic form when it re-enters the ocean after spanning the planet's landmass, but the Khorasan sprawl has blocked their route for the past thousand years, causing an intermediate land-based adult form to evolve. After the Fall, the bortu were frequently hunted for food, and only the command of the third Caliph saved them from the brink of extinction. Many folktales exist of shipwrecked sailors being saved by adult bortu whom they befriended in their youth, and some pagan islanders are said to worship them as gods.

Adolescent: Just over one meter in length, young bortu are gentle herbivores with well-articulated legs enabling them to run as fast as a human walks. Intelligent and curious, bortu in this phase respond to kindness but can be dangerous if threatened or prevented from completing their migration.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Endurance 10

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 6

Skills: Fight 5, Vigor 7

Weapon: Bite (3d DMG)

Armor: 6d

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Adult (inland): Bortu prevented from returning to the water retain the land-legs of their youth, but suffer developmental defects and a profound change in general behavior. Standing over a meter tall and measuring up to 3 meters in length, the adult inland bortu is a carnivore capable of brief bursts of speed to bring down large game. Land bortu blunder into eastern Khwarezm suburbs with increasing frequency, causing havok and attempting to prey upon inhabitants until they are dispatched.

Body: Strength 12, Dexterity 6, Endurance 5

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 3

Skills: Fight 6, Vigor 4

Weapon: Bite (6d DMG)

Armor: 7d

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Adult (aquatic): The rare older bortu that manage to return to the ocean (or find a home in an inland sea) average between 3 and 4 meters long, with the oldest reaching as much as 5 meters. Their legs have metamorphosed into long flippers, making them swift and powerful swimmers, and functional gills allow them to dive to great depths for indefinite periods. Vestigial lungs enable them to survive out of water, but they can only move about on dry land with great difficulty. (The Dexterity score given below only applies when in water.)

Body: Strength 14, Dexterity 5, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 4

Skills: Fight 7, Vigor 5

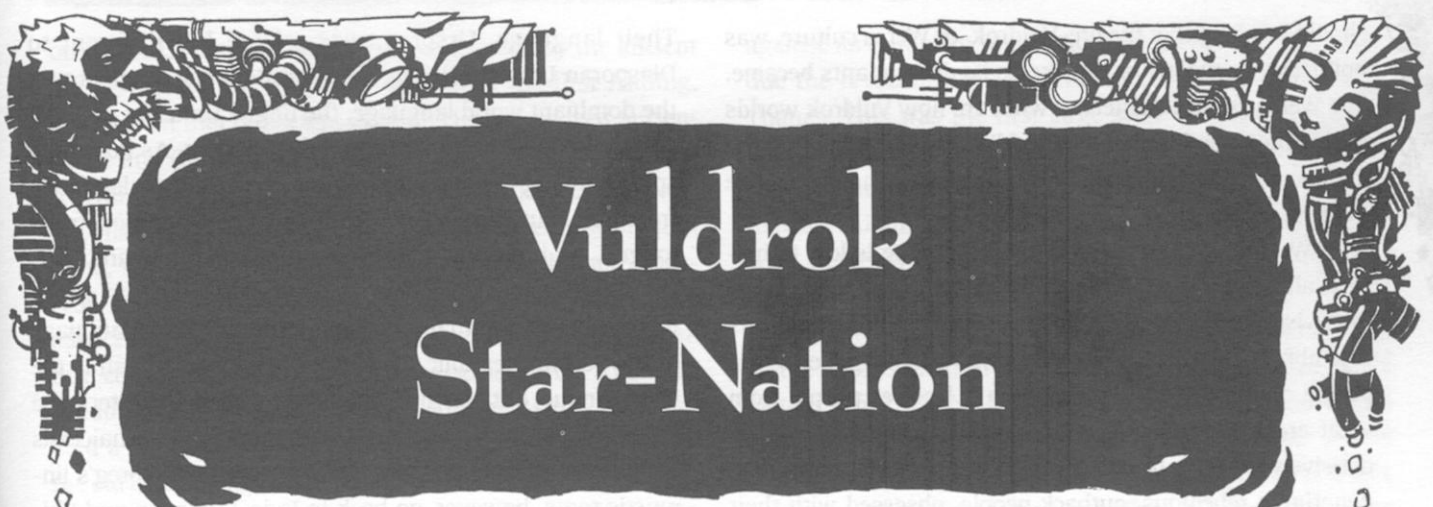
Weapon: Bite (6d DMG)

Armor: 9d

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0







Vuldrok Star-Nation

*When fire-drakes fought, launched from all worlds
Above Wolf's Lament, where grim Minnur ruled,
Burning ships fell, into mist-haunted forests,
Brave warrior flesh became the feast of dark fiends.
Vafadir's Swords drank in deep blood,
The 12 thanes brought brave men, berserkers in battle,
Remnir One Eye it was, who won that great day,
Leading the Althing's armies, o'er Morgan's fallen,
Scant warriors escaped to mighty Mithkiar
With tales of woe, to the kings of all worlds.
Freemen rose seeking vengeance, the great Vuldrok
Nation*

*Born in fire and battle, sent ships against Mithkiar,
Bringing ruin and war, so the Wyrds willed it.
— "The Book of Thanes," Manjafnaer Edda*

The Vuldrok Star-Nation is composed of the fierce warrior peoples of Fingisvold, Frost, Hargard, Raven and Wolf's Lament, and Vuldrok conquerors have founded colonies on Gwynneth, Leminkainen and Antioch. The title of Star-Nation, however, is something of a misnomer, for the Vuldrok are hardly a united power, and the Vuldrok themselves are not one people. Their worlds are a fusion of many peoples and nations, loosely united by language and culture. Lacking centralized power, the Vuldrok war with each other as much as they raid the rich trade routes of the Known Worlds and Kurgan Caliphate. Their origins are known only dimly, through oral legends, the truth of which is lost in that time of darkness between the Fall of the Second Republic and the rise of the Kurgan Caliphate.

The records of settled peoples (Kurgan reports and the *Annals of Antioch*) gave differing accounts of their origins and customs, often with an emphasis on their terrible raids. Ibn Mokum's account is the most famous of these, recorded for the Kurgan Caliph in 4623. He was sent to the court of Ulfmaer the Unlucky on Frost to negotiate the release of noble hostages, but became a hostage himself, living six

years with the Vuldrok. His work brought to light many of their customs and histories. The ultimate authority on Vuldrok history, however, came from one of their own, the bard Skeifbrinner Stormsong.

Around 4600, Skeifbrinner Stormsong recorded the Vuldrok legends on Hargard in the *Manjafnaer Edda*, a work completed as wergild (ransom pay) for the poet's life when he was captured in battle by Svanhild Bloodsword, the thane of Tromsvold, a nation on Hargard. Skeifbrinner won his life with his work. Unfortunately, Svanhild's daughter, Asvoria Moonvision, bore his child out of wedlock, and the bard was slain by Svanhild's Bear-Hounds, or else betrayed by fellow outlaws, depending on which legend is true. His *Manjafnaer Edda*, however, became famous; the book contains the Vuldrok's customs, lore, religion and history.

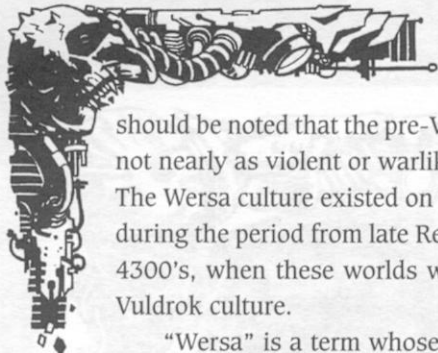
Emperor Alexius' Questing Knights recently procured a copy of the book and brought it to Byzantium Secundus. Its arrival produced curiosity in academic circles, and the Emperor formed a committee of historians and philologists to study the work. So far, however, little commentary has been released for public consumption.

Using a combination of Second Republic reports (found in the libraries of Shaprut and elsewhere), rare Caliphate intelligence records and the *Annals of Antioch*, a brief outline of Vuldrok history comes to light...

Drop-Out Cultures

Vuldrok memories, recorded in sagas and epics, go back to the waning days of the Second Republic. Already the planets of Frost, Wolf's Lament, Fingisvold and Raven were unraveling their allegiances to the overextended Second Republic. Vuldrok legends extend the present backwards; in their mythologies, mighty thanes vied with the Second Republic's armed forces. While these legends contain a vital truth about Vuldrok origins — rebellion — they are highly colored by current culture. Vuldrok ancestors rebelled, but it





should be noted that the pre-Vuldrok, or Wersa culture, was not nearly as violent or warlike as its descendants became. The Wersa culture existed on what are now Vuldrok worlds during the period from late Republican times to roughly the 4300's, when these worlds were united by the successive Vuldrok culture.

"Wersa" is a term whose exact meaning is lost to history, although linguistically it may have had connotations to "twisting" or "turning" in Second Republic Urthish. Its resemblance to "versus" implies it was a term applied to the people of the Rogue Worlds. Certain frontier people from what are now known as Vuldrok worlds were referred to derisively as Wersa by citizens of the core Republican worlds, denoting a rebellious, outback people, obsessed with their own feuds and hostile to the cosmopolitan worlds. Indeed, in one Second Republic novel, the sophisticated and urbane Rox Vi'Domicol despairs when his pleasure ship becomes stranded on Frost. Surely there could be no greater hell, the author implies, than for a cultivated, stylish society man to be stuck on backwater Frost, far from the centers of the cosmopolitan elite.

The worlds of Wolf's Lament, Fingisvold, Raven and Frost were settled by Diasporan pioneers escaping the overly-centralized, bureaucratic rule of the core worlds. On these new planets, independent free zones offered shelter to various disenfranchised groups: persecuted minorities, religious fringe groups and experimental colonists. From pirate republics governed by Articles of Confederation to Native American new lands, these worlds were united by a love of freedom from centralized authority. The many groups making up this melting pot of marginalized cultures included socialist utopians, counterculture drop-outs, small religious sects, escaped convicts, young pacifists (the "Hoftsla"), adventurers, libertarian communes, bold hunters, solitary farmers, Zuranists, Gjartins, retired military officers, and a smattering of every race and creed of humanity imaginable. Some corporations, seeking quick profits outside centralized jurisdiction, also came, forming corporate city-states with light or nonexistent tax bases.

Criminals and mercenary groups found homes on Frost, while pagan settlers, Old World Christians, freezone advocates and Native American descendants settled Raven and Wolf's Lament. Bands of libertarians, rural communists, poet utopians and hardened adventurers, isolated scientific communities, and pioneers settled Fingisvold. Hargard was settled from Shaprut, where the Ramakrishna dynasty founded a Neo-Hindu kingdom under the sisters Dalia and Siry, which has since retreated to the continent of Vijayanagar before the conquering Vuldrok, providing an oasis of cultivated civilization in the Vuldrok worlds.

The gradual blending of religious and linguistic ties created a common bond among the disparate bands of peoples.

Their language, Urspreg, was related but different to Diasporan Urthish. During the First Republic, English was the dominant world language, the lingua franca of international discourse in business and the sciences. As humanity spread among the stars in disparate groups, their language fractured, but English was still the most common trade tongue. As it evolved in the jargon of star pilots and merchants, it adopted new vocabulary but retained its grammatical base, eventually becoming the universal language of the Second Republic. The later Dark Ages Urthish is the same tongue, but heavily influenced by its main writers, the priests of the Universal Church, with intentional archaisms adopted in often haphazard style by scribes. Urspreg's linguistic roots, however, go back to Indo-European and Chinese languages.

A Reluctant Republic

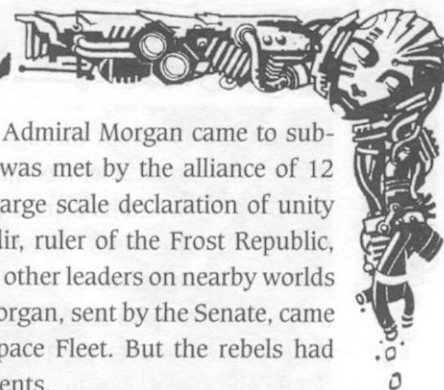
During the Second Republic, the independence of these worlds, coupled with local customs and laws, caused resistance to off-world centralization, but membership in the growing Republic seemed too valuable to pass up. Nonetheless, these worlds' representatives on Byzantium Secundus argued for less government and more personnel freedoms in an era of increasing government control. Libertarian in their views, these worlds were viewed as remote, "fringe" planets by the Second Republic authorities, since their populations and resources — and hence, tax bases — were small.

Since local laws resisted outside taxation and social interference, these worlds quietly slipped off the radar of the policy makers until the Social Redistribution Laws of 3920 caused great regional unrest. (Ironically, some of the colonies were socialist utopians, who practiced their beliefs on a small scale.) The Social Redistribution Laws were the beginnings of the welfare state that eventually collapsed, and were the first chinks in the Second Republic's armor. Even before this, the frontier worlds saw increased interstellar piracy, as smuggling rings and pirates used these worlds as bases for raids on core world space lanes. The jump routes were threatened while the Second Republic teetered, unable to effectively muster police forces in the face of increasing unrest and labor strikes on the core worlds.

The Senate placed increasing pressure on these worlds to provide taxes even in the face of little return, for most of the taxes from frontier worlds were diverted to the noble houses, in charge of quelling problems closer to home. Little of this money trickled back, and with the collapse of the welfare system, medical and social aid to these worlds nearly ceased. In the face of such troubles, the frontier worlds reinvigorated their ancestors' resolve to find their own solutions.

Well-known in this period was Gudmund the Great (3880-3941), a minor pirate leader of the Skord Republic





on Wolf's Lament. Gudmund was fascinated by the ancient Viking culture on old Urth, and created the first Althing, modeled on that of ancient Iceland. He also revived ancient Norse and Old English terms to describe what he saw as a revival of an ancient freebooting and freedom-loving society. His attempts to reshape the culture, unlike those of Bjorn Egon, founder of the Kurgan worlds, met with limited success, but a number of his revived linguistic terms were adopted by frontier society. Economic conditions, more than any conscious attempt to recreate society in a romantic, pseudo-historical manner (as was done by Bjorn Egon), created a situation favorable to piracy and raiding similar to the old Urth Viking culture. Gudmund's example helped unite a rebellious society against the centralized Second Republic. Gudmund's goal was not to play at being Urth Vikings, as children would, but to create a philosophical-linguistic bond between the Wersa worlds, defining them against outside threats.

Similar experiments in creating drop-out cultures through language took place even among the core worlds, such as among the United Wildworlders and their reclamation of the fictional Xoglazi tongue, which would eventually become the root language of the Symbiots.

United by Gudmund's revival or not, the frontier worlds bickered with one another, for it was still easier to foist blame and aggression on a nearby neighbor than a faceless bureaucrat living over five jumps away. Some frontiersmen took to raiding to escape the constant warfare between the different freezones (which eventually became the territorial bases of the first thanes), while others, the disinherited second sons and daughters of noble houses, needed to carve out new territories to rule. Lack of resources on most of these worlds made pirating attractive and almost necessary for survival purposes, goaded on by Gudmund's example.

A reign of anarchy descended on the frontier. Horrifying to core worlds citizens, this lawlessness was nonetheless welcomed by most frontiersfolk, who equating it with freedom. But if anything could unite these peoples' aggressions against a common foe again, it was the Second Republic, come to restore order and accountability to worlds that had long since willingly given themselves over to anarchy.

Revolt

*Long heroes fought for hearth and home
Against the Ondvolk, the Althing host held
Republikaner warriors wrought wrath and ruin
But the spears of the thanes stayed the grim onslaught.*
— "Book of Thanes," *Manjafnaer Edda*

The Republican Senate attempted a show of force in the region, to enforce the Social Redistribution Laws as well as to create an example for any worlds attempting to rebel

against its authority. When Admiral Morgan came to subdue the revolt of 3997, he was met by the alliance of 12 Thanes. This was the first large scale declaration of unity for the frontier, when Vafadir, ruler of the Frost Republic, called for an alliance with 11 other leaders on nearby worlds to resist Admiral Morgan. Morgan, sent by the Senate, came with elements of the 7th Space Fleet. But the rebels had advance word of his movements.

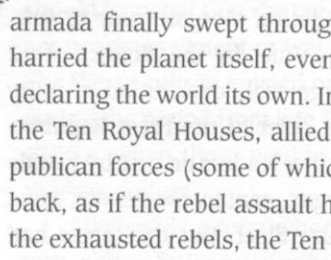
Minnur the Grim called the first interplanetary Althing of the thanes on Wolf's Lament. Chief Tokala of the Lakol Nation sung the great pledge of brotherhood, and the thanes swore strong oaths against their common foe. The thanes then gathered their united fleet and ground forces at Wolf's Lament, waiting for Morgan to strike. (Whether the names of any persons from this time are real or fictional, created by the later Vuldrok, is unclear; the scholarship necessary to determine the truth is now lost.)

Admiral Morgan, commanding human and Ukari Republican troops, entered the system unopposed. Assault landers delivered hardened soldiers onto Wolf's Lament, igniting a fierce battle with the thanes' forces. Then, the thanes' space fleet appeared from its hiding position behind the moons of Hamund's End and engaged Morgan's ships.

A pitched battle ensued on the planet and in space above. Through a dark day and night, the outcome was uncertain. When the sun rose over Wolf's Lament's capitol, the thanes lead a desperate charge against the Republican lines at Trolforbund, and broke through. With miraculously timing, Remnir One Eye, the greatthane of Raven, arrived with a fresh space fleet, wrecking the Republican starships and winning the day. The Republican troops were scattered on the planet below, but the space remnant made a desperate escape through the jumpgate.

From the Republican attack fleet of 34 ships, only 10 damaged ships returned to Byzantium Secundus. The Wersa worlds were now the first of the infamous Rogue Worlds. They struck retaliatory raids in many systems in the following months, but these were just feints meant to hide the greater purpose — a massive fleet, lead by Remnir One Eye and now joined by a smattering of other frontier worlds, gathered to fight its way to Byzantium Secundus (Mithkiar in the later Vuldrok tongue). Traveling a route they knew would avoid the retribution fleet heading for their worlds, they sacrificed their own families' safety, for they were unable to leave a strong defense behind. However, Byzantium Secundus was weak, having committed too many ships to retaking the frontier. How Remnir gained the intelligence allowing him to avoid this fleet is unknown, but rumours of noble house involvement abound.

Nonetheless, Remnir's fierce armada fought sorties every step of the way as it worked closer to the capital world, but the weakened Republic could not halt its advance. The



armada finally swept through Byzantium's jumpgate and harried the planet itself, eventually seizing the capitol and declaring the world its own. Into this chaotic madness came the Ten Royal Houses, allied with the remnant of the Republican forces (some of which had purposefully been kept back, as if the rebel assault had been expected). Attacking the exhausted rebels, the Ten claimed the world and the Republic for their own, bringing to an end humanity's greatest democracy. The Second Republic ended in flame and slaughter, and over her ashes the revived Ten Noble Houses stood, greedy for worlds and power.

The Sundering

Fearing renewed conquest by the noble houses, world after world sealed itself off from the space routes. The nobles were proving greedy in acquiring new territory, and were far less accommodating of local beliefs than the vanished Republic. The closing of the Hargard, Twilight, Collier's Landing and Hira jumpgates shut out many worlds, isolating them from the Known Worlds and the center of Human Space for nearly 500 years.

The Republican fleet sent to retake these worlds was trapped, unable to return home. Meeting little resistance (Remnir's armada had already slipped past them), their commanders tried for a time to restore Republican order to the regions. However, the rising tide of piracy and lawlessness eventually overcame the scattered fleet, and many captains broke away to become warlords or pirates themselves. Their ships are still found — albeit battered and suffering jury-rigged repairs — among Vuldrok raiding fleets to this day.

Legends still tell, however, of the noble Captain Aames, who led the remaining core of the fleet through a jumpgate to a now-unknown world, disappearing from history. Many swear that he was delivered to Dogen, the mythical world ruled by Saint Lextius.

For a time the Wersa worlds maintained a semblance of peace, before their technology base declined. Wersa culture changed in the post-Republic era; the scarcity of goods on many worlds reinforced the historical tendency towards raiding. Soon, neighboring worlds were invaded by the Wersa, although it is hard to distinguish the Wersa in the early New Dark Ages from numerous other barbaric raiders who also broke free from the Republic and the Ten.

The central language of the Second Republic changed on each world as dialects, separated from a central interstellar society, grew farther apart. Urspreg, the original language of the early Diasporan pioneers of the region, was revived, as were many other tongues, each intended to culturally identify a particular culture, nation or colony. Vuldrok culture replaced the fractured Wersa culture with a unifying language and the acceptance of the Erdgheist pantheon (originating on Frost).

This came about as the core Wersa worlds formed a shaky alliance against other barbaric worlds, of which only the name of the Rweng survives (pronounced = reng, with ringing, nasal emphasis at the end). Whether the Rweng were a confederacy of peoples and planets from further space or a single barbaric nation is now unknown, although they were believed to come from the planets Galahaut and Pergamum (both now lost). Their raids into Wersa space (4200-4320) unified the Wersa. With the breakdown of the last vestiges of Republican civilization — including a broad foundation in science and a social consensus of opinion — a true warlike society emerged on Frost, Fingisvold, Raven and Wolf's Lament, valuing battle as the apex of human activity. After the Rweng were driven with slaughter from the four worlds, the Wersa took to the ways of war, plundering and conquering, often with captured Rweng ships.

The Rweng brought with them a resurgence of Sathra worship, a phenomenon which was already beginning again among the Rogue Worlds. Without the laws of the Second Republic to stop them, many pilots dismantled their Sathra dampers and once again sought the ecstasy of jumpravel.

The final victory over the Rweng, at Lamorak (4320), culminated with the closing of jumpgates to the Rweng worlds, and saw the reemergence of the Drenjar Nation, which had been eclipsed by the Zetol in power in the early 43rd century. The Drenjar Nation was a shaky alliance of city-states, thane territories, republics and petty, self-proclaimed nobles who were descended from, or assimilated into, the earlier Drenjar Brotherhood, a political alliance of smugglers, merchant conglomerates and hunting clans. The Rweng assaults from 4370 to 4320 decimated Zetol strength; the Drenjar took up the fight and were largely responsible for the final victories. Thus, Drenjar ideas spread with their rising power, forming the foundations for the Vuldrok Star-Nation.

With their rising power, the Drenjar spread their hate of the Rweng's dark ways, which included newly-awakened superstitions against Sathraism. The Drenjar believed that Sathra was a malign influence, and the Lakol (and later, the Skey) agreed. Any ship they encountered without a damper suffered persecution, and Maghtaw technicians found good employ in Drenjar service re-installing such dampers — and wielding them shut so they could not be dismantled again.

Large-scale raiding and conquests into Kurgan space further enforced a wide-spread warrior society, honoring successful raiders and conquerors. It was the Drenjar Nation, the most conversant with interstellar travel, that provided much of the unifying language, a mishmash of Urthish, Old Norse and Urspreg, but cultural and religious ideas emerged from the other nations as well.

The Vuldrok worlds raided each other as well as other outworlds (many of which shut their gates to keep the





Vuldrok out), but in the 4400's they began consciously pushing outward, seizing new areas for colonization. In the early 4500's, they opened the gates leading to the Known Worlds. With the sacking of the St. Hombor Monastery on Leminkainen, the Vuldrok made their first impression on the Known Worlds.

Invasions

The Church was destroyed, and all the brothers slain, except Brother Reginold, who hid in the reeds nigh to the vineyards. Such a slaughter in our holiest monastery on this world is inconceivable. In six months, the heathens returned and pillaged Dyrak, taking a great number of slaves. The Dextrite and Hawkwood forces, in battle with each other, arrived too late for the fortunes of the burned city, by then stripped bare of wealth.

— *The Chronicles of Leminkainen* (4538)

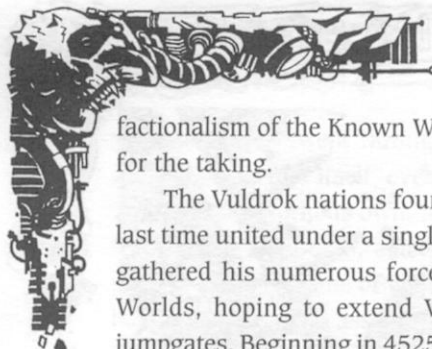
It is a strange twist of history that the Vuldrok were becoming more unified while the Known Worlds were fracturing. Weidor the Law Giver renewed the Great Althing on Frost, where the Vuldrok nations decided policy. Under the thanes of Wolf's Lament, a strong centralized military machine arose, beginning with Gunnar the Grim and culminating in King Froljir the Ill-Fated. Gunnar began by tying other thanes to him through oath and marriage, and putting taxation in place of the wartime freeman's levy. His great-grand-

son, Froljir the Ill-Fated (4501-4548), nearly united the Vuldrok into a single empire.

Gunnar is attributed with popularizing the phrase Vuldrok, a term he applied to his starfaring raiders, meaning "Dragon Wolves." Under Gunnar the Grim, Vuldrok incursions into Kurgan space continued, but now under a more centralized command. These trade routes had been plundered earlier, but now the Vuldrok arrived in force. By the beginning of the 45th century they posed a regular threat to starship caravans in Kurgan space, and by 4450 the Vuldrok footholds were used to stage larger raids on the main planets of the region. The local kingdoms were too diverse to unite a worldwide defense, and the Vuldrok easily seized prime lands and major cities, including the capital dome on Irem.

Ultimately, the Vuldrok invasions produced the counterweight of Juhangiz ("Gudmunder Grimbeard" in Vuldrok lore), the first Caliph, who spent his lifetime uniting the Kurgan peoples and driving the Vuldrok from their worlds. The Vuldrok said that he feasted on the hearts of his enemies and renewed his strength by sacrifices to the Night Peoples who rule the dark spaces between the stars. Uniting many nations, Juhangiz was victorious, succeeding in driving the Vuldrok out. But this did not halt the Vuldrok drive for conquest; like a river, if dammed up in one place, it sought an outlet elsewhere, carving a new path. The weakness and





factionalism of the Known Worlds beckoned as a rich jewel for the taking.

The Vuldrok nations found themselves for the first and last time united under a single monarch, King Froljir. Froljir gathered his numerous forces and swept into the Known Worlds, hoping to extend Vuldrok power to the utmost jumpgates. Beginning in 4525 with attacks on Leminkainen, and minor raids on Vera Cruz from Collier's Landing, King Froljir nearly succeeded in his dream of carving a Vuldrok empire out of the Known Worlds. Hawkwood and Hazat scouting ships returned with reports of a huge barbarian fleet which "darkened the stars, spreading wrath and ruin to all worlds," according to Archbishop Pietro of Aragon.

Simultaneously, Froljir's daughter, Freya Firestorm, renewed the attack on the Kurgan worlds and nearby independants. Freya was the most adept of Froljir's children. Her military genius drove the Vuldrok ships through the jumpgate of Arimaspsia to wreak ruin on the Caliphate worlds, but hers was merely a holding action to offset any Caliphate advantage while the main Vuldrok fleets attacked the Known Worlds. So great was the power and fear that spread before her that garrisons surrendered without a shot and worlds capitulated with little struggle. Freya herself slew the first man of consequence to rally against her, General Uduu. Enriched by the technology falling into her hands, she pushed onward. Untold riches, slaves and weapons made their way back to the Vuldrok worlds, and for a brief time it looked as if the newly formed Caliphate would fall before her.

Unfortunately, the very terror and military power the Vuldrok brought with them eventually produced the opposite effect. The Caliphate, under the strong military rule of Caliph Khabir, drove them out. Great slaughter and ruin befell the civilized worlds, and Freya perished, plunging her damaged warship into Admiral Attala's command ship. Her fiery death inspired numerous sagas and poems, and Freya lives on in Vuldrok religion as the Guardian of the Fheykrigs.

King Froljir's invasion of the Known Worlds produced the same unifying effect on his foes. Only the genius of Vladimir Alecto prevented Froljir's forces from seizing the great empire the Vuldrok king sought. Vladimir's banner briefly unified the factious Known Worlds, and the Vuldrok were pushed back with heavy fighting. Froljir was slain on Gwynneth by Vladimir's forces in 4548, in the Battle of Firefrost, and the dream of a united Vuldrok nation died with him.

His loyal thanes seized his worlds, carving out his kingdom into numerous chiefdoms, and no successor has since arisen to attempt an empire. Froljir's sons, Ufi and Hafdan, perished attempting to wrest Frost from the warlord Ingolf, and his line ended with them. The Great Althing fell to ruin, and the Vuldrok again warred on each other as well as other

worlds, falling back into their squabbles and oath-breaking. So great had been their onslaught into the Known Worlds and Caliphate space, however, that their enemies had not the strength for massive retaliation.

The jumproutes between these separate cultures would open and shut with maddening irregularity in the coming centuries, making it impossible to predict the comings and goings of Vuldrok, Kurgan or Known Worlder.

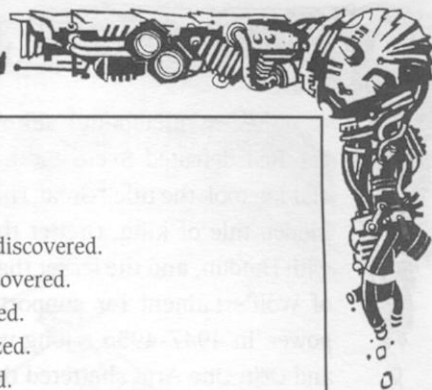
Freedom in Disunity

A time of soul-searching racked Vuldrok culture, and Voki, Chief Priest of Lyghvorth, called an assembly of nations to reinterpret the Vuldrok laws in 4563. It was felt that Froljir had overstepped the bounds of their fathers by declaring himself king. Although the Synnarmarks (territories of nations) were stronger and larger after Froljir's reign than before, the assembly feared such power in any one man — especially a potential rival. The Laws of Voki were drawn up, stressing the freedom and liberty of all Vuldrok, placing particular emphasis on the individual's self-sovereignty over any state or single leader. The laws also lessened the horrors of slavery (a slave's children were now freemen), because it was believed that a society which rested on slave labor would eventually fall from freedom and suffer tyranny. (This mitigated but did not ultimately halt the Vuldrok slave trade.) Shamans, wise-men, warriors, farmers and merchants debated the laws for two years before they reached their final form and were voted on by all the nations.

One great shaman, Wichast Wanbli, "Far Eagle" of the Lakol Nation, called down the gods for debate in a great ceremony, so that the Vuldrok peoples would know that the laws were correct in all things. The shamans from the Drenjar Nation (the largest Vuldrok nation) and the Zetol Nation aided Wichast in the Great Ritual, and helped in spreading the message. Wichast went to Voki with amendments respecting the laws of women and the animal and plant peoples, and these were accepted.

"If we remember we are brothers and sisters, then the laws of the Vuldrok will stand forever," Far Eagle prophesied. "But if we forget, then greater forces will use our squabbles to divide and conquer us, scattering our dreams across the stars. When another Great Jarl unites the *Hawkwyrdedda*, then the time will come to remember our ties or suffer the bitter taste of death and defeat." (Hawkwyrdedda = Known Worlders, foreigners from beyond Hargard. The more modern term is *Rimolk* = outsiders beyond the Vuldrok rim.)

The Laws of Voki codified Vuldrok culture just as it made political centralization and unification of the various nations more difficult. What they gained in liberty from the laws, they lost in collective strength. This dichotomy of Vuldrok culture lead to a weakness against unified enemies, such as



the Caliphate, and now threatens it as Emperor Alexius Hawkwood's empire moves ever closer. These laws, however, rarely prevented ambitious thanes or warlords from attempting coherence, but, coupled with local wars and disputes, they hindered the drive for powerful centralization until modern times.

Travel between the Known Worlds was rare now, for only certain warlords possessed jumpkeys through Hargard, whose gate would occasionally be shut by the Hawkwood only to open again in a matter of months or years, causing the Vuldrok to coin the phrase: "Hargard gate is easier to open than a Decados' legs."

The Caliphate's intelligence operatives realized that the Vuldrok unity had shattered, and the Caliphs began a long-term destabilization plan whereby they would ally with certain Vuldrok warlords against others, and often hired Vuldrok armies to defend the frontier from other raiders. The Vuldrok began peaceful trading with the Caliphate, and many warriors became mercenaries in the Caliph's forces. With the riches that came from Caliphate worlds, the eyes of the Vuldrok turned in that direction. They called the Caliphal domain Irzatamland, a place of plenty.

Occasional alliances between powerful thanes produced a semblance of Vuldrok unity, and when Ulwulf the Red of Frost allied with Maka Seeks the Sky of Raven (4787), their combined fleet tore far into Kurgan space, until the Caliph himself ordered a huge payment of tribute to spare Irem. However, when a Caliphate fleet and forces loyal to the great warrior Sintelha Moon Daughter clashed near Arimaspa, an agent whose allegiance still remains unknown closed the jumpgate, and Arimaspa was lost (4791). Its routes leading to Frost and Antioch were shut, drastically cutting the Vuldrok's easy access to these worlds and bringing to an end the large-scale Vuldrok-Caliphate conflicts, with the noted exception of Kurgan Ilkhan Zeenat Amina's amazingly successful raids against the Vuldrok in the early 49th century.

Invaded

The Vuldrok planets soon suffered raids from enemies of their own, first from the mysterious Three Moon Peoples — the Skey — who came from beyond Fingisvold, and later by the Symbiots, who expanded outward from Chernobog. The Skey maintain that they were the First People to leave Urth, and were even before then from the oldest people on the homeworld. In the face of the Symbiot threat, an alliance was made with the Skey chieftains, who joined the Vuldrok Star-Nation and were granted lands they had already largely conquered on Wolf's Lament and Raven.

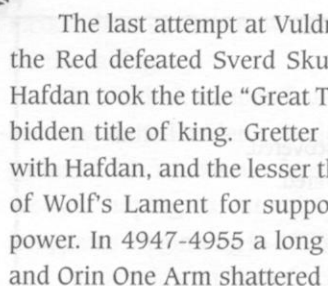
When the shapeshifting Symbiots attacked the Vuldrok (late 4800's), a swift alliance united the warring thanes, and they halted the threat at Abydos (off Hargard and Eridol).

Timeline

Date	Event
2609	Wolf's Lament discovered.
2853	Fingisvold discovered.
2899	Raven discovered.
late 2800s	Hargard colonized.
2900-3100?	Frost discovered.
3920	Gudmund the Great begins revival of Old Urth nordic culture.
3997	Alliance of 12 Thanes defeats Admiral Morgan's 7th Fleet.
4000	Byzantium Secundus falls to the Rogue Worlds; retaken by the Ten.
4200-4320	The Rweng raid Wersa worlds; eventually turned back by the Drenjar.
4400	Vuldrok culture emerges from more disparate Wersa. Raids and colonization of Kurgan worlds results in Juhangiz's revolt.
4525	King Froljir begins assaults on the Known Worlds with an attack on Leminkainen. Freya Firestorm renews attacks on Kurgan worlds.
4548	Froljir killed in Gwynneth space by Vladimir's forces.
4565	Voki's Laws adopted to prevent rise of future tyrants.
ca. 4600	<i>Manjafnaer Edda</i> written.
late 4700s	Raids into Kurgan space, impeded by loss of Arimpasia's jumpgate (4791).
late 4800s	Symbiots take Abydos, converting Vuldrok colonists; the Skey admitted into the Star-Nation after proving their mettle against Symbiots.
Present	Greolf the Grim rises to interstellar power.

Ironically, the Symbiot incursions gave the Vuldrok a new semblance of unity, as battling the Symbiots became a way of testing one's courage, always important in Vuldrok culture. *Hamund's Saga* tells the tale of Hamund Bonebreaker and his Fifteen, who died heroic deaths defending Mithgar's Hall from the *Weogsynu* (Weed-Demon-People), a saga sung across Vuldrok space. That saga also tells of a vitki (runecaster) who reversed the symbiosis disease in converted Vuldrok warriors, restoring them to their humanity.

The Symbiots eventually ceased their attacks to consolidate their gains on Abydos, and occasional uneasy incursions against each other now mark Symbiot-Vuldrok relations. The Vuldrok view the Symbiots as unnatural due to their forced merging with nature, something which Vuldrok shamans claim takes years of magical training. The Symbiots, by hastening the process, harm both nature and themselves; such a swift and bitter union creates an angry, unbalanced people, despite all the Symbiot boasting of their pure, natural state.



The last attempt at Vuldrok unity began when Hafdan the Red defeated Sverd Skunnerson for control of Frost. Hafdan took the title "Great Thane," one step below the forbidden title of king. Gretter the Great of Fingisvold allied with Hafdan, and the lesser thanes looked to Orin One Arm of Wolf's Lament for support against Hafdan's growing power. In 4947-4955 a long war between Hafdan the Red and Orin One Arm shattered the former's drive for Vuldrok unity, leaving the Vuldrok Star-Nation weakened just as the Known Worlds suffered its own war of attrition. Hafdan the Red died of wounds suffered at the Battle of Seven Nations, but his lieutenant Sverd made peace with Orin One Arm, who died two years after his victory.

A lawless time descended on Vuldrok space, as no less than thirty-eight thanes vied with each other for power (4955-4988). Luckily for the Vuldrok, the Emperor Wars distracted the Known Worlds, and a resurgent Vuldrok Star-Nation began harrying the Hawkwood worlds, although with less success than in the 4500's. Advances in Hawkwood tactics and technology put the Vuldrok on the defensive by 4991, and the weakness of their position was noted by Emperor Alexius' military advisors.

The Imperial-Hawkwood victory over Redmark the Bald at Leminkainen (4992) exposed the weakness the independent thane fleets suffered when confronted with a unified space command, and Alexius vowed to press the advantage once he seized the Imperial title. Now that the title is his, he has begun to probe Vuldrok space, first with his Questing Knights, and then by opening up the new jumproutes to Known Worlds adventurers.

On Frost, recent years have seen the consolidation of power among the Hajmark jarls, who now pose the strongest claim to Vuldrok unification. The recent civil war between the half brothers Raynor Wrathwind and Greolf the Grim ended with Greolf's victory at Hostogrod, where his half-brother was hacked to pieces retreating into the moors by a score of Greolf's enraged berserkers.

Greolf the Grim originally chose the life of a shaman, but reentered civil life to press the claim of Raynor to the lands of their father. Greolf's visage unnerves people, and his strange prophetic statements make even his closest advisors uneasy. His words proclaim that all the Vuldrok nations must unite at the Althing on Raven, or perish amid common storms. Many brave men and thanes have flocked to Greolf's banner, and even rival warlords and thanes fear the one-eyed Seer of Svarshild. Greolf listens to reports of Imperial spies and movements, and the Caliphate battles with the Hazat, and ponders what road is best for the Vuldrok Star-Nation. He has called for a gathering of priests to answer this question.

As Alexius' power encroaches, the Vuldrok are again faced with a powerful threat to their freedom.

Vuldrok Society

The Vuldrok (and earlier Wersa) power flourished when the centralized authority of the Second Republic fell, and the successor noble kingdoms were weakened by a falling technical base and their own power struggles. Raiding the Known Worlds, the Vuldrok retreated only when threatened with unified opposition. The first wave of their assaults only broke with Vladimir Alecto's victory on Gwynneth (4548); the lesser resurgence (4770 on) had to contend with a strengthened Regency, fortified Hawkwood space and eventually, the new Empire of Alexius. Wars between various thanes, the Caliphate and Symbiots weakened unified Vuldrok power considerably, but their fierce warrior culture and love of freedom made them hard to conquer. The Vuldrok also learned from their foes.

Naturally, the Vuldrok threat initially weakened the Known Worlds, as ambitious nobles, seeking to build their own power while claiming defense of the frontiers, broke from house authority to become, in effect, petty kings and warlords, mirroring the power structure of the thanes they were fighting. It was not unusual for a petty noble to ally with a raiding Vuldrok party, or the remote head of a Royal House to buy or enlist Vuldrok support to bring a rebellious family member down. In this manner, playing the nobles against each other, territory on Leminkainen was lost to the Vuldrok. The Hawkwood, however, gained in the long term, as the warrior descendants of the Vuldrok now often enter Hawkwood service to become fierce soldiers. Vuldrok culture was steeped in war long before they began their excursions into the Known Worlds.

There were two causes for this. The first was philosophical: the Vuldrok were descended from people suspicious of centralized authority and who worshiped freedom as their birthright. To be made a slave or serf was a dishonor greater than death. But beyond their common love of personnel freedom and suspicion of authority, these ancestral communities were not culturally unified. Descendants of social communes, Native American culturalists, pagan communities, pirate freezones, Second Republic drop-out underground cultures and religious communities vied with each other, often warring over resources and trading grounds or over cultural differences. Each community was well-armed, and every adult carried weapons as a necessity.

These bands of frontier world colonists warred with each other even during the Second Republic, and at times only Republican military intervention ended the conflicts between warring freezones. Service on these frontier worlds was not an envied assignment for most Second Republic armed forces personnel; the natives were suspicious of outside force, and would often ally against it. Freezone politics was a shifting, messy affair, with allies and enemies turning against one



another overnight. When the Rweng attacked the Wersa worlds, they accelerated a process that had its roots in the lawless Diaspora and whose seeds of dissent still sprouted even in Republican soil.

The other major cause for the creation of a warrior culture was a general lack of resources. During the early New Dark Ages, brutal wars were fought over dwindling agricultural lands on Wolf's Lament and Frost, hardening the people; the losers, bereft of their ancestral lands, often took to space pirating. The winners encouraged piracy, not only as a means of diverting discontent among landless young warriors but to enrich themselves, granting successful pirates returned lands and honor in exchange for a share of captured wealth. Frost first adopted this practice, but it soon spread.

Cultural piracy and the warrior's code of loyalty created a common bond which men aspired to. The pirates' raiding of decadent, overly-civilized worlds was seen as brave, and many sought to live the Code of the Star Brethren.

On some of these worlds, where conditions were grim and the native wildlife extremely dangerous, people went armed for protection against the harsh elements and animals; weapons training was a necessity from childhood on. On Hargard, which for a time held an alliance between the Ramakrishna and Hawkwood families, the Wersa colonists were held back by the two noble houses. When famine spread on Hargard, the Hawkwood supplied food to them, but when these shipments halted, famished warriors threw off all peace treaties and invaded Ramakrishna lands and Hawkwood space in search of food.

Generally, with no centralized government or advanced capitalism to produce alienation (with the possible exception of the Reggold cities), the clan became the center of authority and morality in Vuldrok society. Patriarchs and matriarchs provided proverb wisdom handed down from ancestors which helped keep the huge families intact. Bands of clan warriors, often brothers, sisters and cousins, also shaped the Vuldrok warrior culture; a clan member was more likely to remain loyal in the shifting territorial fights than a temporary ideological ally. Some Vuldrok nations were in effect large clans, with everyone knowing their relationship to everyone else, and some clans grew large enough to muster raiding fleets and disciplined warrior bands. Occasionally, several mighty clans would unite under a thane, but this was rarely understood as permanent. Vuldrok alliances always shifted; recent enemies might become allies to plunder the Known Worlds or attack another Vuldrok nation.

Daily Life

Literacy is common among the Vuldrok, surprisingly so. Letters are taught to all, and the average Vuldrok from Frost and Wolf's Lament is literate. In the harsh winters on Frost, some people compose family sagas, which go into the



depositories of the Althings. The common stereotype of unlettered barbarians is incorrect; the Vuldrok are simply a literate culture which enjoys war as the ultimate aesthetic.

—Jolan Migalax, trade representative from Antioch

Daily life is shaped by local conditions on the Vuldrok worlds. Generally, Vuldrok homes, encampments and cities are technically of a lower grade than those in the Known Worlds. Still, tech is in evidence. "God boxes" broadcasts sagas to remote homes, as well as local news and community warnings. But many of these radio devices are found in homes hewn from timber, where herdsmen and hunters plunge daily into dangerous wilderness areas. Aside from farming, fishing, hunting or various trades, the Vuldrok like to wager on contests. Horse races, beast fighting, prisoner fights, feats of strength and games of chance all bring large crowds. Musicians are popular at great feasts, with tales of local heroes enriching many an evening. Among the nomadic Lakol, a musician is always welcome.

The Vuldrok are a lively people and often generous to a fault. Among a nation or clan, however, criminal laws are often strict or brutally enforced. Thieves and rapists are usually hung, and there is little thievery within clan nations (the cities are another matter). Escaped outlaws often flee to cities and sign up with raiding parties, for if they remain in their home territories they are hunted like beasts. Interestingly, crimes of passion are usually put before the Althing, and are often shown mercy. Blood feuds and personal duels are allowed on a small scale, but usually the Lawgiver attempts to intervene if they get out of hand and threaten civic unrest.

The clan unit is the center of each nation; blood ties are important in establishing identity. Family patriarchs and matriarchs wield real power within the clans. Generally, the patriarch knows much proverb lore and has many contacts throughout the Vuldrok worlds, while the matriarch, who also possesses numerous contacts, can determine marriage dates, wills and land partitions.

Greater Vuldrok Nations

There are many Vuldrok nations; only the six greatest are detailed here. The Drenjar Nation, the most adept at star travel, spread its language to the other nations through trade, raiding and colonization of their territories. The Star-Nation as a whole shares a pantheon of gods, called by various names, although the Drenjar terms are the most common. Each planet and nation also has its own unique gods and spirits.

Drenjar Nation

The greatest and most populous Vuldrok nation, the Drenjar began as a brotherhood of pirates, freebooters and

hunters opposing the Second Republic from their freezones on Raven and Frost. They soon joined with numerous free territories on Wolf's Lament, producing the nucleus of the Vuldrok culture. Inspired by Gudmund the Great's Viking cultural revival, they often sported Viking insignia on their ships as a symbol of their alliance.

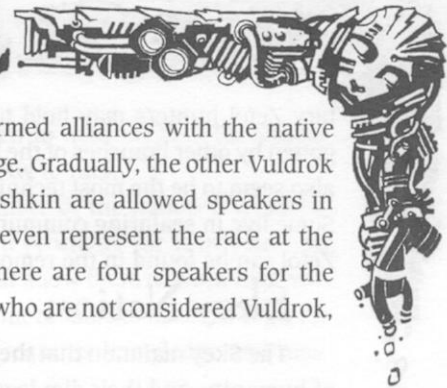
The Drenjar pirated their neighbors (many of whom where the ancestors of the presentday Lakol and Zetol nations), and could, when working with a unified will, produce large fleets. Raiders on Fingisvold voluntarily joined with them, so great was their reputation for success. It is believed that six out of the 12 thanes who rebelled against the Second Republic were Drenjar.

Their initial brotherhood took Gudmund's nordic romanticism as its model, reviving ancient terms from Old High German, Old Norse and Old English, but they took it more seriously as their enmity with the Second Republic grew. In the societal and technological collapse following the Fall, it became the one center they could hold on to, and the means by which the power- and plunder-hungry leaders maintained unity among the ranks, through stressing warrior codes and a heirarchy of the strong over the weak. Inspiration from the far past became a present reality. The shamans hearkened to the Old Urth Viking heritage with pride, although they in truth knew little about the actual history of those distant times. The ideals of racial supremacy equated with such a revival in the 20th century were completely alien to this new brotherhood, composed of a Diasporan mixture of ethnicities, representing all Urth cultures, since the freezone colonies comprised every known belief system. The Drenjar absorbed many freezone cultures into their fold, and were the forerunners of the present Vuldrok unity.

After independence from the Second Republic, the various Wersa freezones, communities and brotherhoods coalesced into minor nations and initiated conflicts with each other over resources or power. The Zetol Nation, under such leaders as Captain Mutalo, inflicted severe defeats onto the Drenjar, soon eclipsing its rivals. The Drenjar reprieve came in the form of the Rweng invasions, which shattered the emerging Zetol ascendancy, and the Drenjar emerged as victors over the Rweng, becoming the defining power in the region.

As the reigning interstellar power, the Drenjar command of trade routes and travel assured that their distinct culture and laws contributed the most to the later, unified Vuldrok society. The nation is ruled by many thanes in a number of city-states, rural townships and wilderness settlements. The warlords of Frost and many thanes from Wolf's Lament are Drenjar.

The Drenjar have a deep love for freedom, but also a notion that life is fated and controlled by forces hard to understand. The gods may certainly help one, but even they



are powerless against the doom that is writ upon all who are born. Since the Drenjar are the most literate nation, much of Vuldrok history has been written from their point of view. They take pride in weapon building, visual appearance and strength.

Lakol Nation

The Lakol peoples, originally descended from Native Americans who landed on Wolf's Lament and later Raven seeking escape from a culture that had little to do with that of their ancestors, have preserved many of their cultural ways, if not the complete ancestral bloodline. The Lakol, as with other Vuldrok cultures (and the Known Worlds, for that matter), have long intermingled with others, and there are few Vuldrok with a single ethnic heritage, save in the most remote regions. Nonetheless, the Lakol Nation holds two tongues, the common Vuldrok and the Oyate tongue, a linguistic descendent of ancient Cherokee, Sioux, Navajo, Mesoamerican and other Indian tribal languages, with some additional English/Spanish elements, all changed greatly over the vast time and distance from Old Urth.

The Lakol Nation ranges across the Sunkmanitu continent on Wolf's Lament, some traveling as nomadic hunters, others holding towns and cities (primarily the Asiwey). The northern Lakol are renowned warriors and shamans; the southern Lakol possess great herds, farms, and are more settled. Skirmishes with their northern brethren break out over occasional raids. Drenjar and Zetol incursions onto this continent were repelled, and the Lakol successfully spread to Raven. There are also smatterings of settlers on Frost and Fingisvold.

The Lakol Nation possesses numerous *Itancans* (chiefs), most of which are pledged to Shakopeh Six Powers, an ally of Wakan Mato, warlord of Wolf's Lament. The Lakol often reach consensus among themselves rather than vote on issues, which they view as derisive, but they nonetheless vote on matters in the Althings. Lakol technology is maintained by specialists and shamans, and many Lakol become interstellar raiders, feared even by other Vuldrok.

Their religion is a blend of Native American, Obun-Ukari, Wersa, ancient Asiatic/Oceanic and other beliefs, but meshes well with the pagan Vuldrok. The Lakol wise men, the Wichasha, insisted that the animal and plant nations be represented in the great Althing; they were supported in this endeavor by the Hoftsla, a pacifistic community now subsumed into many different Vuldrok Nations. Hence, a speaker for animals and plants (*Wamakaskan Oyate*) can address the concerns of wildlife before the Vuldrok nations.

On Wolf's Lament, the Lakol befriended the native marsupial Ishkin, the efficient hunter/trackers who can change their hides, chameleonlike, to hide or sneak up on prey (see Appendix: Ishkin). The Lakol were the first to recognize sen-

tience among them, and formed alliances with the native race, gaining much knowledge. Gradually, the other Vuldrok nations followed suit. The Ishkin are allowed speakers in the Althing; ceremonially, seven represent the race at the Great Althing at Raven. (There are four speakers for the Obun and two for the Ukari, who are not considered Vuldrok, but are called "cousins.")

Zetol Nation

The Zetol were a mixture of peoples who settled on Fingisvold, Frost and Wolf's Lament, formed from an intermingling of hunting and fishing communities, smuggling bases, African culturalists, Zuranists and communal farming societies. Their beliefs have origins in Caribbean, sub-Saharan western and central African, Chinese, Gjartin, Zuranist, Tibetan and Mayan cultures, with a dusting of old Muslim, Shinto and Universal Church folk beliefs. They hold that the universe is composed of a plethora of spirits, each a mask of the One God Imana or Angodcund. The Zetol were initially a defensive alliance against the raiding Drenjar Brotherhood, with whom they fought and competed. However, the two groups united against the Republican threat, and the Zetol leaders Azaka Fire Speaker and Simbi Wind Sister were among the 12 Thaners.

For a time, the Zetol were the most powerful alliance of the Wersa worlds, and their warriors eclipsed the Drenjar. Indeed, the first two relatively peaceful centuries after the Republic's fall was a testament to Zetol power, for they maintained an armed peace, holding the Wersa worlds in a semblance of unity. After crushing the Drenjar Revolt of 4192, it seemed as if the Zetol were destined to rule the Wersa worlds, but the raids of the Rweng siphoned their power, finally crippling them, before the Drenjar defeated the Rweng. Although the resurgent Drenjar conquered certain Zetol zones, the enmity between the two rival nations subsided as their peoples mixed and new alliances formed.

Of all the Vuldrok, the Zetol tend to be the most accepting of outsiders and their beliefs. They are also the most democratic, and every Zetol votes in the decision makings of the council or Althing. They place great importance on the role of their priests to prevent strife between clans. They are at once community-oriented and yet have the wildest independent streak, both due to their heritage as farmers and politically-oppressed peoples. Their nation is the most opposed to slavery; a Zetol can only hold a slave for seven years, after which time he is free and may enter the Zetol family.

Curiously, notions of fate also seem to be the strongest among them, and they will not fight if they feel the wind brings bad luck, or their ancestors warn them in dreams. Since the Zetol were originally an alliance of different groups, each settlement has its own local customs, and even soli-



tary Zetol hunters may hold to personnel spirits long forgotten by other branches of the larger nation. The Zetol clans also seem to be the most technically adept at improvisation. Some live in seafaring communities or in coastal areas, but Zetol can be found in the remotest regions as well.

Skey Nation

The Skey maintain that they hail from the oldest branch of humanity, and their dim legends recall a time when they battled against the Spawn of Su-Whukulthun for Urth long before the other humans arose from brute animal consciousness. Claiming to be descended from an ancient maritime people whose civilization gave rise to younger nations, the Skey are rumored to possess ancient knowledge long lost. Some think they are descended from Australian Aborigines, Polynesians and Maori; others believe they are a blend of many peoples, including Asiatics, Africans and Europeans.

They were unknown to the Second Republic, and many speculate that they represent one of the many forgotten Diasporas from earth, colonists whose jump routes were lost to the rest of Human Space well before even the rise of the Second Republic. Some, however, speculate that the Skey were removed from Urth by the Anunnaki long before humans attained jumpravel, and elements of their mythology support this idea. Others scoff at the concept, speculating instead that the Skey, like the Kurgans, were the result of psycho-cultural programming by some unknown Diasporan or Second Republic charismatic figure, although no evidence in their oral history exists for this.

A people apart, the Skey are swarthy and small in size, but both men and women are fierce in the art of war. Ruled by chieftains, the Skey came from a planet called Ufor that has since sealed its jumpgate. The Skey maintain that the Dark Gods (*Skeydungenga*) and their followers had conquered the world; the Skey would not submit to their blasphemies, and so left for new worlds. Migrating from Ufor sometime in the 48th century, they entered Vuldrok space and dislodged some clans from Raven in fierce fighting. They were eventually admitted into the Vuldrok Star-Nation in return for their aid against the Symbiot menace, although of all the Vuldrok they maintain a separate presence, rarely marrying outsiders.

Their tongue is unique, but their beliefs seem congenial with Vuldrok ones. Skey (plural = Skeyda) means dark in their language, but does not have connotations with the Skeydungenga (dark gods), but rather as the Skeada or Skeotenda, "Warriors against the Darkness." Young Skey warriors often tattoo images of their victories on their bodies, and women fight alongside men. They live in huge extended families; degrees of kinship are strong among them. A great chief must provide for his or her people, and thus chiefs are often poor, giving away their riches at huge ban-

quets they use to boast of their generosity.

Each family is from the one of the Fourteen Clans (see below). The shaman-priests of the Skey, dressed in the serpent robes of their god Zukinayan (Guardian of Knowledge), hold a honored place in the nation. Religion covers all aspects of Skey life, much of it emphasizing ceremonial actions and participation in group-consciousness.

Those Skey who are outlawed or hail from small families often leave to mingle with other Vuldrok nations, usually as members of a warlord's raiding party.

The 14 Clans of the Skey

Each clan has its own oral history and traditions. Some clans are closely allied (Chidtar and Gwerrim), while some have rivalries (Natali and Lymakah).

1. Quetan: Speakers to the dead. Sign: Spirits.
2. Coatze: Holders of the secret hope. Sign: The Dog-Star.
3. Natali: Warriors (second greatest clan). Sign: Eagle.
4. Altiro: The first clan. Sign: Star.
5. Sekwi: Matriarchy. Sign: Mother-Goddess.
6. Mreata: Warriors (small clan). Sign: Hawk.
7. Zaudun: Keepers of wisdom. Sign: Serpent.
8. Chidtar: Hunters. Sign: Bear.
9. Rudraya: Prophets. Sign: Circle of Eternity.
10. Aksha: Medicine clan. Sign: Tree of Life.
11. Tzusyn: Warriors against evil spirits. Sign: Pure White Dragon.
12. Lymakah: Largest clan. Sign: Three wolves (pup, mother, grandfather).
13. Gromd: Rulers of the Skey. Sign: Ancient land (continent).
14. Gwerrim: Spies and stealers of forbidden knowledge. Sign: Owl.

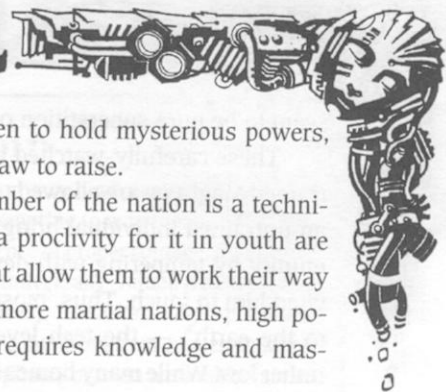
Maghtaw Nation

While scientists in the Wersa worlds after the Fall did not suffer the inquisitorial frenzy that wracked the Known Worlds, it was always a rare calling among frontiersmen. Once the initial geological surveys and terraforming on a newly-discovered world were complete, the scientists usually packed up and moved on to the next challenge. The colonists whose descendants make up the majority of Vuldrok never valued scientific lore very highly, instead being drawn to more physical or even spiritual pursuits.

At the time of the rebellion against the Second Republic, Mergen the Light Giver was a prominent scientist friendly to the rebels, and provided them with high tech, even going himself to battle with some followers. However, once the initial glory of freedom from the Republic faded, and technology became rare, scientific bases became prime targets for raiders seeking tech to plunder or scientists to take hostage, forcing them to maintain starships or other devices.

In defense, groups of centralized scientists on Fingisvold





formed an alliance with other bases, gathering weapons and fortifying their installations. These armed camps resisted the raiders well, and soon the other nations had to parley with them for their tech lore. These armed enclaves had learned well the lesson of not sharing with others, for their protected lore was the key to their survival in the new universe of anarchy and might.

The Maghtaw are largely descended from these Second Republic scientists and engineers from installations and stations throughout Wersa space; they are the least numerous nation, but valued for their tech-shamans. They have spread to every Vuldrok world, and hold territories in many cities, for technological lore is passed from parent to child in this nation. Most starship captains seek to have Maghtaw engineers aboard their ships.

The Maghtaw are more of a calling than a nation, a sort of scientific priesthood or guild, but at least two thanes on Fingisvold are Maghtaw. Their love of knowledge does not prevent them from raiding, and they often form raiding parties at the merest rumor of a Second Republican cache of marvels.

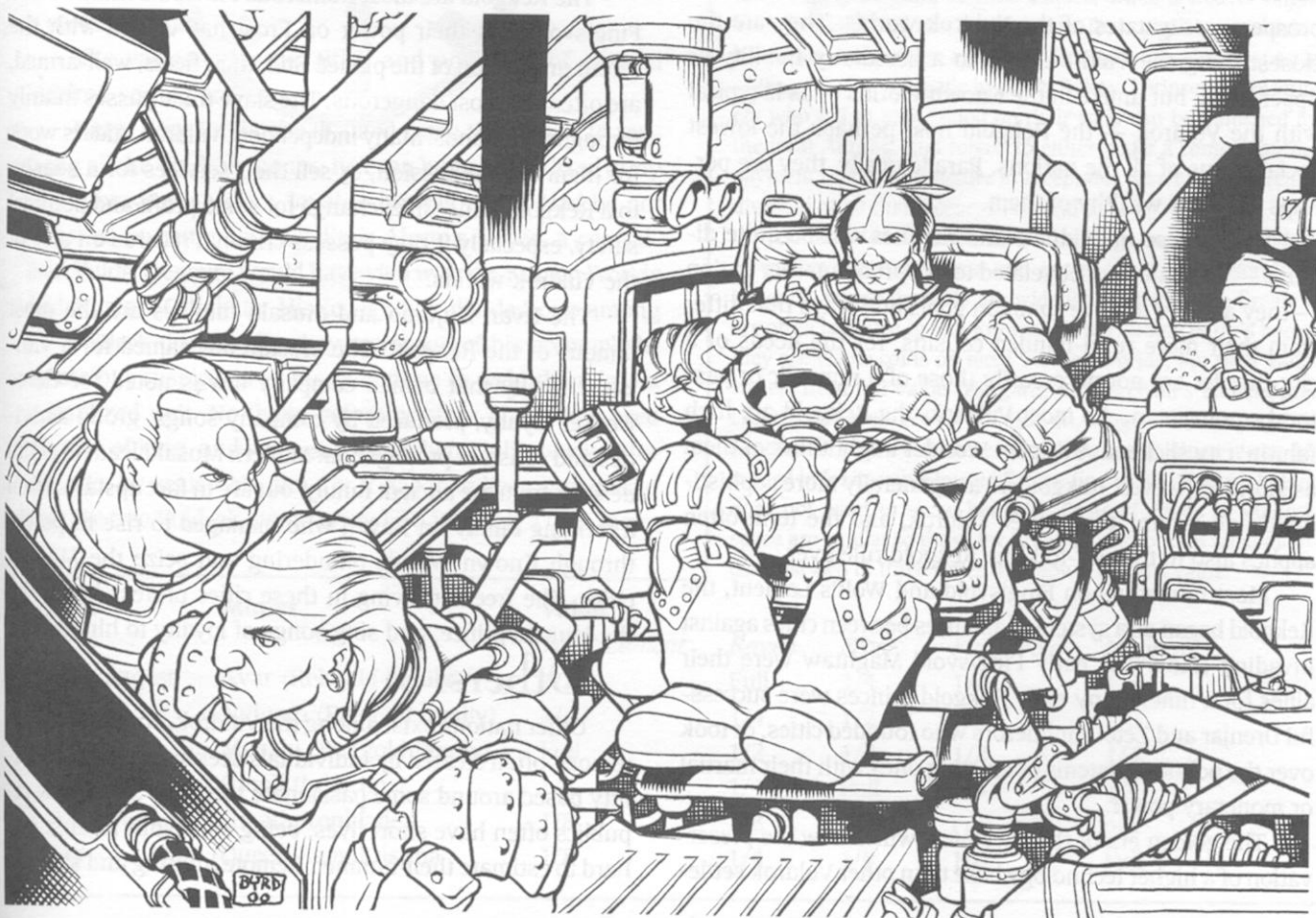
Their customs and ways revolve around their craft and profession, and the holding of valuable scientific lore. While they can be warriors, and like most Vuldrok do honor warrior culture, their power comes from their *ricu* skill — their knack with technical endeavors. Indeed, deformed children,

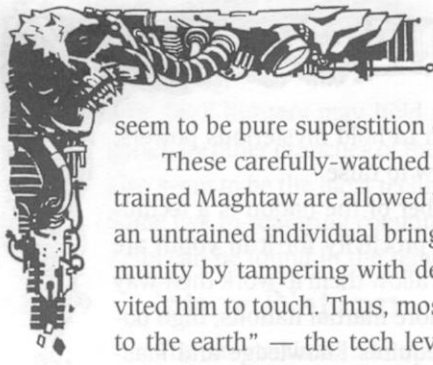
such as dwarfs, who are seen to hold mysterious powers, are often given to the Maghtaw to raise.

However, not every member of the nation is a technician; only those who show a proclivity for it in youth are given the apprenticeships that allow them to work their way up in the nation. Unlike the more martial nations, high position among the Maghtaw requires knowledge and mastery of tech lore.

Adept students may become practicing Maghtaw upon mastering the Seven Plateaus of Learning. Their customs hold respect for knowledge, and they teach much lore freely, only keeping high-tech knowledge within the clan or nation; teaching high-tech lore to a non-Maghtaw is considered a serious crime against the nation, unless done with the consent of the leaders.

They seek balance to knowledge, declaring that only the wise should utilize powerful knowledge. Their lore is heavily-colored by their pagan beliefs, and technology is believed to be a form of power granted through the intervention of spirits in a universe where even inanimate objects are considered to be alive. Thus, tech use and training is heavy with taboos which must not be transgressed for fear of angering spirits or inviting bad luck. While many of these strictures were surely born from the need to ensure safety when working with poorly understood yet dangerous technologies — such as fusion drives or radioactivity — some





seem to be pure superstition or mysticism.

These carefully-watched taboos ensure that only well-trained Maghtaw are allowed to work with technologies, lest an untrained individual bring ill luck and ruin to his community by tampering with devices the spirits have not invited him to touch. Thus, most Vuldrok nations are "bound to the earth" — the tech level of much of Vuldrok life is rather low. While many homes have a God Box, which broadcasts clan-chosen proverb-wisdom, weather reports, sagas and news, the representatives who present this information follow oracles and rules set down by the Maghtaw. God Boxes usually broadcast only three hours at night, unless war or natural disasters dictate otherwise.

A Known Worlds Engineer would perhaps be shocked at the seeming primitivism of a Maghtaw, who may display the same adeptness at repairing engines but who does so only when the "signs" have declared it safe to commence, and then only after a small ceremony of appeasement or invocation to the spirit that powers the engine. But shocked or not, the same Engineer may begin to envy the Maghtaw once he displays theurgic rites that prove quite efficacious at manipulating technology.

Rekgold Nation

The Rekgold is not so much a single, unified nation based around a clan structure or profession, but a loose alliance of various merchant princes and families that rule the prosperous citystates of the Vuldrok worlds. They are the closest thing the Vuldrok have to a hereditary nobility or upper-class, but unlike in the Known Worlds — as is typical with the Vuldrok — the Rekgold hold perhaps the lowest social status of all the nations. Paradoxically, they are perhaps the most wealthy of them.

While these individuals and families can be quite diverse — and can even be related to or part of another nation — they all tend to have common goals and ways that differ from their more rural-minded cousins, for the needs of a city-dweller are not necessarily those of a nomadic or pastoral countryman. To most Vuldrok, the Rekgold are high falutin' city slickers. A Known Worlder might think of them as glorified Reeves. Rekgolders are generally more sophisticated and urbane than other Vuldrok, and the term often applies also to the city-folk the Rekgold rule over.

Most numerous on Fingisvold and Wolf's Lament, the Rekgold began as a system of alliances between cities against invading clans. The early Fingisvold Maghtaw were their allies for a time. Many early Rekgold princes were successful Drenjar and Zetol conquerors who founded cities, or took over the political systems of existing ones with their martial or monetary power.

The golden era of the citystates, which saw the preservation of a higher technology base than other Vuldrok settle-

ments for many years, ended around 4400, when their technical edge was battered down after too many raids. While the Rekgold cities are held by powerful families, over time older clans fell from power and newer ones emerged. The voting system in these cities favors the wealthy (the *Lyft-cynn*) over the poor (*Myslic-cynn*). Champions of the poor have occasionally emerged from the wealthy class, sometimes out of genuine altruism (Tungrefa the Good of Ceapburg) but often to further their own political ends.

Some merchant princes possess huge fleets, which both plunder and trade as the occasion demands. Rekgold merchants have traveled as far as Irem and Byzantium Secundus. They sometimes attempt to hold trade monopolies on certain items, but these are hard to enforce and maintain in Vuldrok space. They often cement alliances of profit or protection from certain warlords by supplying credit, loans and city services. Still, disaster can strike — when Finnhold the Strong forfeited on his loan to Gedref, ruler of Ceapburg, the city's economy went into a depression.

There is no standard Vuldrok currency, and each warlord, city or clan mints its own coinage. Rekgold have an advantage in that their money tends to apply in all allied Rekgold cities, and they run profitable money-changing operations whereby visitors can exchange their currency for city money, at a lower rate of course. (See the Barter & Coin sidebar.)

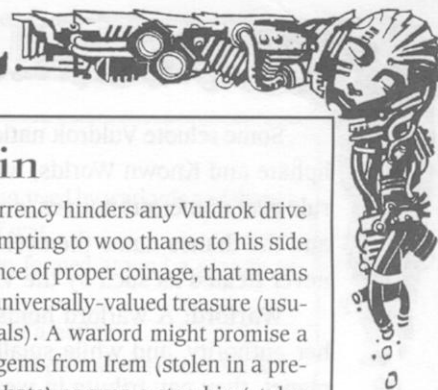
The Rekgold are most numerous on Wolf's Lament and Fingisvold, but their power on Frost has waned with the recent unification of the planet. Still, their fleets, well-armed, are often the most dangerous. The slave trade passes mainly through their hands. Many independent Vuldrok raiders work for them on commission, or sell their services for a season to a Rekgold prince in exchange for some profit and political safety, especially if they possess criminal records on any of the Vuldrok worlds.

The Kvar, Nujumo and Musaki families are the most famous of the Rekgold. The Musaki are named for a vanished family that owned company towns noted for fierce worker loyalty, produced by company songs, group activities and constant propaganda. Modern Musaki leaders claim descent from the ancient family, but are in fact upstarts from a farming family on Raven who managed to rise in power through Known Worlds plundering and seize the Musaki cities. The freemen living in these cities profess loyalty to the Musaki prince, and sing songs of loyalty to him or her.

Others

Other nations exist among the Vuldrok, some small and remote, often created by individuals seeking a new community based around some passionate ideology. Since new republics often have short lives, being makeshift affairs, it is hard to estimate their number. Remote hunting and shaman





societies often create small nations, some of which endure, but most of which eventually vanish or intermingle with the larger nations. On high mountains, the mysterious Katsu Nation thrives, a remote hermit people who speak to the spirits in seclusion. They are sought after for wisdom, but are not numerous.

Sometimes these vanished or small nations leave an impact. Although the peace loving, pacifist Second Republic Hoftsla culture long ago dispersed into the mainstream Vuldrok nations, Hoftsla notions of ecological balance and respect became a major factor in Vuldrok beliefs. Certainly their belief in Gjarti provided a framework which united the various Vuldrok pantheons. To this day, many aspects of Vuldrok religion are indistinguishable from Gjarti, and Known Worlders call the Vuldrok Gjarti worshipers. A few clans on Fingisvold still call themselves Hoftsla; they are primarily farming and hunting communities.

Classes

Vuldrok territory is defined by nations, which serve as the main cultural and social identifiers among the various clans of the Vuldrok worlds. Each nation holds various domains or lands, ruled by thanes. Warlords often rule over entire planets. Some domains are not territorial but are based around nomadic clans, in which case the term applies to that group of related clans. Domains are further subdivided into clan realms, territories, towns or villages associated with a particular clan.

The various classes, titles and positions of note in Vuldrok society are:

King: King Froljir the Ill-fated came the closest to unifying all the Vuldrok thanes; he even had a centralized army of the bravest warriors, loyal to himself alone. Had he not perished in battle with Vladimir Alecto's forces, a centralized Vuldrok empire would have vied with the Known Worlds and Kurgan Caliphate. His legacy is a divided one among the Vuldrok peoples, for they are proud of his accomplishments but suspicious of his intentions to weld them into a centralized unit. No thane before or since Froljir has used the title of king, and some say that when Froljir reached for the title, he sealed his fate, for it has long been prophesied that the free Vuldrok would never let a king reign over them.

Barter & Coin

The lack of a universal currency hinders any Vuldrok drive for unity, for any warlord attempting to woo thanes to his side must offer reward. In the absence of proper coinage, that means barter or booty in the form of universally-valued treasure (usually precious metals or minerals). A warlord might promise a thane a crate of perfectly-cut gems from Irem (stolen in a previous raid to the Kurgan Caliphate) or even a starship (stolen from raids on Hawkwood worlds).

Most people, however, can't afford to trade such glamorous goods. Daily life requires steady barter or exchange. For most Vuldrok, this means any number of coins minted by local thanes or the merchant princes of Rekgold cities.

The value of such coinage, of course, depends on its minter's ability to back up the currency in items of real value, usually gold, but exotic goods like ceramsteel or pygmalium can also work. In the end, a coin's value is what its users grant it. The coin with the widest territory and use usually predominates, although the currency of a popular thane who exhibits steady rule and is unlikely to be deposed can also be valuable.

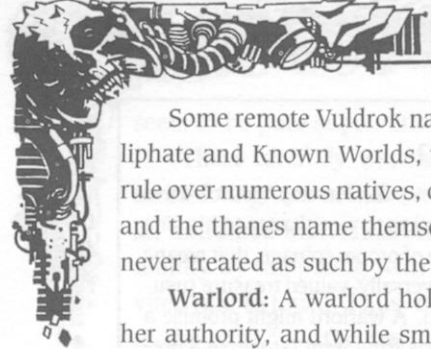
The most successful coins are often those minted by Rekgold princes, for their network of alliances with other citystates ensures that these coins are easily exchanged for local currency at good rates. Since these cities and nearby villages are the de facto centers of most trade, their coinage dominates the market. Below is a list of the most popular currencies and their values on various worlds.

Most trade among rural freeman, however, still consists mainly of barter: a herder might trade a herdbeast to a farmer for a supply of grain or food staples, while a weaver might trade a number of blankets or coats for a pig. More valuable items, like technology, are usually traded with coinage or scrip — promissary notes made by many Rekgold princes. Scrip writers who fail to make good on their scrip can be punished by the local Althing, and forced to either make a commensurate payment to the scrip-holder in acceptable barter or are forcibly divested of all their possessions and exiled.

Some Vuldrok accept Imperial coinage, most often raiders or traders who travel into and out of the Known Worlds or Hargard, where firebirds are widely accepted. Since firebirds are often included in any Known Worlds raiding party's booty, they are viable coins on most Vuldrok worlds, but their value varies, from full value (Hargard) to 1/2 (Wolf's Lament and Frost), and even 1/4 to 1/8 (Raven, Fingisvold). Imperial or League scrip is even more widely accepted, since it can be cashed in for its value by middlemen (in case the Vuldrok holder does not want to show himself). Costs of goods in Vuldrok space are similar to those for firebirds, except that technology can cost two to three times its Known World's value.

Coin	Minter	Value				
		<i>Wolf's Lament</i>	<i>Raven</i>	<i>Frost</i>	<i>Fingisvold</i>	<i>Hargard</i>
Grimmagest	Kvar (Rekgold family)	1/2	Full	1/4	1/4	1/8
Widget	Nujumo (Rekgold family)	1/4	1/4	1/2	Full	1/8
Moon	Musaki (Rekgold family)	Full	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/4
Bearclaw	Greolf the Grim	1/4	1/4	Full	1/4	1/4
Pentacle	Amara Ironblade	1/8	1/8	1/8	Full	n/a
Lotus	Queen Ramakrishna	1/8	1/4	1/8	1/8	Full





Some remote Vuldrok nations, set up in the Kurgan Caliphate and Known Worlds, where small bands of warriors rule over numerous natives, developed into small kingdoms, and the thanes name themselves kings. However, they are never treated as such by the Vuldrok heartworlds.

Warlord: A warlord holds an entire planet under his/her authority, and while smaller nations may exist on the planet, they pay tribute in weapons, riches and soldiers to the warlord. In return, the warlord protects the clans and nations under his allegiance.

A family usually holds the position as long as it is powerful. A warlord will sometimes give his authority to an outsider to succeed him, but more often a new clan arises or another powerful clan overthrows the warlord to place one of its own members in the title. The closest the Vuldrok come to hereditary aristocracy is in the consolidation of power under the recent Frost warlords.

Warlords who seek interstellar power must gather a fleet of starships. By law, they cannot levy these from their thanes or freemen, but most who refuse to donate ships to such service may find them taken by force, under the excuse that they threatened the warlord's power. Those who do willingly provide ships expect a share of booty in return. If it is not given, resentment grows, and the warlord may gain a reputation as an unjust ruler, the first stage in his eventual dethroning.

Thane/Jarl/Earl (the Frea): While there are no kings in Vuldrok culture, thanes, jarls and earls compose what might be thought of as local or landed aristocracy. However, social mobility makes it possible for a freeman (*freold*) to become a thane by gathering warriors to his banner or proving himself wise in the estimation of a community. Most Vuldrok domains possess two thanes, the War Thane (*Weard-Thane*) and the Law Thane or Law Speaker (*Wergenda-Thane*); the latter administers the legal codes and presides over the domestic tranquility of the people.

Although the positions were originally equal, the War Thanes have gained more power over the last centuries, but the Law Thanes still rule the day-to-day life of the people, calling the local Althing to session, judging civil cases, settling disputes and appointing the priests and priestesses who administer over the marriage, death and celebration rites important to the domain. Upon taking office, a Law Thane traditionally surrenders something of value to the welfare of the gods and people, sacrificing crops, herds, or sometimes even an eye or hand for the common good. By tradition the Law-Thane is elected, even when a War Thane seizes power against his predecessor.

Thanes, jarls and earls are next in authority to a warlord; on planets without a warlord they are the authority over the lands they rule. Among the Lakol peoples, the thane

Vuldrok Language

Althing: House where laws are debated and enacted, based on the ancient Urth Althing of Iceland. Each world has a planetary Althing in addition to localized ones. The Great Althing of the Vuldrok Star-Nation is on Raven.

Berserker: A warrior brotherhood loyal to Wordun, a god of shapeshifters.

Captain: Title of a person of authority in the Zetol Nation; equivalent to thane.

Drenjar Nation: Vuldrok nation descended from secret raiding societies. The largest Vuldrok nation, its members are those most encountered on Known Worlds raids.

Deofran Path: Brotherhood which most Vuldrok artisans belong to.

Ealdwic: The mysterious spirit-people of Raven, who appear in the mist-haunted forests and valleys.

Elteoswe: First Power, often called the Creator in Vuldrok belief.

Erdgeist: The ever-changing Vuldrok religion, incorporating many aspects of Gjarti and, like Gjarti, divided into three similar paths: Vanlig (Folk), Skyje (Contemplative) and Pejuta (Compassionate).

Fheykrig: Female warrior belonging to the sisterhood of the same name and pledged to Dafar, goddess of the virgin hunt. Fheykrigs held supreme political power on Fingisvold for a period of time.

God Box: A radio device found in many Vuldrok homes. Broadcasting only occur in the evenings or times of emergency.

Gods, spirits and powers: Numerous gods and spirits are found within the belief system of the Vuldrok. Kurmda, the God of War, is promoted by Frost and resisted on Fingisvold by the followers of Wordun, God of Shapeshifters. The other main deities are Gwelkarga, goddess of destruction; Wakinyan, the thunder power; Marassa, the Twins; Unter, Chief of the Gates; Egla, Voice of the Void; Wisterlia, goddess of winter and weapons; Zukinayan, serpent of knowledge; Gon, god of solar winds; and Ultasht, the goddess of love and fertility.

Hawkwyrd, Hawkwyrdedda: Original Vuldrok term for Known Worlder.

Hoftsla: Originally part of Second Republic "dropout" culture, this tribe of sorts founded peaceful colonies on Wolf's Lament and Frost. They became more of a warrior culture during a long-running conflict with the Musaki Barons.

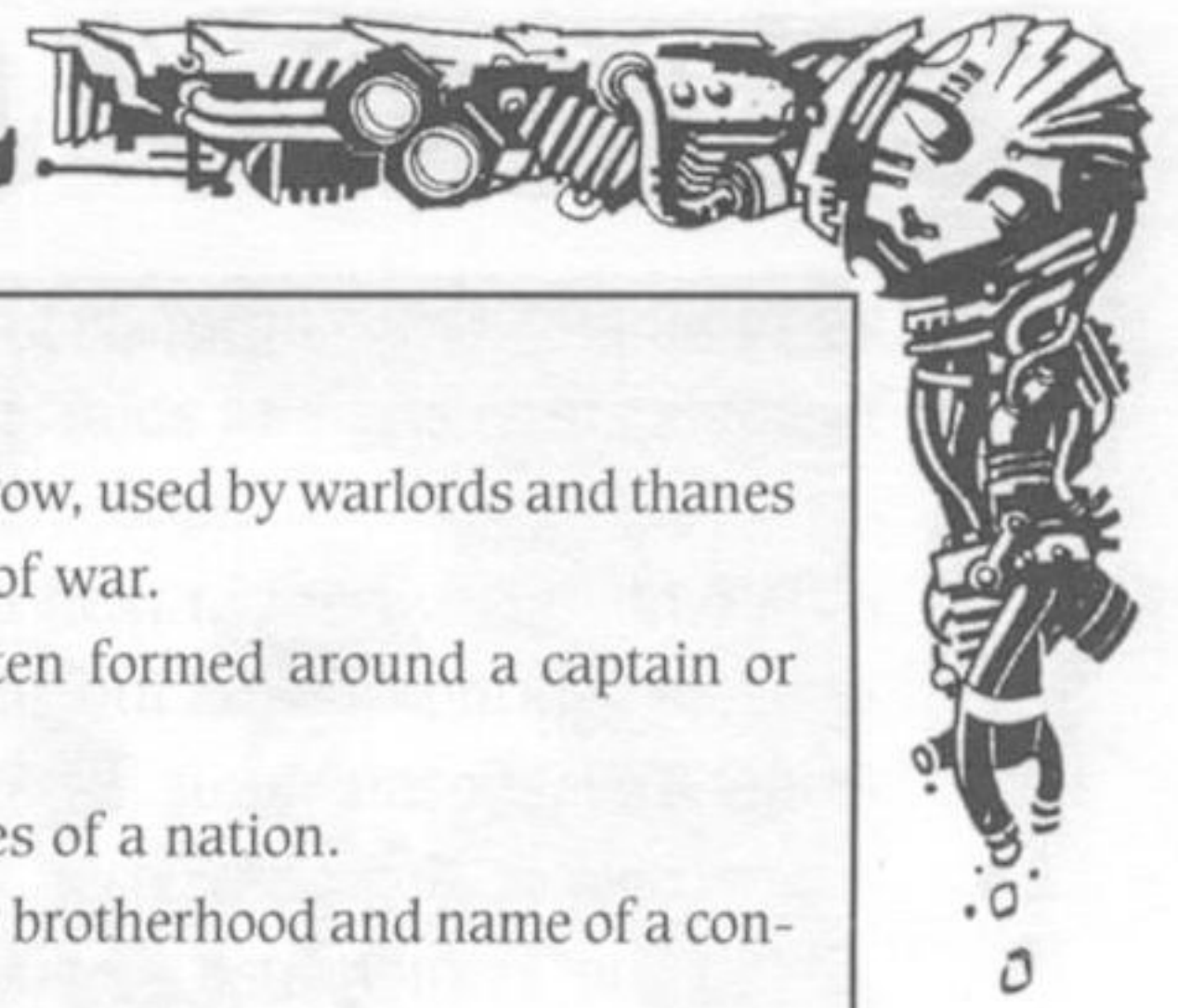
Itancan: Title of "chief" in the Lakol nation, equivalent to thane. There is usually a War-Chief and Peace-Chief among any Lakol settlement.

Irzatamland: The worlds of the Kurgan Caliphate.

Krillbror Brotherhood: Warrior society dedicated to the war god Fyr Kurmda, politically and financially backed by the warlords of Frost.

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Lakol Nation: Vuldrok Nation descended from followers of Native American ways, encompassing many traditions.

Law Thane or Lawspeaker: Also called the Peace Thane, the Law Thane is in charge of community laws while the War Thane is in charge of a community's defense. Law Thanes have lost much political power and position to the War Thanes over the centuries.

Lething: Levy of ships, men and armaments a clan is supposed to provide its military leaders in times of war.

Maghtaw Nation: Vuldrok nation now formed around a profession and pseudo-scientific culture.

Manjafnaer Edda: A book of Vuldrok oral lore, history and customs composed by Skeifbrinner Stormsong around 4600, which contains their legends, often with emphasis on Drenjar accounts.

Mindren: Sons and daughters of slaves, who are by law free but often landless. Many join raiding parties.

Modig/Lofan: Male and female energies, respectively, which encompass all things in the universe. Modig is in the ascendancy in the Vuldrok culture, but this will eventually be balanced by an ascendancy of female energy.

Musaki Barons: A Second Republic corporate family who established company-towns on Wolf's Lament, it still survives as part of the Rekgold princes. Descendants of its workforce still carry on some of its corporate traditions.

Myrkvolk: Spirits of Fingisvold, sometimes harmful or helpful to humans.

Ondvolk: Drenjar term for the Ur-Ukar.

Praktri: A form of Neo-Hinduism which developed on Hargard after the fall of the Second Republic under lands controlled by the Ramakrishna dynasty, it evolved into Tertha in the 4600's. The worship of Gwelkarga, the goddess of destruction, is thought to have originated when the Vuldrok and native Hargard cultures meshed.

Rekgold Nation: Vuldrok nation composed of merchant princes who control cities, although the term now also describes most of the citizens of the cities they rule.

Reoc: Sacred mushroom, which produces visions and inspires confidence, administered by the followers of Gwelkarga.

Ricu: Creative energies possessed by all people and, some say, everything.

Rimolk: Foreigners from beyond the Vuldrok rim. Also any non-Vuldrok stranger.

Runes: Mysterious Anunnaki glyphs found in certain ruins which apparently unlock mental powers in certain sentients gifted with understanding them.

Runecaster: See *vitki*.

Rweng: A people who raided the Wersa after the fall of the Second Republic, hardening them into a warrior culture.

Skerra Upp Heror: War-Arrow, used by warlords and thanes to summon their allies in times of war.

Skjaldborg: Shieldwall, often formed around a captain or thane in battle

Synnarmark: The territories of a nation.

Sunkmanitu: Lakol warrior brotherhood and name of a continent on Wolf's Lament.

Tertha: A religion descended from Praktri on Hargard in the 4600's, it recognizes Ten Schools. Tertha does not clash with Vuldrok beliefs, and some cultural intermingling has occurred.

Thane: Thanes are divided into two classes, War Thanes, who control the military aspect of Vuldrok life in a territory, and Law Thanes (also called Lawspeakers and Peace Thanes) who administer the daily laws of society in a given territory. Over time, the War Thanes have grown more powerful, but the Lawspeaker is always elected, while a War Thane may be conquered or overthrown.

Tulac: A powerful drink made from Reoc and Muazi (Sky Tear fungi) compounds, which produces group consciousness during battle; warriors who ingest it are impervious to pain.

Tundra Wolves: Large carnivorous, canine-like mammals of Wolf's Lament. Mystical abilities are attributed to them.

Vitki: (plural = vitkar) A runecaster, one who works with the mysterious glyphs found in Anunnaki ruins. Vitkar are quite powerful and are believed to be mad, so all Vuldrok walk and speak carefully around them.

Voki's Laws: Laws written up by the priest Voki after King Froljir's death left the Vuldrok leaderless. Voki's laws stressed an end to centralized authority, placing freedom and individuality over claims of nobility, and were adopted by the entire Vuldrok nation.

Vuldrok: The Vuldrok nation emerged from the earlier Wersa culture around 4440, composed of the Drenjar, Zetol, Lakol, Maghtaw and Rekgold Nations; the Skey joined later. Although they are not always politically unified, they share many cultural characteristics and the Great Althing, where all nations address common issues on Raven.

Warlord: A ruler of an entire Vuldrok world.

Weogsynu: Vuldrok term for the Symbiots, meaning "Weed-Demon People."

Wersa: The culture from which the Vuldrok sprang, denoting the people of Fingisvold, Wolf's Lament, Raven and Frost during the late Second Republic era to around 4440.

Wichasha Oyate: Speaker for the Animal and Plant Nations, who represents the speechless at the Althings, giving them a vote and voice.

Zetol Nation: Vuldrok Nation descended from pirating rivals of the Drenjar, the Zetol is the second most numerous nation.



is usually called Itancan; among the Skey, Tatec; and among the Zetol, Captain.

Like warlords, thanes are responsible for building their own starfleets. They cannot legally levy them from their own people, and usually privateer them from others.

On Frost, thaneships have become largely hereditary in the past century, while on Wolf's Lament the nations vote for the ablest ruler, usually a warrior. The hereditary trends on Frost point to a shifting pattern towards the establishment of a local nobility, although this is still resisted by custom and law. To augment their power, the thanes have championed the Kurmda war god priesthood and increased the representation of the richer thanes and freemen in the Althing.

Some thanes, such those of the Rekgold Nation, are more like merchant princes, whose families rise and fall with successful trade routes, pirating, and that most elusive gift, luck.

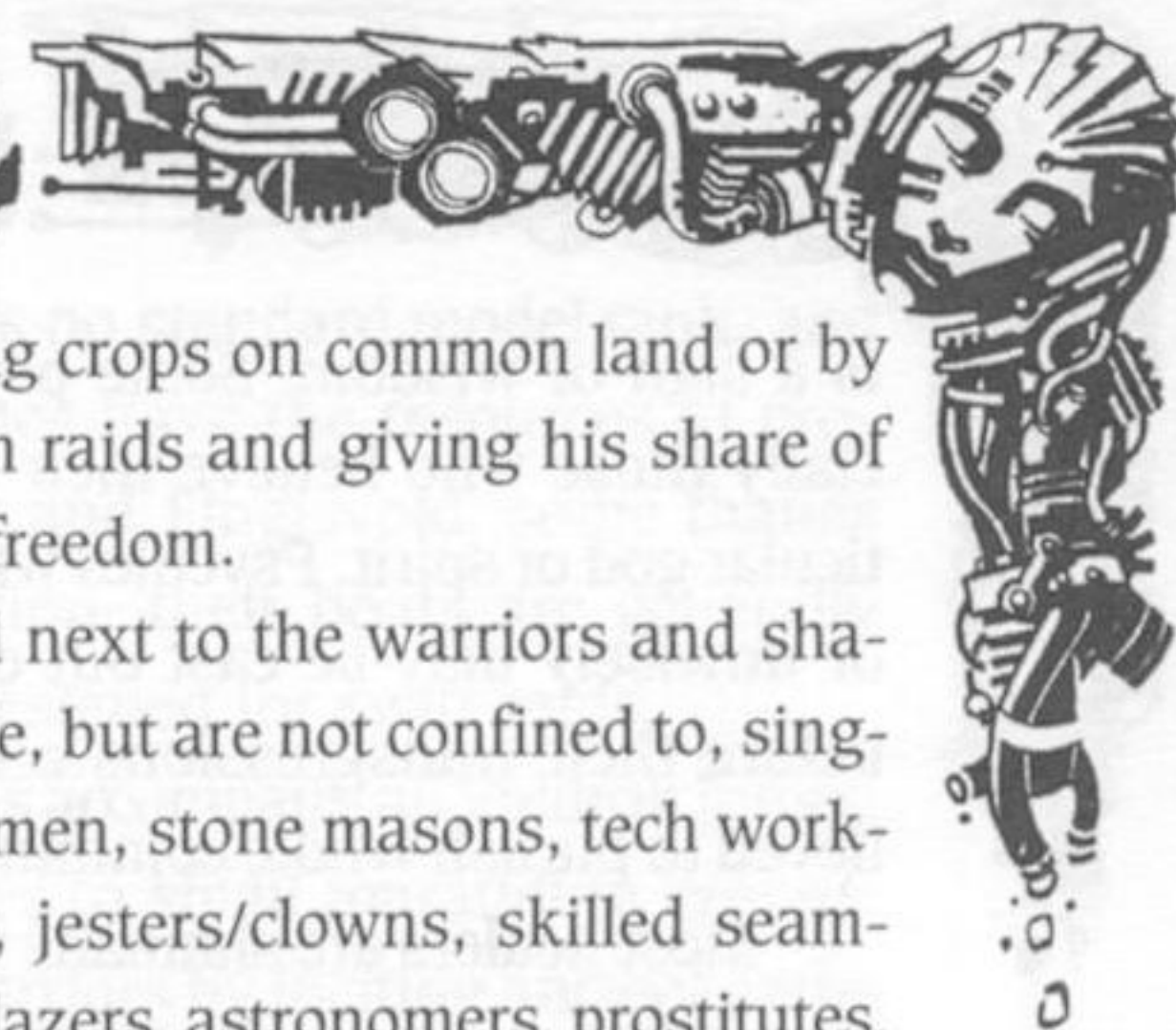
Freemen (*Freold* or *Ikce Wicasa*): The greatest freemen are wealthy merchants or town leaders and possess power comparable to a thane. The majority, however, are farmers, hunters, artisans, healers, fishers, tradesmen and day laborers who make up the bulk of the Vuldrok population. On the lowest end of the scale are homeless wanderers and small-scale, marginal laborers who live no better than serfs, but are protected under Althing law from mistreatment.

The courts are administered in local districts by local Althings, where freemen (usually the patriarchs or matriarchs of the clans) debate local issues. All the Vuldrok worlds have a planetary Althing, where only thanes, earls and chieftains debate, under the authority of the Lawspeaker.

All Lakol peoples are free, and some small nations are entirely composed of freemen, with no thanes or slaves, just temporary War Chieftains when the time arises (the Skey).

Freemen have property rights. If they lawfully purchase land from a legitimate owner, that land is theirs and cannot be taken from them legally. In this manner, wealthy men rise to thane status, elected by those they allow to live on their lands. However, ownership of vast lands is rare, for war thanes often attempt to raid or conquer such regions, making it a game only for the bold or wealthy. This forceful seizure often uses any number of excuses an Althing would rule as legitimate, from just retribution for an insult to an action for the common good. Most regions are owned by clans, with some areas owned by individuals of that clan and other areas kept in common for all.

There are many examples of freemen, even adventurers from other worlds, rising in status to become thanes or even warlords. Some remember the career of Dram Ampde (4598-4677?), a Known Worlds Engineer who piloted a cache of Second Republic weapons into Vuldrok space to escape Decados pursuers. Eventually arriving at Wolf's Lament, he



swiftly carved out a territory for himself with his advanced weaponry, eventually becoming warlord. Known as Dramvis the Mindwise, he ruled with just laws. Enough technology now flows toward the Vuldrok worlds that it is doubtful his exploits can be repeated on such a scale. However, in remote locations where tech is low, an enterprising individual with some followers could set up a similar powerbase.

Mindren: The lowest social order of freemen, the Mindren are the freed sons and daughters of slaves. Often, they are left homeless after they reach maturity, and hire themselves out as day laborers for wealthy landowners. The cost of day laborers and seasonal help is generally cheaper than that of caring for slaves, which is why the wealthy landlords did not overly protest Voki's Laws against generational slavery. Some Mindren become outlaws by necessity, but others take to a nomadic warrior's life, signing up with raiding ships. There are those who become adopted by Vuldrok parents and inherit considerable land. The second sons and daughters of many wealthy Vuldrok are called Mindren derisively, because they inherit little. Many athane's son or daughter finds a warrior companion whose parents were his/her household slaves.

Slaves (*Thrall*, *Tyjnuur* or *Onshe*): Originally, the Wersa culture possessed no serfs or slaves, and the very idea was anathema to the early Vuldrok. But, as raids and wars increased, captured peoples were brought back as slaves, becoming the property of their owners. At first, brisk sales to the Caliphate and other worlds saw the Vuldrok as middlemen, but slavery began to taint their culture. Many Vuldrok looked askance at the growing slave populations on their worlds (it was against all laws to enslave another Vuldrok), but it was not until Voki's Laws were enacted that generational slavery was outlawed on the Vuldrok worlds. Thus, a captured person can become a slave, but the sons and daughters of a slave are considered freemen. This was done to ensure no large-scale social unrest on the Vuldrok worlds, for slave revolts were rife in the 4400's and 4500's, and many Vuldrok, lovers of individual liberty, thought the institution corrupt. Also, slaves brought in strange ideas (a hidden Zebulon cult long existed among them), which were foreign to Vuldrok culture, and curtailing large groups of slaves ensured that Vuldrok beliefs would remain those of their ancestors.

Many areas, economically, can support few slaves, and in others the number of slaves a person may own is sharply curtailed by law. This does not stop a flourishing Vuldrok slave trade from the Known Worlds to the Caliphate worlds. Despite Voki's Laws, generational slavery still exists on areas of Fingisvold and Hargard (in Vijayanagar, where Voki's Laws do not hold). A slave can be freed by his master at the local Althing. Slaves are also often freed for bravery in battle, or one can purchase freedom from a master, usually with

the profits gained by growing crops on common land or by accompanying the master on raids and giving his share of the bounty in exchange for freedom.

Artisan: Artisans stand next to the warriors and shamans in respect. They include, but are not confined to, singers, harpers, painters, craftsmen, stone masons, tech workers, oral storytellers, actors, jesters/clowns, skilled seamstresses, master cooks, trailblazers, astronomers, prostitutes, and highly proficient trappers and fishermen.

All artisans possess the *ricu* power, as do all warriors and shamans, which can best be defined as a spiritual quality which shows in the individual's work and life. All people have this quality, but some master it better than others, incorporating it into their creative lives.

Artisans, like warriors and priests, have their own sacred brotherhoods and sisterhoods, which often perform the same functions as guilds in the Known Worlds. The greatest of these is the Deofran Path, which accepts many different arts under its strong banner.

Shaman: Shamans are respected in Vuldrok culture as servants of the gods and powers. They can function as warriors, artisans, or farmers, but most remove themselves from society for study under a sacred *orwichcasha pejuta*. Generally, an adept seeks out a master for learning, although sometimes a master finds a powerful adept.

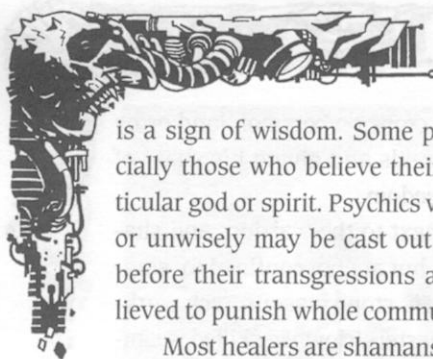
Vuldrok culture is flexible, so the dogmatic battles familiar among Known World Church sects rarely enter their debates. Their gods and spirits, however, are served in traditional ways, with great attention to ritualistic detail. Shamans can marry, own land, even become thanes, but they are generally at the service of their people. Some charge fees, which is traditional in some domains, while others operate for free, taking oaths of compassion to all things. Skey priests will negotiate before treating outsiders.

Since so many traditions operate under the cloak of the Vuldrok Star-Nation, it is difficult to categorize the priests. The Lakol peoples possess priests who call upon the Powers for aid; the Drenjar call upon gods; the Zetol upon spirits; the Skey upon the Guardians; and others upon a variety of beings or spirits, including even their ancestors.

Evil priests exist, usually exiled priests who turned against ancestral laws, and these sorcerers sometimes call upon dark powers; there is a tradition of necromancy among them. The Althing has outlawed such practices, and a sorcerer can be hung after being judged by local priests. Sorcerers are also shamans in training who grow impatient and leave their masters. They often possess great power, but are generally not as strong as a master shaman.

Psychics are seen as gifted with great *ricu*, and are either welcomed or shunned, depending on the use to which they put their powers. It is generally considered a bad sign to show off psychic powers and use them openly. Discretion





is a sign of wisdom. Some psychics become priests, especially those who believe their powers are gifts from a particular god or spirit. Psychics who use their powers flagrantly or unwisely may be cast out or exiled — or even killed — before their transgressions anger the spirits, who are believed to punish whole communities for the sins of one man.

Most healers are shamans with knowledge of herbalism, who practice vows of compassion, administering to all. Among the Maghtaw, there are healers who rely on medical tech, while a growing number of healers use both shamanistic practices and tech for cures.

Lodges

There are numerous lodges, societies and brotherhoods throughout Vuldrok space, most of them geared around a profession. Much like Known Worlds guilds, lodges work to ensure the best jobs and opportunities for their members, and some have powerful voting blocks in the Althings. A Vuldrok's best path to fame, fortune or respect is through a lodge.

Some of the more prominent lodges are:

Baron Night: Lodge of Zetol priests.

Brinnyr's Band: Lodge of technicians, mainly Maghtaw.

Children of Two Moon Wolf: Lodge of hunters and trackers.

Children of Ultasht: Prostitutes guild, found mainly in large cities; a legal, somewhat religious profession.

Daughters of Dafar: The official name of the main Fheykrig lodge (female warriors pledged to the hunting goddess Dafar; see below).

Deofran Path: Lodge for artisans and craftspeople.

Hikuli (Red Hunters): Society of Skey warriors.

Kin of Nagi: Rumored lodge of dark sorcerors.

Krilbor Brotherhood: The greatest warriors' lodge, its members owe allegiance to Kurmda.

Sons of Gon: Lodge of starpilots and interstellar travelers.

Sunkmanitu: Brothers of the Wolf, a lodge whose membership mainly consists of Lakol warriors.

Velstand: Lodge of merchants, lead by a Rekgold prince.

Wichapki Circle: Lodge of lawgivers dedicated to spreading peace and wisdom; originally Lakol, membership is open to all nations.

Wordun's Hide: Berserker brotherhood who worship the shapeshifting god Wordun over Kurmda.

Yavild's Dogs: Thieves and pirates lodge, started by the Zetol and considered somewhat legitimate.

Yemaya's Eye: Lodge of Zetol wise-women and shamans.

War

They listened to my talk about the Pancreator with some interest, but stubbornly refused to see how the Caliph was his sole representative. Surely many would minister to such a powerful spirit? I said yes, but that the Caliph was in charge of them.

Legdraca shook his head. 'Anyway, this Pancreator is far away, on your world. Our gods are closer. Pledge yourself to Wildeor Wyndas, Lord of the Woods, and we will share blood in a binding oath. Wyndas is near, I hear him in the branches, and he will adopt you as a son. Zaibolu is far, and cannot protect you. It is a good host who adopts the gods of his benefactors, as my father told me.'

I felt a long night coming on.

— Ibn Mokum, *Concerning the Barbarian Worlds, a Hostage's Report*

The Vuldrok Star-Nation is an armed camp. However, the majority of people are not warriors, but farmers and hunters. Some worlds, such as Frost and Wolf's Lament, are so harsh that even slaves go armed against sudden attacks from wild beasts, outsiders or feuding kinsmen. But most Vuldrok are trained from youth in the ways of war, and have proven able warriors when their lands are threatened. The theme of armed brotherhood and sisterhood runs throughout Vuldrok society. War lodges or societies, possessing their own Mead Halls, with their own oaths and traditions, are found throughout the Star-Nation.

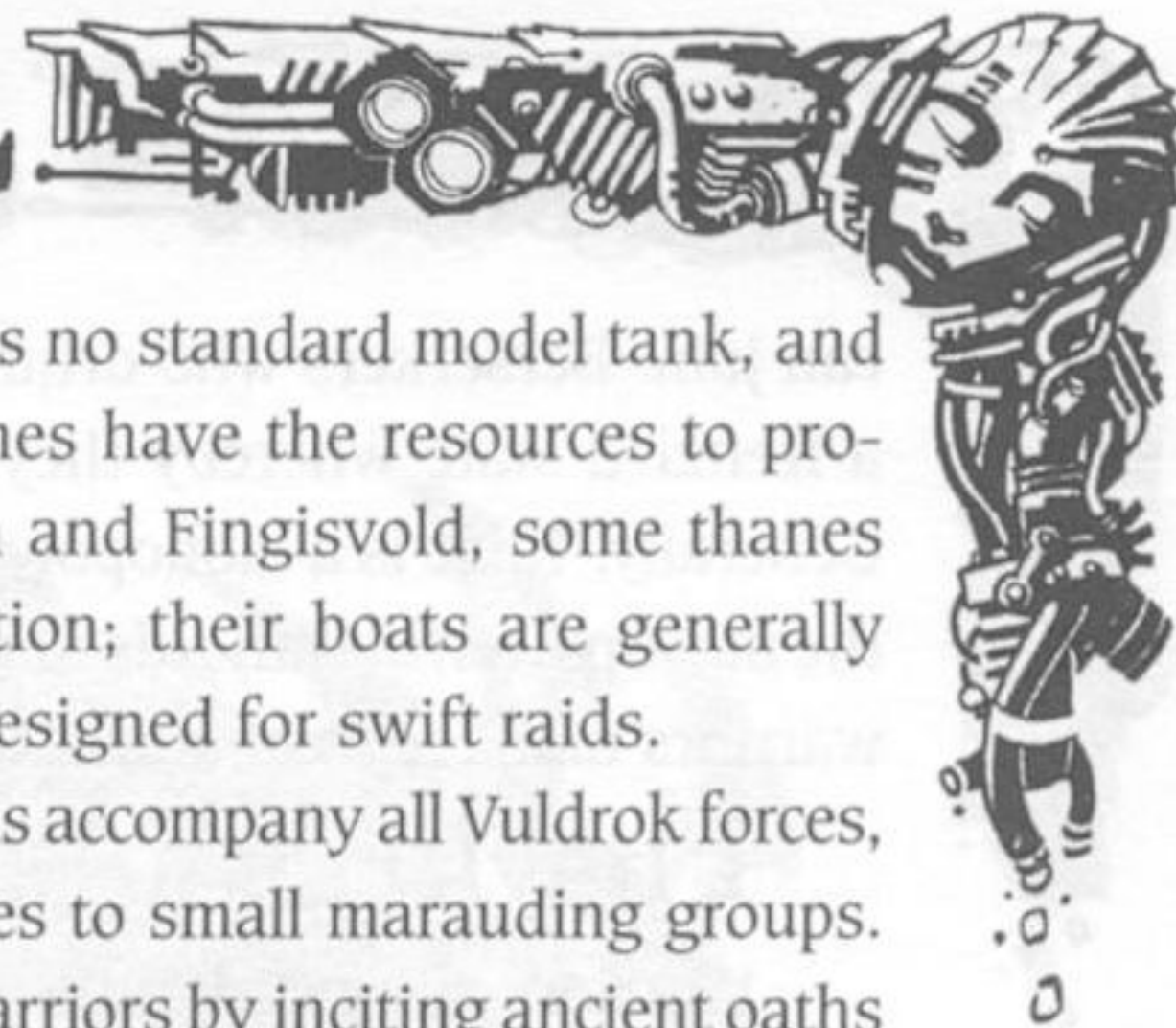
The greatest of these is the Krilbor Brotherhood, whose members have sworn oaths of loyalty to the war god Kurmda. They hold real power and authority, and are often blessed by the priests. The Sunkmanitu, or Brothers of the Wolf, run through Lakol society, and the Hikuli are common throughout the Zetol Nation. The Fheykrigs, an order of female warriors, often have sacred areas dedicated to the goddess of the hunt, their patron spirit. Many raiding parties are composed partially or entirely of members of a warrior brotherhood.

Warfare

*The arrows flew in the far Caliphate kingdom
Where Wirsas and Wingold sharpened their swords
And gave thanks to grim Kurmda, god of all warriors
Who gave them strength to slay many skilled fighters.*
— "The Song of Skeld," *Manjafnaer Edda*

Vuldrok military defense depends on the Lething, a levy of ships, men, armaments and provisions called out by the thane or local war chieftain and supplied by the population. Each thane's domains are divided into smaller clan realms, and each realm supplies at least one man. The severity of a Lething is often denoted by the number of men called up from each realm. A Three-Man Lething is more serious than a One-Man Lething.





On Frost, the levy has begun to emerge into a form of taxation to the warlord, marking (as it did in King Froljir's day) the beginnings of centralized power. When a domain or realm is attacked, every able-bodied man, woman and thrall is expected to fend off the invaders. Even when conquered by another thane, the people retain their traditional right to weapons, which is encoded in the Laws of Voki. This is to ensure protection against unjust laws. The Vuldrok practice restraint among their own people, but off-worlders rarely receive the same courtesy.

When a thane wants to go on the offensive, each domain must supply a hund (hundred men). Naturally, this does not always hold in theory, as some districts are wealthier than others or have access to more technology. Sometimes, high tech weaponry or starships can be substituted for men, but this is rare, and fosters discontent if the thane forces the issue.

Generally, by custom but not law, a levy is called for the defense, a half levy for offense, and even smaller levies for plundering purposes. In times of war, the War Arrow (*Skerra Upp Heror*) is passed to the domains of the levy, and the God Box announces the levy inside every farm and village.

On land or in space, Vuldrok (especially the Drenjar) prefer hand-to-hand fighting. On land, they often adopt a shield-wall defense when fighting a large press of enemies, with the most heavily-armed warriors in the front ranks. However, only the greatest warlords, with a standing militia, can produce such disciplined troops. At times, a wedge phalanx is formed, with two men in the front, three behind, and five in the third rank; the mobility of the phalanx is remarkable. Sir Geoffrey Bellvar Hawkwood described a Vuldrok phalanx wheeling around into a circular formation at the Battle of the Fords on Leminkainen in 4989.

The chiefs and thanes often have an elite group of warriors about their person capable of forming a shield-wall (*Skjaldborg*). These shields, while usually of wood or metal, are sometimes marked with runes that provide an energy field similar to personal energy shields. Unlike energy shields, which are activated by fusion cells, these rune-shields are fueled by the mysterious science of runelore. (See *Runecasting*, in the Appendix.)

In close combat, Vuldrok warriors use swords, axes, energy axes and energy spears. Archers and laser rifles are used by specially-trained forces (*pilmen*) and fielded in larger attacks. In space, higher tech weapons are avoided due to the damage they can cause a ship, save for handguns or blaster axes as a last resort. Vuldrok prefer boarding actions to broadside combat, for they often incorporate captured ships into their armadas, or strip them for tech.

On land, calvary and large automotive or tank warfare is generally avoided, but the Vuldrok have at times fielded some heavily-armored, fire-spewing and missile-launching

tanks, named *Draka*. There is no standard model tank, and only the more powerful thanes have the resources to produce them. On Leminkainen and Fingisvold, some thanes are adept at naval construction; their boats are generally fast-moving light cruisers, designed for swift raids.

Generally, poets and bards accompany all Vuldrok forces, from the great warlord armies to small marauding groups. Their task is to prepare the warriors by inciting ancient oaths of bravery to the gods and the promise of great renown in life or death. Warfare is highly ritualized, and death in battle is the highest goal a warrior can achieve, where the slain spirit joins with the gods. The greatest warriors become transformed at death into the Shield Wall, the bodyguards of the warrior god Fyr Kurmda, who will lead the worthy into battle at Leyagh-Mekdhest, the Day of Doom. Death in warfare, therefore, is preferable to lingering into old age, a burden on one's relatives, for honor is all that is remembered of one in this life. To be named in one of the great warrior sagas is accounted a fitting end to a life well spent, where living descendants can drink to one's name.

Weapons

The Vuldrok possess many of the same weapons found throughout the Known Worlds, but some rare weapons operate on the unique principles of runecasting. (See Appendix: Runecasting.)

The scaly hides of the Fire-Drakes of Frost produce scale, chain and plate armors, but these suits are lighter than their metal counterparts, acting more like lightweight, high-tech plastics. This armor is expensive — sometimes as much as triple the normal cost — and while powerful thanes and their bodyguards often have suits, average warriors must pay vast sums for them, sometimes borrowing far beyond their means.

An individual Vuldrok's personal weapons are his most prized possessions. They often give names to their weapons: Doom Bringer, Bone Cleaver, Bloodbane, or Widow Maker are common sword names. Weapon names and their mythical attributes fill their sagas. The great mythological sword Frostgram is believed to await the hand of the next great Vuldrok conqueror. Vitki can shape Soul Shards or Philosophers Stones into swords or shields. The sword of King Froljir the Ill-Fated, Rygolak, is rumored to be such a device; some say the warlords of Frost still wield it.

Berserkers

Wordun, the god of shifters, figures prominently into the Vuldrok battle culture. His priests and priestesses provide animal-skin shirts to warriors, enchanted by magical rituals, which merge the qualities of the animal with the warrior (see *Theurgy*, below).

Berserkers are chosen from among seasoned warriors and raiders; battle experience and a passionate personality are preconditions for membership. Both men and women



can join. Berserkers who drink Tulac (see below) can enter a frenzied state whereby they ignore the pain of wounds. Generally, Tulac is a monopoly given only to berserkers and the more powerful warlords and thanes, but sometimes other warriors manage to obtain a supply.

Fheykrigs

Warriors dedicated to the goddess Dafar, virgin guardian of the sacred hunt, Fheykrigs are almost always women. They fight alongside men, but usually in separate companies, except in the case of smaller raiding parties. A Fheykrig dedicates her life to Dafar for a number of years, sworn in oath, after which she is free to settle and marry or pursue war as a captain among the Vuldrok Star-Nation.

Women can rise to thaneships, but usually establish territories of their own (on Frost and Raven, the eldest child, daughter or son, inherits lands after the death of the landed parent). Not all women raiders join the Fheykrigs, and the elder shamans bemoan this fact, saying the old ways are falling, and strict adherence to discipline in society is sadly lacking.

Generally, all female raider-warriors are called Fheykrigs, whether they follow Dafar or not. The Lakol call them *Peta Winan*, "Fire Women," devotees of the Star Wind Power (*Wichapi Ahtah*), and the Zetol say they are possessed of the spirit of Erzulie Fire Maiden. The Skey women fight in equal proportion to their men; it is up to the old to look after the children if a Skey settlement is attacked. The Fheykrigs hold political power on Fingisvold; the current warlord of the planet, Amara, hails from their ranks.

Male followers of various trickster gods sometimes attempt to join this sisterhood in attempts to be contrary, as transgressing all boundaries, including gender, is a high ideal. Only a very few have been accepted, but they have become popular figures of myth tales, such as Dadar Yogulm's cross-dressing adventure among the Caliphate, where he joined the Caliph's harem and boldly fought his way out of the palace upon discovery of his true gender.

Gods & Religion

*In grave council the great gods gathered
Where the wyrd of men were weighed in balance
The spirit speaker Sican swore oaths to the seated ones,
"Man lives under doom from which none can deliver him
For even you gods are held fast by fierce fetters of fate,
Driven by destiny's wheel to death and destruction
So it is written, so our wyrd will it."*

— "The Lay of Kurmda," *Manjafnaer Edda*

Several belief systems merged to create Erdgheist, the religious system which predominates on the Vuldrok worlds. Elements originating from earlier Urth beliefs (especially among the Lakol, Zetol and Hoftsla peoples) and the Chil-

dren of Zuran intermingled, but the religion known as Gjarti, founded by Edgar Vollmak in the 27th century, became the main source from which Erdgheist sprang. (See the **Fading Suns Players Companion** for more information on the Gjarti religion.) Many of the early communities on Wolf's Lament and Raven were farming utopias that practiced Gjarti.

Due to the sheer variety of spirits and spirit-worshipers found on each world, and the numerous guises the gods wear in different societies and places, it is only possible to speak of Vuldrok religion in general terms; details differ by region. On the whole, Gjarti beliefs shine through Erdgheist, which is loosely divided into three schools. Each school has its adherents, but only the most devout adepts study them all. Below are listed the qualities of each school.

Vanlig, or Maka

Like folk Gjarti, the Vanlig path teaches cures and herblore, and is followed by doctors, animal and plant specialists, hunters and gifted villagers. It is a folk tradition, although some priests hail strictly from this line (especially from the Zetol nation). At the upper end of the teachings, the adepts learn the mastery of plant and animal totems. Vanlig holds that the gods and spirits are real, and each person's fate is meted out at birth. However, freedom in a life dominated by fate is the highest virtue, for defying fate with free action is courageous. Adepts learn about household and ancestral gods, and practice weather divination through the reading of supernatural signs found in nature.

Skyje, or Anpo Path

Unlike Vanlig, Skyje seeks communion with gods more than spirits, and is concerned with more universal ideas than regional concerns like crop success or auspicious weddings. Skyje path followers usually seek power, fame, glory or simple success in life by following the Erdgeist pantheon of deities. Individuals usually place special emphasis on one god, whose ways they follow above all others, although respect for other gods' purviews is still held.

Fates control the affairs of men and gods, but a shaman can bridge the gap separating the gods and spirits from men to bring aid back to the earthly plane. In return, there is a sacrifice or acknowledgment demanded by the mother and father spirits to placate cheated fate. Advanced Skyje adepts learn the secrets of summoning and communion with spirits in dreams.

Pejuta, or Steora

Acknowledged as the highest yet most difficult shaman's path, Pejuta followers believe all reality is an illusion of interconnected yet ever-changing energies. Compassion allows the shaman to connect with and aid other beings. Pejutans must muster the trinity concept of emptiness, separateness and mingling. Even the gods are illusions, and ultimate re-



ality cannot be known, only experienced. Reincarnation, escape from the great axis of recurring life, liberation from fate or wyrd, and release from the duality of being are possible, but the road to destiny mastery is not easy.

High-level practitioners of the Pejuta path renounce war, and even eventually renounce the Pejuta path itself. A Pejuta shaman usually opts to join a hermitage or retreat, for mastery of Pejuta's abstract concepts is hard when suffering distraction. Upon mastery, she may return to society in any role, although most desire to remain in contemplative retreat. Some do become warriors, farmers and tradesmen. Pejuta shamans do not give out their secrets, but teach them only to small groups of select adepts.

Modig/Lofan

The concept of Modig/Lofan is central to understanding Vuldrok beliefs as regards the sexes. Modig and Lofan are the male and female energies of the universe, respectively, and came into being when the First Power (*Elteorwe*) created the Second Power (*Wegan*), which merged its essence with the First Power, producing the Third Power, or Modig/Lofan energy, which gave birth to all things. No one element is pure Modig or Lofan, but always a varying mixture of the two components. Both powers form a balance which is to be respected. The ricu, or creative energies inherit in all

peoples (and some argue, things), is a mixture of Modig and Lofan.

It is said among the Vuldrok that their society is slightly unbalanced toward Modig. This began hundreds of years ago when their ancestors began assailing distant worlds in war. Modig energy is swift, active, and moves away from the sacred circle of the community but eventually returns to it, enriching the community with new energies. Lofan energy is centralized, appearing passive but with a greater and deeper network of connections than Modig energy. It is often symbolized as a circle with web strands leading outward. The men adventure on distant worlds while the women control the communal life, although the men return with legends to thrill the women.

Since both powers are equally respected, both sexes are, in theory, equal in status before the law. Women do become warriors, warlords and lawspeakers, but in all these arenas men are slightly in the majority. The women say that the Modig/Lofan balance will eventually correct itself, and favor the female energies for six hundred years, before the culture becomes harmonized. They say that the signs of this are approaching, and some men agree that this must be so, for one energy can only be dominant but so long before it damages society.





Pantheon

The Vuldrok pantheon of gods in Erdgeist originated on Frost and Raven, but gathered elements from neighboring worlds. Akin to the earlier Gjarti religion, Erdgeist recognizes numerous gods and spirits. The gods are personifications of spiritual powers, but all gods are mystically linked with the One God, the creator, beyond dualities and both the negation and source of all things. This universal principle is variously named Imana, Wu Chi, Elteorwe, Almitiga or Wanan Tanka. Each Vuldrok world has many gods particular to it; seen as a whole, the religion is a shifting pantheon of spirit powers.

This adaptive religion permeates the Vuldrok culture, and some worshippers can be quite sophisticated in philosophical beliefs, although the Kurgan Caliphate and Universal Church think they practice a simplistic paganism akin to demon worship. The Vuldrok religion does recognize demons (*Deofol* or *Nithelm*), but they are hostile forces, intent on causing ill to men and lead by the spirit thanes Earmscapa and Scyldig (and some say Satrar, or Sathra). Only a fool or evil man would succor such dark powers.

The Lakol peoples, who call upon natural powers for aid, see the forms of the gods as manifestations of sentient beings' desires and willpower. Higher energies cloak themselves in raiments which ignorant humans can understand.

The Zetol and Lakol gods and spirits began shaping Vuldrok beliefs after 4400. From them came a notion of controlling and appeasing the powers that watch over human lives. Sacrifices were made to the spirits, and the shamanistic aspects of Vuldrok culture were strengthened. The Gjarti impact on the religion introduced the practice of plant and animal sympathy and appeasement.

As tolerant as Vuldrok are to the local ways of others, friction does occasionally occur between various god worshippers. Each nation has a slightly different interpretation of what the gods and powers are, agreeing only in the broader sense that they are manifestations of world energy, itself a manifestation of a higher universal energy.

Vuldrok religion has proven resilient to both Universal Church and Caliphate theology, with some exceptions. In the 4500's, a form of Zebulon's teachings arrived with Kurgan and Known Worlds slaves and merged with several marginalized colonies of existing believers to challenge Vuldrok religion. Fevered followers, whipped up by the oratory of Brodhun the Firespeaker, a converted Vuldrok thane, desecrated the holy places and temples of the gods and spirits on Frost and Raven. Armed bands of Zebulonites and Erdgeist followers came to blows, and the matter was brought before the Althing on Raven.

Tharbad the Wise, a Lawgiver famous for his tolerant decisions and compromises, agreed to settle the dispute if

all parties would follow his counsel. They concurred. After a day of deep meditation beneath the sacred yew tree Yggdril, he came to an answer. "Kill the thralls of Zebulon," Tharbad said, "for there will be no peace in our lands until we do."

As the words left his lips the killing began; great slaughter fell onto the Zebulonites. Some renounced their ways and spared their lives, but most fell beneath the fury of the old believers. The slaughter spread to Frost, and the tide of Zebulon's gospel was turned back. Luckily, the zeal of the Vuldrok did not reach Hargard, and a small Zebulonite township on Frost, famous for their healers and low-key approach to religion, was spared. Since Caliphate and Known Worlds priests preach different schools of Zebulon's teachings, the Vuldrok become confused as to his message and nature, and believe his followers are crafty liars, producing whatever theological arguments they need to win their way.

Below is a list of some of the most universally recognized spirits and gods found throughout Vuldrok culture.

Kurmda — God of Battle

Fyr Kurmda, or simply Kurmda, is the god of battle. He is usually depicted as an old man with a great axe accompanied by great wolves, whose alpha leader is Sunkmu, the mysterious link between the animal and human worlds who teaches men the tongues of nature. Kurmda gives power to the brave, and his strength blesses weapons and raises courage. Surprisingly, he is also associated with the arts of healing and charity, and he often walks about the world of men in disguise, testing those he encounters. Kurmda is the war thane of the Vuldrok gods; his place of power is on Raven. In some legends, Vinnspara, goddess of healing, is his wife, while some say the spirit of Raven (a form of Gjarti) is his wife.

The war god's cult is strongest on Frost and Wolf's Lament, where the great thanes promote it as a means of unifying the people, and is least popular on Fingisvold, where (except for the war college) the people hold instead to Wordun, god of shifters, stating that he is the original god of battle. They believe Kurmda's worship is a political ploy used by warlords to extend their power; they say Kurmda was originally a minor weapon spirit inflated by propaganda. The followers of Wordun and Kurmda have come to blows on occasion, and seven of Kurmda's priests were slaughtered recently by a band of enraged berserkers on Fingisvold.

Gwelkarga — Goddess of Destruction

An echo of Kali the destroyer, the cult of Gwelkarga originated on Hargard after the Vuldrok had contact with the native neo-Hindu culture. Gwelkarga is a female deity, part trickster, who stirs up strife to keep the Vuldrok strong. She is depicted as riding a great bear and throws the seeds of destruction into fertile ground. Gwelkarga also is a goddess of balance, and she gives proverb-wisdom and mystical insight to the weak to balance society against an overly-





powerful warrior caste. She is also a protector of orphans and the old.

Gwelkarga is dark in appearance, with molten eyes. She is accompanied by the harpist Fylgja, a female deity who can summon the spirits of the living and the dead with her enchanting music. Accepted among the Zetol, Drenjar, Rekgold and Maghtaw Nations, Gwelkarga's worship is resisted by the Skey and Lakol peoples as being too divisive.

Wakinyan — The Thunder Power

The Thunder Power, contacted through sacred ceremonies by the Lakol people, grants a shaman aid. Wakinyan is the source of willpower and *wyrd* or *ricu*, the mystic will energy which fuels the lifepower of each soul, and without which a spirit can no longer hold to a body. At each being's birth, Wakinyan apportions out that person's *wyrd* (although some believe their own pastlife actions determine this allotment). However, this birthgift is not final, for petitions to Wakinyan can provide more, or help focus a shaman's use of it. Besides aiding shamans, Wakinyan is also a god of fortune of luck, and is called upon by craftsmen and artisans who wished to produce great works.

Wakinyan's worship has spread throughout all the Vuldrok nations, and in some regions is personified as a lightning-wielding god, also named Scaef-Thrar. Swords and weapons blessed with the runes of Thrar are numerous. The Lakol do not personify Wakinyan the way the other Vuldrok do. Early Lakol resistance to the Drenjar hegemony was primarily over spiritual matters, until years of meetings between their holy men and women settled some differences. Among some Lakol (such as the Ashiwey, who dwell in settled communities like Itiawana on Wolf's Lament) the powers and gods take on personified depictions in their artwork.

Marassa — Guardians of Passage

The Twins, male and female, usually depicted in a dance of embracing. The Marassa come from the Zetol Nation, and they are the gateway to the Beyond. They are traditionally the guardians of boundaries, jumpgates and burial places, and they are also associated with riches and good journeys. The Vuldrok offer sacrifices to them before raiding, extending one's land, or burial. Conversely, they are also birth gods and guardians of the home. The Marassa hold the bridge between the spirits and gods and the One God, and are sometimes associated with notions of fate. They are depicted dancing with a jumpgate between them.

Although the worship of Satrar (Sathra) is shunned by the superstitious Vuldrok (a tradition going back to the wars with the Sathra-worshipping Rweg), the Marassa still retain an association with the "travel-trance" or "passage joy" that surely comes from memories of the Sathra Effect, and are said to sometimes gift it to followers who complete arduous spiritual quests. (Nonetheless, see Unter, below.)

Wisterlia — Goddess of Winter

The goddess of winter and weapons, she is the daughter of Kurmda. Her hair is long and white and she holds the famed blasteraxe, *Sceocca*, which screams when it drinks the blood of a foe. Wisterlia is also the goddess of Frost, virtue, smiths and technology. Oaths made to her are sacred, and the protection of the blind and crippled are in her care. The Maghtaw hold that she gave precious secret knowledge to their founders.

Yavild the Lucky

The son of Kurmda, Yavild took to raiding the stars. Often masquerading as a merchant or warrior, Yavild is a sort of trickster who lies, brags and conjures to get what he wants. He even disguised himself as an old grandmother to get to a young woman who caught his fancy. Beloved of raiders and merchants, his temples are widespread. Usually depicted as a young man with a gleam in his eye, accompanied by his dog companion, Ulf, tales about him abound in Vuldrok space. He seems to have originated among some of the pirate republics in Zetol territory as a response against growing Drenjar power. Many of his earliest escapades seem to be against overly proud Drenjar thanes and gods, and he became a symbol of cultural resistance for the Zetol, and later the Lakol, where he is known as Yume. So strong was his reputation that the Drenjar adopted him, although at first unwillingly. They still mistrust him, and he is more malevolent in their eyes than among the other nations.

Oaths taken to Yavild are serious affairs — to break one's word to a trickster usually brings bad luck. A rich looking, mustachioed figure, he is usually depicted enjoying himself with wine, women and song. Yavild is also a shapeshifter, from which grew the Vuldrok custom of feeding stray dogs "Yavild's meals," for any of them could be Yavild himself.

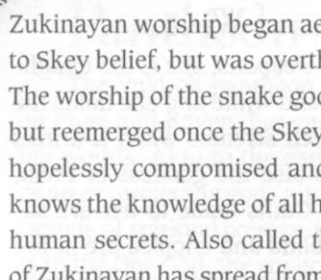
Ultasht — Goddess of Love

Goddess of love and fertility, Ultasht is depicted as a young lady in flowing robes. She sends the fever of enticement, which causes women and men to fall madly in love. She takes many paramours but renews her virginity nightly, so that every lover is her first. Ultasht watches after pregnant women, crops and female animals. Her companion is her husband/brother Thul, a wise farmer carrying books, who is the protector of dreams and farmers. He adds balance. Ultasht loves him dearly, but is fated to ever betray and reunite with him. Thul is patient and forgiving, but some say he has a mistress, Takal of the Water Spirits.

Zukinayan — Serpent God of Lore

The Skey serpent god of knowledge, guardian of the Universe Tree. Zukinayan possesses the power of granting followers the Clan Mind without the aid of the Muazi from Sky Tear. Hence, the Skey were the first Vuldrok warriors to attack in a group-conscious, making them formidable foes.





Zukinayan worship began aeons ago on old Urth, according to Skey belief, but was overthrown by the Younger Nations. The worship of the snake god went underground for a time, but reemerged once the Skey left Urth, a world they saw as hopelessly compromised and spiritually fallen. Zukinayan knows the knowledge of all healing herbs, mathematics and human secrets. Also called the Child of Sirius, the worship of Zukinayan has spread from the Skey, but the other Vuldrok reduce Zukinayan to one attribute (knowledge), while the Skey maintain that the serpent spirit is the bridge one must cross to get to all understanding.

Gon — Spirit of the Vortex

Gon, Spirit of the Vortex and solar winds, is worshiped among the raiding fleets and merchant princes. Depicted as a laughing, powerful god riding the great starship *Skhelmgworm*, Gon is a force of nature, at turns helpful or terrifying. Gon's worship began among the Drenjar raiders as a personification of the solar winds, and the early space marauders swore that sacrifices to him brought good luck. Gon was swiftly adapted by the other Vuldrok nations, and Gon's center of worship moved from Frost to Raven. Some raiders pledge themselves solely to him, and in return (they say) Gon sends them visions of riches and their location. Temples to Gon were set up as far away as the Caliphate worlds, and his worship was once as great as all the other deities together.

Egla — Voice of the Void

So mysterious is Egla that there is no depiction of the entity, although some state she is the daughter of the elder gods who ruled before this universe was born. Egla alone seems to predate most of the Vuldrok spirits and gods, and some think her worship was begun by the Rweng; others equate her with an offshoot of the Sathra religion. Even the Skey whisper that the Voice of the Void is not a natural power. Egla's priests and priestesses often dwell in waste places, and are considered mad. Prophecies given by them often make no sense while others are dead accurate. Egla's voice is strongest in space, coming from lightless regions. Many fear Egla, although some bargain with the Voice. The Lakol hold that Egla balances the Powers by being what they are not.

Unter — Chief of the Gates

Unter is the guardian and chief of the jumpgates, placed there by Marassa, the Twins. Some say Unter is their son. Depicted as a giant wrapped in furs, Unter holds aloft *Khad*, the Gun of Death, while his right hand is open in parley. Unter surrendered his left eye to gain knowledge of the star lanes from Egla, and he utters prophecies. His priests are most often consulted about the future, although certain Zetol say this province belongs to the Twins alone. There is a leg-

end that Unter guards the gates from certain hostile spirits, one of which is destined to slay him, unless Kurmda reaches him with the Seal of Souls in time. Unter's symbol contains two interlocking circles surrounding a single eye, and is often placed on spaceships to avoid misfortune, and is commonly seen on starship Sathra dampers.

Unter guards against the influence of Satrar (Sathra), who is personified in Vuldrok lore as a greater power than Egla, but even more mysterious. Satrar is inimicable to humankind, luring pilots by trance to dark routes where their souls can be devoured by demons. Some claim that Unter stole the power of travel-trance from Satrar, and gave it to the Twins to protect.

Others

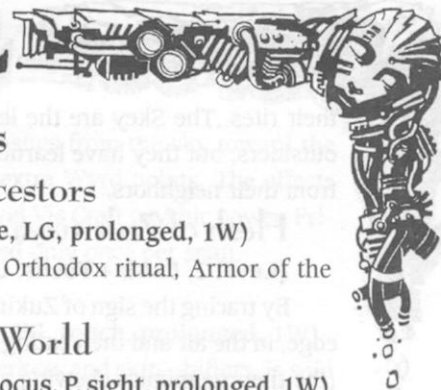
The Universal Mother — or Gjarti — remains rooted in Erdgeist, although often in the background, and each world is symbolized by a female deity. Erdgeist claims that the Universal Mother herself was created from the Modig/Lofan energy. Vuldrok priests do not believe that gender is applicable to a deity or power created before Modig/Lofan, but some Drenjar refer to the First Power, Elteorwe, as male. By all accounts the Universal Mother is more approachable than the First Power, but her planetary representatives are closer still.

Tulac, Sacred Food of the Gods

The shaman-priests of Gwelkarga, the goddess of destruction and balance, hold the mushroom Reoc sacred. When administered, the fungus causes a warrior to become berserk for six hours. This cult is a remnant of a much larger soma cult, found at one time throughout Second Republic space. Reoc's effects (it is usually blended into a drink) produce visions, poetic inspiration, supreme confidence and a sense of immortality. The Sons of Gwelkarga zealously guard the growing areas of the intoxicating fungus, believed to be beneath the great mountains on Wolf's Lament.

Shamans from the Vuldrok worlds have peacefully traded with the Muazi of Sky Tear for small portions of their fungal mass. Mixed with the sacred Reoc mushroom, it creates Tulac. Drinking Tulac from a ceremonial bowl creates a group berserker consciousness among warriors. Beginning around 4700, these group-berserkers have proven the most formidable part of the Vuldrok military, as 10 warriors, united by a single will, can fight to the death against forces four times their number. Berserk Vuldrok are greatly feared among Caliphate and Known World soldiery, for they are impervious to pain and brave to the point of recklessness, disregarding life and limb in the pursuit of holy battle.





Erdgheist Theurgy

Descended from (and still complementary to) Gjarti and earlier syncretic belief-systems (including Zuranity, Caribbean and revived paganism), Erdgheist shares many of the Gjarti rites. The main set of rites a theurge calls upon depends upon his Erdgheist path:

- Vanlig Path followers learn Folk Gjarti rites.
- Skyje Path followers learn Contemplative Gjarti rites.
- Pejuta Path followers learn Compassionate Gjarti rites (which are the same as those for Sanctuary Aeon).

Details on these rites can be found in **Fading Suns Players Companion**. In addition, instead of Hubris, Erdgeist theurges can suffer from the Gjarti Antipathy given in that book.

In addition to these Gjartin rites, various Vuldrok shamans and priests have created or discovered unique rites sacred to their own peoples. Some of these are listed below, divided by nation. Generally, the Drenjar, Maghtaw and Rekgold worship the same core gods and spirits, with a smattering of Lakol and Zetol spirits thrown in. The Zetol recognize many spirits and powers not found among the Drenjar, Rekgold and Maghtaw, and the Lakol even more so. The Skey hold the most fiercely to their ancestral spirits, but they are the newest assimilation into the Vuldrok nation and their spirits are not well-known outside of their territories. However, since Vuldrok culture cross-pollinates across nations, a Lakol practitioner can usually learn Zetol rites, or a Drenjar priest can pick up rites from the Maghtaw.

Drenjar Rituals

Strength of the Ettins

(Level 3, Passion + Vigor, LG, temporary, 1W)

This rite, calling upon the power of the mysterious giants said to reside in Raven's forests, adds one plus victory points x2 to the caster's Strength, allowing him to exceed the racial maximum for that trait. For instance, if a caster with a Strength of 3 rolled four victory points on the casting of this rite, his Strength is then 12. This rite may be extended for an additional 10 turns at the cost of one Wyrd point, to a maximum of one hour. If the rite was successful, the priest must later sacrifice wine in the name of the Ettins.

Hero Shield

(Level 6, Wits or Faith + Vigor, LG, prolonged, 1W)

Acts like the sixth level FarHand psychic power, FarWall.

Kurmda's Hammer

(Level 8, Passion + Impress, L, sensory, 1W)

This rite summons the Hammer of Kurmda, directed at a particular target. The target suffers 10 dice of damage plus one per victory point from an ethereal hammer composed of crackling energy (energy shields can defend against this). The hammer disappears after it has struck its target.

Lakol Rituals

Shield of the Ancestors

(Level 3, Faith + Dodge, LG, prolonged, 1W)

Acts like the third level Orthodox ritual, Armor of the Pancreator.

See the Invisible World

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

Acts like the forth level Eskatonic ritual, Second Sight.

Soul Recovery

(Level 8, Wits + Impress or Knavery, LGP, sensory, 1W)

Acts like the eight level Orthodox ritual, Exorcism.

Zetol Rituals

Speak to the Dead

(Level 6, Faith + Focus, LGP, temporary, 1W)

The theurge, after marking a recently dead body with a series of magical symbols, can summon the body's spirit back to answer one question. One or two successes mean that the theurge must first bargain with the apparition (perhaps agreeing to convey a message to the dead's loved ones, or bury the body with proper rites, or even avenge the death) before it reveals an answer. The spirit can only answer questions that it could just before it died, from its own memory. In this way, it can tell how it died, or who the secret traitor in the thane's court is. However, a critical on the rite roll means the spirit can prophecy, similar to the 7th level psychic Omen power, Shadows to Come.

Invisible Highway

(Level 9, Wits + Focus, LG, instant, 2W)

The theurge can instantly walk "the Invisible Highway" between two physical places within a range of one kilometer of each other — basically, she can teleport. The destination point must be well-known, or seen clearly (through a video or holoivid transmission, or a telepathic projection). The distance can be increased as with a psychic power, by spending more Wyrd.

Only those items immediately upon the theurge's person may accompany her; bulky backpacks or large items cost one Wyrd to bring. The theurge can also take others with her by spending one Wyrd per person. Only willing targets may be brought along.

To initiate the rite, the theurge usually walks through a nearby obstacle — a tree, rock, wall, etc. — disappearing into it and appearing from another obstacle at the destination point.

This rite may only be used once per week.

Skey Rituals

The Skey rites are the hardest to learn; an outsider must roll Faith + Vigor to successfully gain knowledge of one of



their rites. The Skey are the least open Vuldrok culture to outsiders, but they have learned many Gjarti-inspired rites from their neighbors.

Flesh of Zukinayan

(Level 2, Faith + Focus, GP, 1W)

By tracing the sign of Zukinayan, the Serpent of Knowledge, in the air and then eating of its invisible wisdom flesh (the theurge mimics chewing and swallowing, although he can also use any actual food to represent Zukinayan), the theurge gains hidden lore. This rite acts like the second level Eskatonic rite, Divine Revelation.

Darts of the Pa' Unkta

(Level 6, Passion + Shoot, LG, sight, 1W)

The theurge summons mystical and venomous darts from the sacred tree of 23 mysteries, Pa'Unkta, and directs them at a target. One dart is summoned per victory point, but they are all thrown at once. Each dart does five dice of damage; if this damage penetrates armor and inflicts at least one wound on the target, its poison enters his system. The darts ignore energy shields.

To resist the poison's hallucinogenic effect, the target rolls Endurance + Stoic Mind. If he succeeds, he suffers mild visual hallucinations, such as sparkling lights and patches of light and dark; these cause a -4 penalty to any Perception or Shoot rolls. If he fails, he falls into a trance state where he is said to enter the spiritual realm of the Skey gods, which can be frightening and dangerous to the unenlightened. Phantasms and fearsome entities harass and haunt him; he must roll Faith or Ego + Stoic Mind or Focus to withstand this haunting. If he succeeds, he suffers no adverse affects once the drug wears off; if he fails, he has a temporary phobia, and must make Passion + Focus or Stoic Mind rolls for the following week to perform any task requiring courage or resolve (such as combat, or even negotiating with an imposing figure like a noble or thane).

Skey theurges sometimes use these darts to send themselves into trance states into the spiritual realm to recover lost knowledge. If the shaman withstands the haunting (and the damage from the darts!), he gains the effects of the sixth level Omen psychic power, Shadows Gone By (his successes on the withstanding roll are applied here).

Clan Mind

(Level 8, Extrovert + Empathy, LGP, sensory, prolonged, 1W)

Acts like the eighth level Brother Battle rite, Oath of the Shieldmates.

Maghtaw Rituals

Hands of Gottun

(Level 3, Tech + Vigor, LG, prolonged, 1W)

The theurge channels the Hands of Gottun, a crafts god,

through her own hands. She can repair tech without the need for tools — her fingers can unscrew even flush-tight screws, her fist can hammer nails, and she can even perform complicated high technology tasks, like adjusting a stardrive flux cache to micrometer exactness without requiring the proper gauge. The theurge could even pick locks with this rite. However, she must still make a Tech Redemption skill roll to successfully perform these tasks; this rite simply removes the need for expensive or unavailable tools.

A fourth level version of this rite allows the theurge to cast it upon a willing person.

Spirit of the Machine

(Level 4, Wits + Focus, LP, 1W)

The theurge can "speak" to a machine or device and thus diagnose malfunctions or learn how to better repair or improve its functioning, and even learn how to use an unfamiliar device. One success allows for a basic evaluation (the fusion drive malfunction is due to insufficient energy flow, the gun barrel has a slight defect, that odd think machine can be turned on by tapping its keyboard. etc.), and successive victory points provide more detail. In addition, victory points gained on the rite's roll can add to Tech Redemption goal rolls in the same manner as complementary skills.

When attempting sustained tasks (such as complicated repairs or inventing technology), victory points on the roll can add to the theurge's total needed to complete the task, but only one such attempt can be made per task, although if it is a particularly time-consuming task, the gamemaster may allow another roll after sufficient time has passed (this could be a week or a month, depending on the project).

Note: This rite cannot be used on Anunnaki tech.

Vizlik's Song

(Level 7, Calm + Focus, LPG, touch, instant, 1W)

Vizlik is a spirit embodying boundless energy. It is said that his song resonates throughout the universe, sustaining the fields of energy that bind things together: magnetism, gravity and the weak and strong forces. Should he stop singing, entropy would overcome the physical world.

With this rite, a theurge can attune himself to hear and feel the vibrations of Vizlik's song, using the emanating waves of energy to fuel starships, recharge fusion cels or generators, or propel primitive steam driven or fossilized fuel devices (except wind-driven tech).

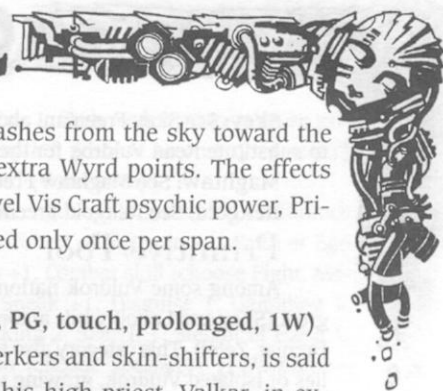
This rite acts like the seventh level Vis Craft psychic power, Vis Vortex, and requires the same Wyrd costs.

Rekgold Rituals

Barter Tongue

(Level 5, Wits + Charm, LG, sensory, one act, 1W)

This rite acts like the fifth level Orthodox rite, Pulpit's Gift, except that it is driven more by commerce than faith.



Svarbad's Eye

(Level 4, Perception + Inquiry, LPG, temporary, 1W)

The theurge can place a correct monetary or barter value on any object, place or even person (if he is selling services or is a slave). Svarbad's Eye can instantly sweep over entire areas, such as a market (1 kilometer radius maximum distance), in search of a particular item (even stolen items). If the item is found, the theurge has a mental sense of its location, but will not recognize the booth or stall visually; he will simply know where to go and when he has found it. Once the duration expires, he can still find the spot, but will not sense if the item has been moved to another location.

God Rites

The following rituals can only be cast by shamans or priests devoted to the particular god or goddess named in the spell description.

Kurmda's Rage

(Level 6, Faith + Vigor, LG, instant, 1W)

Acts like the sixth level Brother Battle rite, Smiting Hand.

Wakinyan's Bolts

(Level 9, Faith + Focus, P, instant, 0W)

Through prayer to the Thunder Power, the theurge begs a boon of Wakinyan's special power to apportion soul energy. If successful, a mystical lightning bolt (visible only to

psychic or theurgic sight) flashes from the sky toward the theurge, flooding him with extra Wyrd points. The effects are like those of the ninth level Vis Craft psychic power, Primal Vis. This rite may be used only once per span.

Wordun's Shirt

(Level 9, Faith + Vigor, PG, touch, prolonged, 1W)

Wordun, the god of berserkers and skin-shifters, is said to have given this secret to his high priest, Valkar, in exchange for the priest's arm. The theurge must also know the eighth level Folk Gjarti rite, Strength of the Animal Powers. With the Wordun's Shirt rite, the theurge can permanently endow certain animal skins or shirts with the effects of the Strength of the Animal Powers rite (a sort of Saint's Lore relic for pagans). The effects of an entire skin or shirt are somewhat different from the fangs or claws mentioned for that rite. The gamemaster can come up with his own rules, but some suggestions are given here:

Animal	Effects	Curse
Wolf	+2 Endurance, +1 Survival	Wary (-2 Extrovert)
Cat	+2 Dexterity, +1 Sneak	Surly (-2 Calm)
Bear	+2 Strength, +1 Fight	Hot-headed (-2 Calm)
Hawk	+2 Perception, +1 Shoot	Haughty (-2 Extrovert)
Fire-Drake	+2 Wits, +1 Vigor	Slothful (-2 Passion)

These attributes stay with the skin-shirt, although after the theurge dies, they may slowly fade.

Vuldrok Character Creation

Upbringing

A Vuldrok's parentage determines her early upbringing — the child of a thane learns different lifeskills than the children of artisans, warriors or primitive clansmen.

Freeman

The majority of Vuldrok are trained for war from an early age on, as defense from enemies or wild animals is a necessity on all worlds. Even loyal slaves receive such training. Thus, even artisans, farmers and merchants are skilled warriors. (Professional lifeskills are learned in the Apprenticeship stage.)

Drenjar: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Lore (folk or region) 1, Read Vuldrok (2 pts); *Blessing* — Unyielding (+2 Endurance when honor is at stake); *Curse* — Proudful (-2 Calm when insulted)

Lakol: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Etiquette +1, Lore (folk or region) +1, Read Vuldrok (2 pts); *Blessing* — Gracious (+2 Extrovert to guests); *Curse* — Vengeful (-2 Calm when honor impinged, will never forget a slight)

Zetol: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Lore (folk or region) 1, Read Vuldrok (2 pts); *Blessing* — Shrewd (+2 Wits against

fast-talk); *Curse* — Vain (-2 Per when being flattered)

Skey: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Faith +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Impress +1, Vigor +1, Lore (folk or region) +1, Survival 1; *Blessing* — Bold (+2 Passion when acting when others hesitate); *Curse* — Unnerving (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around superstitious people)

Maghtaw: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Tech +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Read Vuldrok (2 pts), Science (choose specialty) 1, Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 1; *Blessing* — Loyal (+2 Passion when following leader); *Curse* — Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers)

Rekgold: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Extrovert +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Lore (citystate) 1, Read Vuldrok (2 pts), Streetwise 1; *Blessing* — Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new); *Curse* — Bluster (-2 Extrovert when recounting deeds)

Parentage of High Regard

The daughter or son of a thane, warlord or extremely wealthy freeman has social opportunities unavailable to most. However, most nations raise their children the same, regardless of status. There are some differences to note, though:

Drenjar: See Drenjar Freeman, above, but change one of the Strength bonuses to Extrovert +1.

Lakol: See Lakol Freeman, above.

Zetol: See Zetol Freeman, above.



Skey: See Skey Freeman, above, but the player has the option to substitute Read Vuldrok for the Survival and Vigor skill levels.

Maghtaw: See Maghtaw Freeman, above.

Rekgold: See Rekgold Freeman, above.

Primitive/Poor

Among some Vuldrok nations, wealth discrepancy is not too great (Skey and Lakol) while among others it can be huge (Rekgold, Drenjar, Zetol). This category also refers to wandering nomadic families or isolated Vuldrok, growing up in remote regions with limited opportunities.

Drenjar: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Vigor +1, Lore (folk or region) 1, Survival 1; *Blessing* — Unyielding (+2 Endurance when honor is at stake); *Curse* — Pridful (-2 Calm when insulted)

Lakol: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Vigor +1, Lore (folk or region) +1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1; *Blessing* — Gracious (+2 Extrovert to guests); *Curse* — Vengeful (-2 Calm when honor impinged, will never forget a slight)

Zetol: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Perception +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Knavery 1, Lore (folk or region) 1, Streetwise or Survival 1; *Blessing* — Bold (+2 Passion while acting when others hesitate); *Curse* — Disrespectful (-2 Extrovert around authority figures)

Skey: See Skey Freeman, above, but substitute Stoic Body 1 for Impress +1.

Maghtaw: Poor Maghtaw share the same upbringing opportunities as others in the nation; there are no primitive Maghtaw.

Rekgold: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Sneak +1, Knavery 1, Lore (citystate) 1, Streetwise 1; *Blessing* — Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new); *Curse* — Greedy (-2 Calm when money involved)

Apprenticeship

Sometime between the ages of 8 and 12, a Vuldrok begins an apprenticeship in a profession in the hopes of rising to fame, fortune or high regard in that field. Most leave their family home to live with their master, but some remain at home during this time.

Artisan: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +1, Primary talent (choose Artisan or Arts specialty) 2, Secondary talent (choose Artisan or Arts specialty) 1, Academia 1, Focus 1, Lore (related to primary talent) 1, Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 1

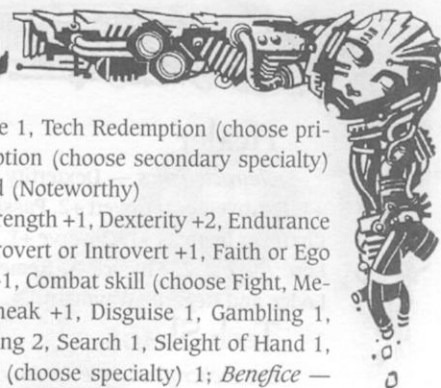
Hunter/Tracker: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Perception +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Primary weapon (choose Melee, Shoot or Archery) +2, Observe +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Beast Lore 1, Search 1, Survival 1, Tracking 2

Merchant: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Extrovert +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +1, Gambling 1, Inquiry 2, Lore (related to main trade) 1, Streetwise 2

Skald/Bard: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Empathy 1, Knavery 1, Lore (sagas) 2, Performance 2, Social (Oratory or Acting) 1

Star Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Melee +1,





Shoot +1, Drive Spacecraft 2, Remedy 1, Spacesuit (2 pts), Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 1

Techcrafter: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Academia 1, Physick or Remedy 1, Science (choose specialty) 1, Spacesuit or Read Urthtech (2 pts), Think Machine 1, Tech Redemption (choose primary specialty) 2, Tech Redemption (choose secondary specialty) 1

Thief: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Dodge +1, Sneak +1, Gambling 1, Knavery 1, Lockpicking 2, Streetwise 2

Warrior/Raider: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1; *Skills* — Fight or Melee +2, Impress +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Social (Leadership) 1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1

Early Career

A Vuldrok does not have to follow the same profession she apprenticed in; she can change fields and learn new lifepaths. Some of the greatest Vuldrok heroes came from such varied backgrounds.

Artisan: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +3, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +1, Primary talent (choose Artisan or Arts specialty) 3, Secondary talent (choose Artisan or Arts specialty) 2, Academia 1, Focus 1, Lore (related to primary talent) 2, Remedy 1, Tech Redemption (choose primary specialty) 2, Tech Redemption (choose secondary specialty) 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Hunter/Tracker: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Primary weapon (choose Melee, Shoot or Archery) +2, Secondary combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +2, Sneak +2, Vigor +1, Beast Lore 1, Search 1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1, Tracking 3; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Merchant: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +1, Extrovert +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +1, Artisan or Arts (choose specialty) 1, Drive (choose craft) 1, Etiquette or Gambling 1, Inquiry or Knavery 2, Lore (related to main trade) 1, Social (Acting, Debate or Oratory) 1, Speak Dialect (2 pts), Streetwise 2; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Skald/Bard: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +2, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Arts (choose specialty) 1, Empathy 1, Etiquette 1, Focus 1, Knavery 1, Lore (sagas) 2, Performance 3, Social (Oratory or Acting) 1, Stoic Mind 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Star Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight or Melee) +1, Shoot +1, Drive Spacecraft 3, Gambling 1, Remedy 1, Science (Astronavigation) 1, Speak Dialect or Spacesuit (2 pts), Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Techcrafter: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Academia 1, Focus 1, Physick or Remedy 1, Science (choose primary specialty) 2, Science (choose secondary specialty) 1, Lore or Read

Urthtech (2 pts), Think Machine 1, Tech Redemption (choose primary specialty) 3, Tech Redemption (choose secondary specialty) 2; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Thief: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +2, Perception +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +2, Dodge +1, Sneak +1, Disguise 1, Gambling 1, Inquiry or Knavery 1, Lockpicking 2, Search 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Streetwise 2, Tech Redemption (choose specialty) 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Noteworthy)

Warrior/Raider: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight or Melee +2, Impress +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Gambling 1, Remedy 2, Ride 1, Social (Leadership) 1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Newblood)

Erdgheist Shaman Upbringing

Shamans share the same Upbringing stage as other Vuldrok (see above). They only begin their shamanic training upon adolescence.

Apprenticeship

A shaman begins training in adolescence, usually in one-to-one relationship with an elder shaman, although he sometimes shares training with several students. Those who undergo this spiritual apprenticeship can later choose to become warriors or join some other profession (they can choose another stage for their Early Career or continue with the priesthood); the reverse, however, is not true — only those who experience this apprenticeship can become shamans. The time and dedication to become a servant of the spirits and Powers favors early apprenticeship. In extremely rare cases, warriors have left the path of battle to master shamanic training, but these cases are so few as to discourage all but the most skilled.

Drenjar: *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight or Melee) +1, Observe +1, Focus 1, Knavery 1, Lore (theology) 1, Remedy 1, Physick 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Stoic Mind 1

Lakol: *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight or Melee) +1, Beast Lore 1, Empathy 1, Focus 2, Lore (theology) 1, Remedy 1, Physick 1, Stoic Mind 1

Zetol: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight or Melee) +1, Alchemy 1, Arts (sigils) 1, Focus 1, Lore (theology) 1, Remedy 1, Physick 1, Stoic Mind 2

Key: See Lakol, above, but substitute Stoic Mind 2 for Empathy 1.

Maghtaw: See *Techcrafter* in the Vuldrok Apprenticeships, above, but substitute Faith +1 for Passion or Calm +1.

Rekgold: See Drenjar, above.

Early Career

Once apprenticeship is complete, the priest leaves his master and goes forth to practice his craft or study it further (sometimes, favored students stay with the same master to learn deeper secrets while actively practicing shamanism). There are many roles fulfilled by priests in Vuldrok society...



Healer

Characteristics — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception or Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +1, Alchemy 1, Empathy 1, Focus 2, Lore (herbs) 2, Physick 3, Remedy 3, Stoic Mind 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Tech Shaman

See *Techcrafter* in the Vuldrok Apprenticeships, above, but Stoic Mind 1 substitutes for Academia 1. *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Temple Shaman

Temples or shrines are usually dedicated to a particular god or spirit of the region. Priests are called upon not only to make prayers and sacrifices to this deity, but to defend the grounds from defilement. Local worshippers come to them for healing, wisdom and worship rites.

Characteristics — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +2, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Academia 1, Artisan or Arts (choose specialty) 1, Focus 2, Lore (theology) 1, Lore (folk or region) 1, Physick 1, Remedy 2, Social (Leadership or Oratory) 1, Stoic Mind 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Depending on the particular god the temple is dedicated to, choose one of the following options:

Kurmda: Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +2

Gwelkarga: Choose a combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +2 or Remedy +2

Wakinyan: Any skill +2

Marassa: Drive (choose craft) 2

Wisterlia: Either a weapon skill (choose Melee or Shoot) +2 or Tech Redemption (choose specialty) +2

Yavild: Choose Charm +2 or Performance or Social (Acting) 2

Ultasht: Choose Charm +2 or Empathy 2

Zukinayan: Choose Lore (choose subject) 2 or Stoic Body 2

Gon: (His temples are usually on starships) Choose Spacesuit (2 pts) or Drive Spacecraft 2

Egla: Stoic Mind 2

Unter: Choose a weapon skill (Melee or Shoot) +2 or Warfare (Gunnery) 2

Urban Shaman

Shamans who reside in cities are often called upon as healers or even lawyers, and sometimes are asked to investigate crime scenes for clues that may mystically identify a criminal.

Characteristics — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +2, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +1, Academia 1, Alchemy 1, Etiquette 1, Focus 2, Inquiry or Knavery 2, Lore (city or cityfolk) 1, Physick 1, Remedy 1, Streetwise 2; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Wanderer

Characteristic — Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +1, Vigor +1, Drive (choose craft) 1, Empathy 1, Focus 2, Lore (people and places seen) 1, Physick 1, Remedy 2, Speak Dialect (2 pts), Survival 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Warrior/Raider

Some shamans serve Vuldrok raiders, performing healings and providing spiritual needs for the warriors. The hardest even join the boarding parties themselves.

Characteristics — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Primary combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +2, Secondary combat skill (choose Dodge, Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Impress +1, Vigor +1, Focus 1, Lore (sagas) 1, Physick 1, Remedy 3, Social (Oratory) 1, Stoic Body 1, Stoic Mind 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Wilderness Shaman

Characteristic — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith +2; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight, Melee or Shoot) +1, Observe +1, Vigor +1, Beast Lore 1, Focus 2, Lore (region) 1, Physick 1, Remedy 2, Stoic Body 1, Stoic Mind 1, Survival 2, Tracking 1; *Benefice* — Lodge and Regard (Wayman)

Extra Stages

Characters continue to practice their professions: Vuldrok shamans are often called upon to aid their people in times of trouble, or partake in the councils of the nation. Warriors and raiders are often called to serve with a powerful raiding fleet or a thane's force. Advancement comes from many factors.

Vuldrok characters use the same Extra Stages as nobles, priests and guildsmembers given in the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook.

Note: The firebirds given with the Worldly Benefits options are used to purchase a characters' starting equipment. Any money left over should be converted to a local Vuldrok currency.

Blessings & Curses

Knack

Blessing

Lucky Weapon (2 pts: +2 goal first attack on new opponent with chosen weapon)

Benefices & Afflictions

Background

Benefices

Spirit Sign (2 pts): The character is believed to have been born under a lucky sign or experienced some omen that he was chosen by a particular god or spirit. The character thus has an easier time getting shamans to teach her, but more is expected of her; if bad luck strikes a group she travels in, they may blame her for angering the gods.

Affliction

Slave/Mindren (1-3 pts): The character is either a captured slave or the child of a slave. Being of the lowest class causes difficulties.

1 = Mindren (parents were slaves)

2 = Slave favored by master/family leader; may even inherit lands or money. This may cause envy among true

3 = Slave

Lodge (1 pts): The character is a member of a lodge, society or brotherhood, and may sit in on its meetings and petition other members for aid. His Regard in society is generally that gained in his lodge. Those loners who don't join lodges aren't necessarily mistrusted, but it is harder for them to gain Regard.

Regard (2-12 pts): A measure of a character's renown among the Vuldrok nations. While Regard is much looser and less-codified than noble, guild or Church rank in the Known Worlds, it is still a substantial thing, for each person is judged approvingly or harshly according to his Regard. In a society filled with nomads and wanderers, one's reputation is often all others have to judge you by.

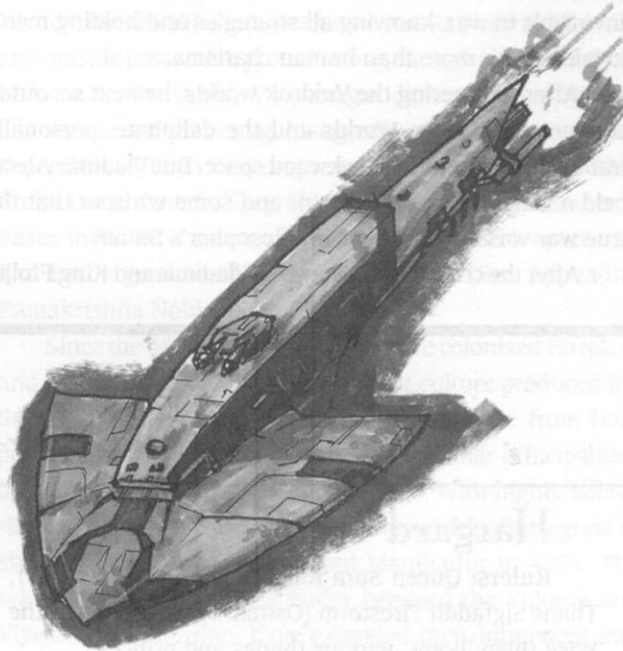
Regard is awarded by consensus at a person's local Althing. Whenever a character's deeds merit enough notice by his fellow lodgemembers, community or particular men and women of high regard, they may be sung before others at the Althing. Someone "nominates" the person, and after his deeds are told, all vote on whether or not they were worthy of note. If enough heads nod or people grunt in agreement, the character rises one level in Regard.

Regard for warriors and shamans is more rigid than for most Vuldrok; titles are important, as are the responsibilities that come with those titles. However, even though the ranks of thane and warlord are considered warriors ranks, it is possible for a shaman or even an artisan to rise to these positions, especially in areas where leaders are elected. Most Vuldrok are rated by their skill in their professions, the thing usually sung most about them in skald songs. Instead of using a rank title for such a person, others speak of him as a "man of cunning," or a "gifted warrior."

Note: Terms like Shieldman, Wayman and Journeyman become Shieldwoman, Waywoman and Journeywoman for females.

	<i>Warrior</i>	<i>Shaman</i>	<i>Ricu (skill)</i>
2 =	Newblood	Wayman	Noteworthy
4 =	Shieldman	Apprentice	Journeyman
6 =	Armsman	Wyrddworker	Gifted
8 =	Jarl	Seer	Cunning
10 =	Thane	Groach	Adept
12 =	Warlord	Godhi	Master

The most widely-used ship for independant raiders or those not supported by a warlord or wealthy thane.



Myrkwyrms captains tend to fly directly at their prey — sometimes even ramming them— and then board with their marines, often joining the boarding parties themselves (leaving the pilot and engineer on board). Most *Myrkwyrms* carry no conventional weapons, instead relying on grapple guns to take their prey. (Vuldrok believe young captains should learn to board the hard way before relying on weaponry.)

Size Rating: 3 (35 meters long, 9 wide, 7 high)

Grade: Lander

Engines: Fast

Shields:

<i>Speed</i>	<i>Left/Right</i>
Full Thrust	0/0
3/4 Thrust	1/1
Half Thrust	1/1
1/4 Thrust	2/2
Full Stop	2/2

Armament: 2 Grapple Guns

Sensors: Radar 4

Crew: 3 (Captain/Navigator, Pilot, Engineer)

Marines: 4 (Up to)

Passengers: 0 (However, passengers can replace the marine compliment)

Cargo: 30 metric tons

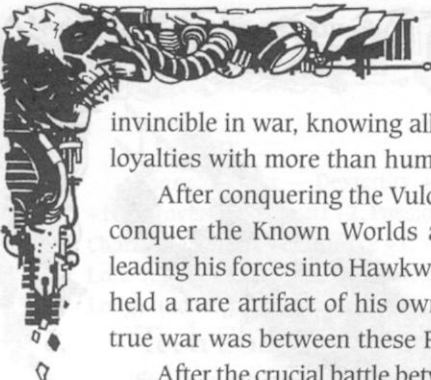
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 45,900 firebirds

Artifact: Kurmda's Helm

Some believe Kurmda's Helm to be a Philosopher's Stone shaped by runecasting into the form of a horned war helmet. Others hold that it was fashioned by the war god Kurmda himself and presented by his priests to King Froljir the Ill-Fated. While wearing it, King Froljir was held to be





invincible in war, knowing all strategies and holding men's loyalties with more than human charisma.

After conquering the Vuldrok worlds, he next set out to conquer the Known Worlds and the Caliphate, personally leading his forces into Hawkwood space. But Vladimir Alecto held a rare artifact of his own, and some whisper that the true war was between these Philosopher's Stones.

After the crucial battle between Vladimir and King Froljir,

Kurmda's Helm vanished. Froljir lost his life on Leminkainen. Some say that Froljir sent it to his daughter in her fight against the Caliphate, while others hold that Vladimir's Philosopher Stone destroyed it. The priests of Kurmda say that the god himself took it back, allowing King Froljir to wear it Twelve Years and a Day. The helm has entered the folklore of the Vuldrok worlds, and awaits discovery by the next Vuldrok unifier.

Hargard

Hargard Traits

Rulers: Queen Sura Ramakrishna (Vijayanagar), Thane Sigfaddir Firestorm (Ostmark), Thane Eldrid the Wise (Jyandhom), various thanes and princes

Cathedrals: Tertha (Neo-Hindu), Tarn (Vuldrok Erdgeist), small Zebulon sects

Agorae: Achihearta (Vijayanagar), Elfhome (Jyandhom)

Garrison: 6

Capitols: Achihearta (Vijayanagar), Elfhome (Jyandhom), various other principalities and smaller thanedoms

Jumps: 3

Adjacent Worlds: Leminkainen (dayside), Khotan (nightside), Abydos (nightside; runes prevent Symbiot ships from easily entering Hargard's jumpgate)

Solar System: Ayodhya (0.401 AU), Fyren (0.853 AU), Hargard (1.56 AU, Hatan), Sigefest (2.783 AU, 2 moons), Vrindavan (Gas-giant; 6.088 AU, 7 moons), Udal (12.32 AU), Aesir (23.57 AU, 2 moons), Diyan Dinè'e (34.87 AU), Jumpgate (48.99 AU)

Tech: 3 (6 in Vijayanagar)

Human Population: 84 Million

Alien Population: 200,000 (most are Obun-Ukari in Vijayanagar, but at least 10,000 Nizdharim settled in the seas)

Resources: Slaves, contraband, weapons, space-ships, ores

Exports: Slaves, weapons, gold

Landscape: Large oceans cover Hargard. Aside from Vijayanagar's tropical and temperate forests, other continents possess large tundra areas with some conifer forests and high, inaccessible mountain ranges. The Vuldrok rule three-quarters of the world, but are broken down into thanedoms and principalities. Most of the Vuldrok are Drenjar, with a smattering of Lakol and other nations.

Hargard (also called "Vuldrok" by House Hawkwood) has long been a staging area for Vuldrok raids into Hawkwood space, and its people have profited greatly from trade the raids have brought. Not all of Hargard belongs to the Vuldrok, however, although many of its non-Vuldrok peoples have fought as mercenaries for certain warlords.

First colonized by settlers originating from Shaprut in the late 2800s, the planet was ruled by the Ramakrishna noble dynasty, which continued to hold economic and political power (albeit senatorial rather than feudal) during the Second Republic era. Rauhina, as the world was initially called, was founded by the twin sister queens Dalia and Siry, and became the successor of the Ramakrishna's unique civilization after Shaprut entered the al-Malik fold and was largely lost to the family.

Rauhina tried to remain independant during the rebellions at the end of the Second Republic, but its position on the jumpweb caused its system to suffer conflicts between the Rogue Worlds and the Second Republic, resulting in the closure of its jumpgate by rebels, who then forcefully colonized portions of the world. By the time the gate opened again, no jumpkeys leading back to the Known Worlds remained on the planet, but the Vuldrok raiders had keys to Rauhina.

It was a testament to Ramakrishna power that the ruling dynasty, with no outside help, resisted the Vuldrok, but the sheer ferocity of the attacks gradually caused the neo-Hindu rulers to abandon the northern hemisphere and half of the southern hemisphere to the invaders, who renamed the world Hargard.

History

Settled by colonists originally from Shaprut, Hargard (then Rauhina) remained in the hands of the Ramakrishna ruling family after the al-Malik inherited Shaprut. A sophisticated civilization, devoted to learning, thrived during the Second Republic. The post-Fall era saw a resurgence of Neo-Hinduism, or Praktri belief (with an emphasis on universal ethical values for society and the individual), which won-



out over the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun in defining the planet's cultural trends. A small Universalist Church sect continued to survive, but it developed along different lines from the Known Worlds Church, which it was now cut off from.

Praktri also evolved, going through a series of changes influenced by many factors, until it reached its latest form, Tertha, around 4670. Tertha recognizes a diversity of schools (the Ten Schools) united by a thread of ultimate wisdom which leads to a bridge between the seen and unseen. Highly speculative and philosophical, but with broad mass support, Tertha recognizes St. Amalthea and St. Hombor as deities. Zebulon himself is one of the Sixteen Great Avatars.

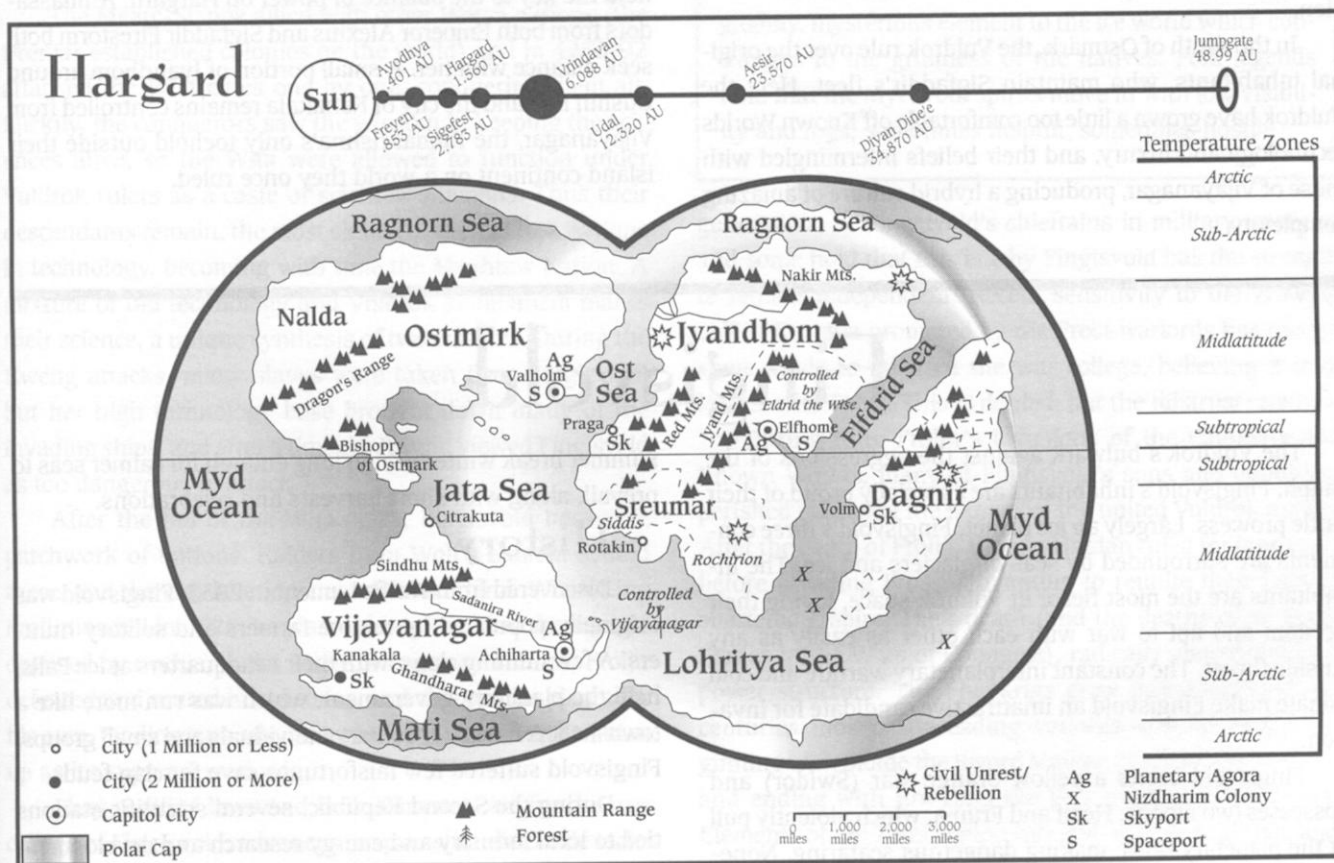
By the late 45th century the Ramakrishna dynasty had retreated before the Vuldrok to the island continent of Vijayanagar, leaving only a toe-hold on the continent of Jyandhom. Vijayanagar remained an island kingdom of civilized culture in a sea of Vuldrok barbarity. The rulers of Vijayanagar eventually allied with various thanes to maintain their independence. This territorial retreat reshaped the culture's philosophical and religious leanings; the old warrior caste was replaced by a larger standing army and social mobility between the castes softened in the face of the outside Vuldrok threat.

Mustered-out Vijayanagar warriors sometimes sign on with Vuldrok warring parties on incursions into the Known

Worlds, but the Vijayanagarans are just as likely to ally with any outside power that proves strong enough to make a show of force on the world. Vijayanagar diplomacy has been to ally with lesser thanes against greater ones, to maintain independence (they were conquered once, in 4541-48 by King Froljir the Ill-Fated). They also have one of the greatest tech bases in Vuldrok space, and many new Vuldrok spacecraft and battle gear come from Vijayanagar. (See Appendix: Ramakrishna Nobles).

Since the 4600's, more Vuldrok have colonized Hargard, and a mixture of Vuldrok-Vijayanagar culture produced the Sreumar Princes, who declared independence from both peoples. With lands in the south, the Sreumar principalities display a curious blend of both cultures. With highly militarized and planned societies, the three principalities grew in size until the Vuldrok destroyed Manihadur in 4901. The remaining states act as a buffer between the Vuldrok and Vijayanagar, and they have extended their influences into many Vuldrok lands and the seaports on Vijayanagar.

Recently, small colonies of the otherworldly, twelve-tentacled Nizdharim settled in Hargard's seas, initially with local permission. However, the various rulers of Hargard became concerned when a strange cult began emerging in coastal ports, where men spoke in whispers of the great Nizdharim god Nidderdak from Beyond the Stars. A few thanes desire to end the menace but others profit from the



rich trade the Nizdharim provide in otherworldly goods, and still welcome them and their star brethren whenever they appear.

Territories

Currently Vijayanagar is under the rule of Queen Sura Ramakrishna. Vijayanagar has put out feelers to Emperor Alexius, but the current queen worries about the power of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. Sura believes that a cultural conquest would destroy the unique civilization Vijayanagar has managed to preserve, and her advisors are divided as to what to do. Some maintain that Alexius would rid the world of the constant barbarian menace, while others state that the Vuldrok are the best safeguard against the intolerant theology of the Known Worlds. Vijayanagar is represented in the Great Althing on Raven; Sura wonders if her people would receive representation in the Emperor's councils.

The northern continent of Ostmark is ruled by the greatthane Sigfaddir Firestorm, long a name of terror through out the Known Worlds. He holds many lesser thanes to him by blood kinship and oaths, and his power is felt across the continent. Sigfaddir's people are mighty warriors who have enriched themselves by plundering the Known Worlds. Already Sigfaddir has begun to prepare an eventual invasion, and Imperial intelligence has singled him out as the most likely Hargard leader to rally his people against any incursion.

In the south of Ostmark, the Vuldrok rule over the original inhabitants, who maintain Sigfaddir's fleet. Here the Vuldrok have grown a little too comfortable off Known Worlds technology and luxury, and their beliefs intermingled with those of Vijayanagar, producing a hybrid culture of amazing complexity.

It is in this area, where the slave trade passes from the Known Worlds into Vuldrok space, that the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun has reemerged. Captured priests began spreading Zebulon's message, and by 4600 there emerged a Bishopry of Ostmark, centered in the south. The current Bishop Roland is also called the "Little Father," or Patriarch of the Faithful. Communication between the Universal Church of the Known Worlds and the Church of Ostmark has been scarce. Not surprisingly, the Ostmark Church has evolved its own ways, but not so much as to be unrecognizable to Universalists, and a reconciliation with the central Church is possible.

The Church of Ostmark (composed of 500,000 souls) is aware that more Sons of Zebulon dwell in the Hawkwyrd worlds beyond, while the Universal Church has heard only the vaguest rumors of Church remnants in Vuldrok space.

The continent of Jyandhom is divided by seven thanes who war and ally with each other with maddening frequency, and also attack the two Sreumar principalities of Siddis and Rochirion. Siddis is ruled by Princess Vayatadr, while Prince Tupal rules Rochirion.

Eldrid the Wise, a warrior maid of formidable skill, stands as the greatest Jyandhom thane. She avenged her father's death by burning the Great Hall of her enemy Hrothgar the Bald, when Hrothgar and his warriors celebrated their victory over her father. A Fheykrig, she may hold the key to the balance of power on Hargard. Ambassadors from both Emperor Alexius and Sigfaddir Firestorm both seek alliance with her. A small portion of Jyandhom around Bushin Bay and the city of Kanakala remains controlled from Vijayanagar, the Ramakrishna's only toehold outside their island continent on a world they once ruled.

Fingisvold

The Vuldrok's bulwark against the aggressions of the Caliph, Fingisvold's inhabitants are especially proud of their battle prowess. Largely an ice planet, Fingisvold's three continents are surrounded by seas of glaciers and ice. The inhabitants are the most fierce in Vuldrok space, loving their freedom and apt to war with each other as easily as any outside threat. The constant interplanetary warfare and cold climate make Fingisvold an unattractive candidate for invasion.

Fingisvold orbits a yellow-orange star (Swidor) and possesses two moons, Healf and Fruma, which violently pull at the planetary tides, making dangerous seafaring. Nonetheless, Fingisvold has her seasons; a slight spring and brief

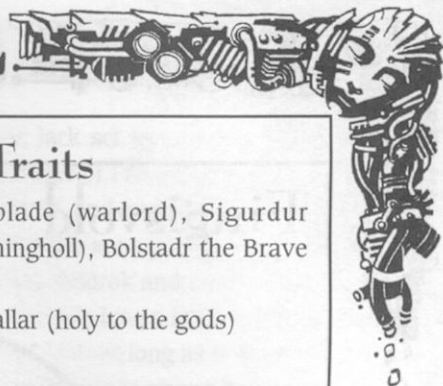
summer break winter's reign long enough for calmer seas to prevail, along with short harvests and celebrations.

History

Discovered from Wolf's Lament in 2853, Fingisvold was originally populated by remote farmers and solitary hunters. A few hunting clans, with their headquarters at Ice Falls, held the planetary government, which was run more like a town-hall. A haven for solitary individuals and small groups, Fingisvold suffered few misfortunes save for clan feuds.

During the Second Republic, several scientific stations tied to local industry and energy research and development were stationed on Fingisvold. The scientific communities formed small enclaves of educated families huddled against





the larger wilderness and growing clan power of the native settlers. The institutes and their parent corporations onworld were largely governed by Republican codes, remote from the clan settlements. The two groups existed relatively peacefully with each other, but the end of the Second Republic saw some hunting clans united in the Mearc-Stappa, a nation of fierce warriors under Lagabeiter Longbeard the Wise. Lagabeiter was one of the 12 Thanes who battled the Republican forces of Admiral Morgan. The scientists and corporations of Fingisvold preferred the stability of Republican rule to the unruly clan nations forming around them.

After Republican authority was thrown off, the scientific communities and industrial towns had to rely on each other for support, and some began creating technical defenses in the growing sea of barbarism. Gradually, as the centuries passed, they established an aristocracy, where the scientists were viewed as shamans by the population, since they held onto the technical secrets of the Republic. Calling themselves the Wita Republic, they set up a caste system of scientists (the Rulers), warriors (the Enforcers) and farmers (the Tenders). The Mearc-Stappa, dwelling outside the great Wita cities, raided them from time to time, but an amazing culture was developing within the cities. Isolationist tendencies, however, retarded the Wita cities. Those outside their culture were viewed as shadows, realities lacking substance far from the illuminating sciences of the Wita. But the shadows hungered for the light of technology.

The Mearc-Stappa allied with other Wersa nations (the Drenjar established colonies on the world) and in 4255-92 attacked the Wita cities one by one, conquering them all. Luckily, the conquerors saw the wisdom in keeping the sciences alive, so the Wita were allowed to function under Vuldrok rulers as a caste of scientist-shamans. Thus their descendants remain, the most skilled of the Vuldrok nations in technology, becoming with time the Maghtaw Nation. A mixture of old technology and Vuldrok shamanism marks their science, a unique synthesis of two cultures. During the Rweg attacks, many slaves were taken from Fingisvold, but her high technology base brought down many of the invading ships, and after a time the Rweg viewed Fingisvold as too dangerous to attack.

After the fall of the Wita cities, Fingisvold became a patchwork of nations. Raiders from Wolf's Lament settled there, and the Zetol Nation claimed much land. When King Froljir landed in 4527, he was welcomed by two thanes and opposed by twelve. In the Battle of Fourteen Thanes, Froljir defeated and routed his enemies, and claimed the planet for his own. Finding it unruly, he set his two sons Ufi and Hafdan up as its supreme warlords.

They codified laws and built Kurmda's Might, the war college of Fingisvold; advances in spaceship and battle technology still come from this institution. The college has trained

Fingisvold Traits

Ruler: Amara Ironblade (warlord), Sigurdur Dragonslayer (thane of Thingholl), Bolstadr the Brave (thane of Leidvollor)

Cathedral: Mount Kjallar (holy to the gods)

Agora: Tungavatn

Garrison: 7

Capital: Tungavatn

Jumps: 6

Adjacent Worlds: Wolf's Lament (dayside), Novgorod (nightside), Epiphany (nightside)

Solar System: Holt (0.771 AU), Fingisvold (1.934 AU, Healf, Fruma), Tintreg (6.57 AU), Yldra (17.8 AU, 7 moons), Grama (28.88 AU), Jumpgate (39.17 AU)

Human Population: 23 million

Resources: Mineral wealth, timber, plastics, volcanic ash (excellent soil)

Exports: Weapons, art, fish, gold, silver

Landscape: Fingisvold is an ice-covered world, with volcanic activity in the Fellholt mountains in Thingholl and the Syspell Mountains on Leidvollor. The continents of Myrkfell and Leidvollor fall across the equator and stare at each other on opposite sides of the southern hemisphere. Thingholl is the northernmost — and coldest — continent.

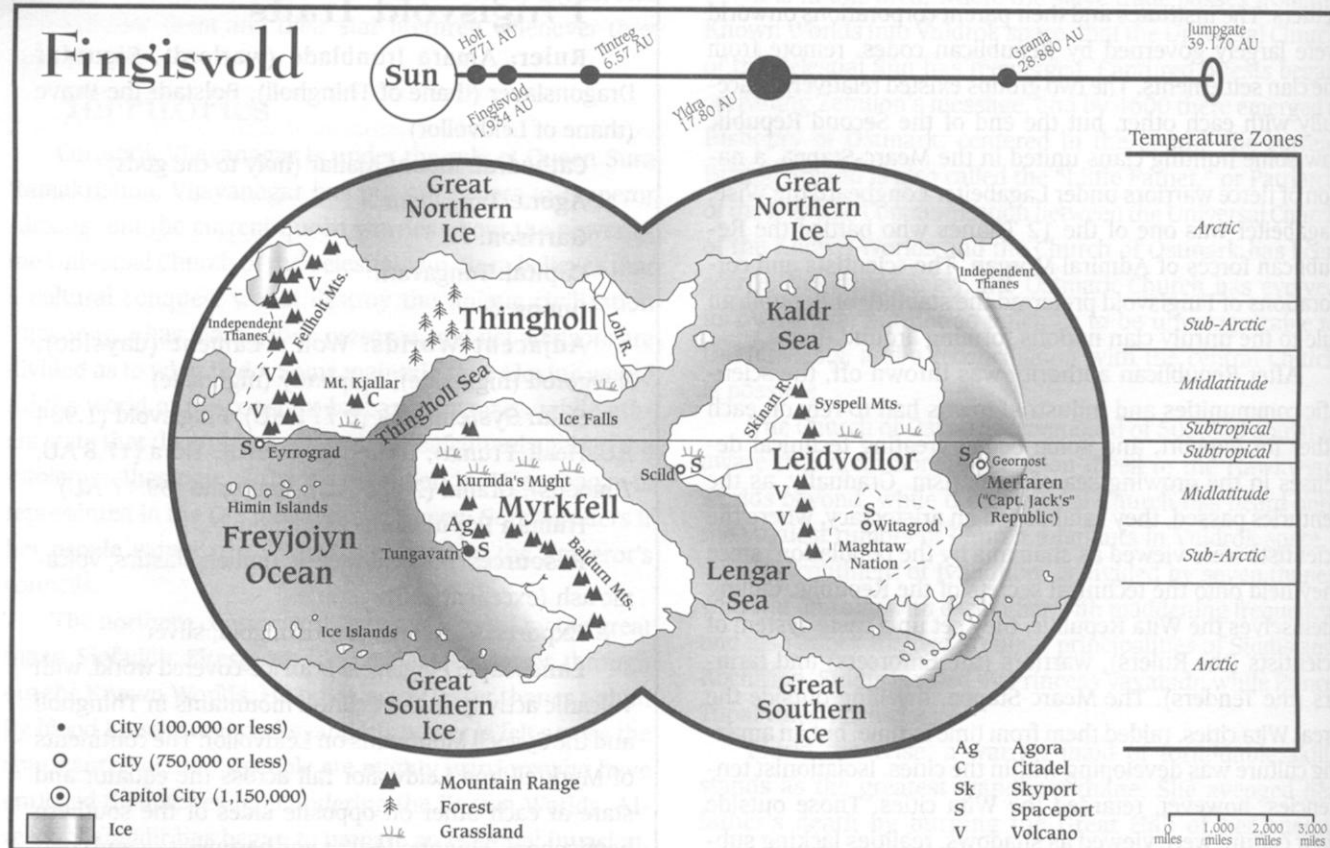
The cloud cover is thick on Fingisvold, adding a gloomy, mysterious element to the ice world which contributes to the grimness of the natives. Folk legends hold that the Myrkvolk spirits move in with low visibility and fogs, sometimes helpful, sometimes hostile.

generations of Fingisvold's chieftains in military sciences, and some hold that this is why Fingisvold has the strength to remain independent. Recent sensitivity to the growing cult of Kurmda promoted by the Frost warlords has caused some locals to mistrust the war college, believing it is in league with Frost. This is denied, but the mistrust remains.

During King Froljir's invasions of the Caliphate and Known Worlds, many of Fingisvold's sons and daughters perished following the banner of the united Vuldrok nation. After the death of Froljir, Ufi and Hafdan ruled for four years before invading Frost, attempting to reunite their father's shattered empire. Their death (and the deaths of so many thanes in the Wars of Conquest), radically altered the local power structure. The Fheykrigs grew prominent; for two centuries, most of the leading warlords were Fheykrigs, beginning with Skade the Sword Maiden (reigned 4557-4589) and ending with Erwynna the Fair (reigned 4778-4791). Elements of the Zetol Nation rebelled against Erwynna, and the planet broke into battling factions.



Fingisvold



When the Symbiots struck, Fingisvold briefly united under the Zetol priestess Mambo Ibo (4860-4899), whose mystical abilities were so great that the Symbiot insurgents left the world. Said to be as deadly a tactician as a conjurer, she kept rival warlords in line through fear of her power. Upon her death the planet fell to the mightiest thane, Grettir the Great. Fearing Wolf's Lament strength, he allied with Orin One Arm of Frost. Fingisvold became a battleground between the rulers of Wolf's Lament and Frost for Vuldrok unity, leaving the planet devastated. Grettir drove off the forces of Wolf's Lament at the Battle of Seven Streams (4912), but it was a pyrrhic victory. An entire generation of the planet's best warriors had perished, and the war's end left no easy solution to the power Wolf's Lament posed to Fingisvold.

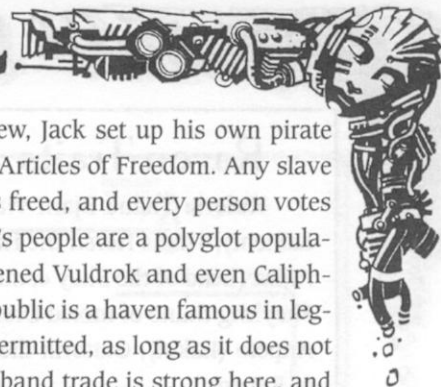
Grettir survived the wars, but was slain by his son Uftar (4924). Upon his death, Fingisvold fell back into localized factions. Some thanes supported the rulers of Frost, some those of Wolf's Lament, and Fingisvold was in danger of becoming a permanent battleground for the two mighty Vuldrok powers. A series of planet-wide wars devastated the world further, with neither faction being long victorious (4945-64).

Fingisvold was eventually saved by a third faction, one that desired the world's independence from both worlds. Jahn

Fire Orisha rallied Zetol factions to him and others soon followed; soon, Fingisvold settled down to independent but peaceful rule. Before his death, Jahn chose the Fheykrieg Amara Ironblade as the planet's warlord. Amara rules over the most factious Vuldrok world, but her strong political savvy has kept the planet independent so far. Some factions favor Greolf the Grim of Frost. It should be noted that Amara's rule remains the shakiest of all the major warlords, and depends on maintaining strong alliances between numerous thanes.

There are rulers opposed to Amara. The Thingholl thanes, traditionally proud and independent, were the first to throw off centralized rule and the last to submit to Jahn's rule. Their current ruler is Sigurdur Dragonslayer, who carved his throne out of the bones of an Ice-Drake he slew. Sigurdur is allied with Wolf's Lament, opposing Amara Ironblade's plans for planetary unification. Sigurdur views this alliance as a necessary evil. Amara has gathered her forces and rumor states that war will soon fall. Sigurdur has pledged to keep Thingholl free, and has put out feelers to the only other planetary thane of power, Bolstadr the Brave, for alliance. Sigurdur's lawspeaker, Scega Saga Wise, has attempted to keep a precarious peace between Amara and Sigurdur, with some success.

The northern continent of Thingholl is a land of mys-



tery. Great volcanic activity and leagues of conifer forests produce an eerie, unsettled country, largely populated by herders and lone hunters, save in the extreme south. Here stands Eyrrograd, the city of the Thingholl thanes. A small spaceport allows for incoming trade, and the sea port is free of ice four months a year, allowing for trade with the south. 600,000 people dwell in stone and timber homes, heated from subterranean waters warmed by volcanic activity. Most of the city is walled, and a great citadel, Usenhelm, stands atop a large hill in the city's midst. The thanes' power does not extend into the southwest, where Amara has support from various independent thanes.

Some want no more of the entangling alliances. On the equatorial island of Merfaran, a temperate paradise with the old city of Geornost, stands Cap'n Jack's Republic. Cap'n Jack started life as a Hawkwood peasant from Gwynneth who joined the local planetary guard during the Emperor Wars. Captured on a Vuldrok raid, he was sold into slavery to Scefig Deathspear of Hargard. Scefig noted Jack's ease with weapons, so allowed him to accompany his men on raids. One night, Scefig's enemies, united by Thane Atelic Axerule, attacked his headquarters in a surprise midnight raid. Jack, out hunting, noticed their approach and alerted Scefig in time, and even saved his thane from death by four axemen.

For his bravery, Jack was freed by Scefig, but disdain- ing lands offered by his former master, Jack took up pirat- ing, eventually rising to command of his own ship. With his

riches and interplanetary crew, Jack set up his own pirate utopia on Fingisvold, under Articles of Freedom. Any slave who finds sanctuary there is freed, and every person votes in communal decisions. Jack's people are a polyglot popula- tion of escaped slaves, hardened Vuldrok and even Caliph- ate outlaws. Cap'n Jack's Republic is a haven famous in leg- end, for here everything is permitted, as long as it does not harm one's neighbor. Contraband trade is strong here, and ships are always arriving or leaving. Cap'n Jack has grown rich on trade and plunder, but has not gone soft, preferring a vigorous life of pirating between long siestas of wine, women and song.

Flora and Fauna

The animal life of Fingisvold includes the Vroken Whales, great beasts hunted for their oil, and the land-dwell- ing Berantung, a great white, carnivorous bearlike creature, descended from marsupial-like ancestors, who carries its young in pouches. The native mammalian wildlife differs from Urth mammals in the possession of seven digits at the ends of their feet and hands. There are rumors of primitive Weardvolk, lumbering troll-like simian creatures with op-posable thumbs, dwelling in the far north.

Ice-Drakes are descended from reptilian stock, but pos- sess warm blood and a feathery hide. These creatures pro- duce a spitting poison which burns, and are as large as an- cient Urth dinosaurs. Carnivorous, they dwell in the uplands, hunting solitary animals and humans.

Raven

The spiritual heart of the Vuldrok, this icy world is said to be home to their gods as well as to their leading priests. The first runes were discovered here, found among the Anunnaki ruins and stones, inscribed on the Elder Mono- lith and the strange statues leading into the Valley of Mists and the fogbound Myrdwood beyond (see Appendix: Runecasting). Raven's atmosphere creates unusual impres- sions in newcomers, from heightened dreams to seizures of sudden fear, emanating from different areas across the planet, but most often associated with places strong in Ur traces. It was on Raven that runelore developed, and the Drenjar sent their greatest priests there to study the ancient lore. The very soil of the world possesses a yellowish cast, and the many mountain ridges and deep valleys hold se- crets older than humanity.

Raven's people speak of the Ealdhwic, the ancient people, who appear in the mist hunting ghostly shapes, leading some to fortune and others to sudden death. While they boast of many things, the Vuldrok do not speak much about Raven

to outworlders, keeping silent on matters they consider most holy. Shamans from all the Vuldrok nations call upon gods and spirits here, and proud warriors who remain unslain in battle often come to die.

All the Vuldrok nations are represented on Raven, with the Drenjar and Lakol predominating. The Great Althing was moved from Wolf's Lament to Raven early in the 4900's, when Frost and Wolf's Lament were locked in a bitter war. It was felt that the gods preferred the Vuldrok Althing to be on holy ground, a place neutral and respected by both contend- ing worlds.

History

Raven was settled from Wolf's Lament in 2899. First came the explorers and geographers, mapping the strange terraformed valleys and mountain ranges created by long forgotten Anunnaki sciences. Next came the settlers, for the most part herders, farmers and small mining operators, who built the first towns around the scientific exploration bases.



Raven Traits

Rulers: Thane Bjarn Warbringer (allied to Wolf's Lament), Thane Hersir the Hairy (allied to Frost), Chief Aljira (head of the Skey community), Kolfinna (elected Fheykrig thane of mixed Drenjar-Zetol territory), Chief Anpeto (Lakol), Guttorm the God-Crazed (Chief Priest of Raven)

Cathedral: Mist-Hleotun (Valley of Mists) and Myrdwood

Agora: Vasteria Market

Capital: Vasteria (Great Althing)

Jumps: 6

Adjacent Worlds: Wolf's Lament

Solar System: Beorte (Sun), Mere (0.368 AU), Fen (0.798 AU), Raven (1.2 AU, Raven's Catch), Rune (2.93 AU), Fire (11.72 AU, 2 moons), Syllicran (18.03), Snow (24.55 AU), Claw (29.93 AU), Jumpgate (37.03 AU)

Tech: 4

Garrison: 4

Human Population: 51 million (despite its high agricultural yield, Raven maintains a low birthrate, and for two centuries the population has declined)

Alien Population: 4,500 (captured Known Worlds aliens serve as slaves; a few Obun and Ukari have small settled towns of 400 or so)

Resources: Ores, religious artifacts, Ur artifacts, food, electronics

Exports: Refined ore, Ur artifacts, religious artifacts, electronics, food

Landscape: Large Ur-carved mountainous continents, mist-shrouded in the north and south, cover Raven, as does a peculiar yellow soil. The planet is warmer and more arable than other Vuldrok worlds, and therefore important as a food exporter. Parts of the world are quite pleasant, and merchant princes grow abundant crops near small citystates. The Zetol ply the seas for marine food.

When the scientific teams left, the settlers remained. The atmosphere conveyed by the eerie Anunnaki ruins and carved landscapes affected the settlements; the people swore that Raven was holy and guarded by unseen powers. Even the most ardent skeptics could not shake the feeling that something strange was in the air. Studies recorded strange energy patterns and higher concentrations of biospheric waves than was common on most settled worlds. Xenologists studied the glyphs carved amidst the ruins, but believed them to be merely two-dimensional carvings.

A small colony of Wersa spiritual seekers set up near the Valley of Mists during the late Republican era. Within a

few generations, they produced powerful shamans, who became the guardians of the sacred sites.

The Elder Monolith, made from Ur-alloys, standing 600 feet high and covered in glyphs, was the first place the runes revealed themselves. Govan Glitterbeard, a mad shaman, first spoke to them, and taught the runelore to others. The runecasters (*vitkar*) are strange; their power has maimed them and made some deranged, so that most fear them. But a *vitki's* magics exceed even those given to the vessels of the gods; *vitkar* are sought after by warlords and thanes who thirst for power to lay low their enemies.

While the other Wersa worlds gathered power through raiding and pirating, the people of Raven grew renowned in spiritual power, producing the most famous shamans and runecasters, capable of parleying with the invisible powers of the mysterious universe. It was to Raven that shamans from other worlds came to contact the gods or learn first hand from the spirits through visions. The entire planet was filled with an atmosphere of mystery.

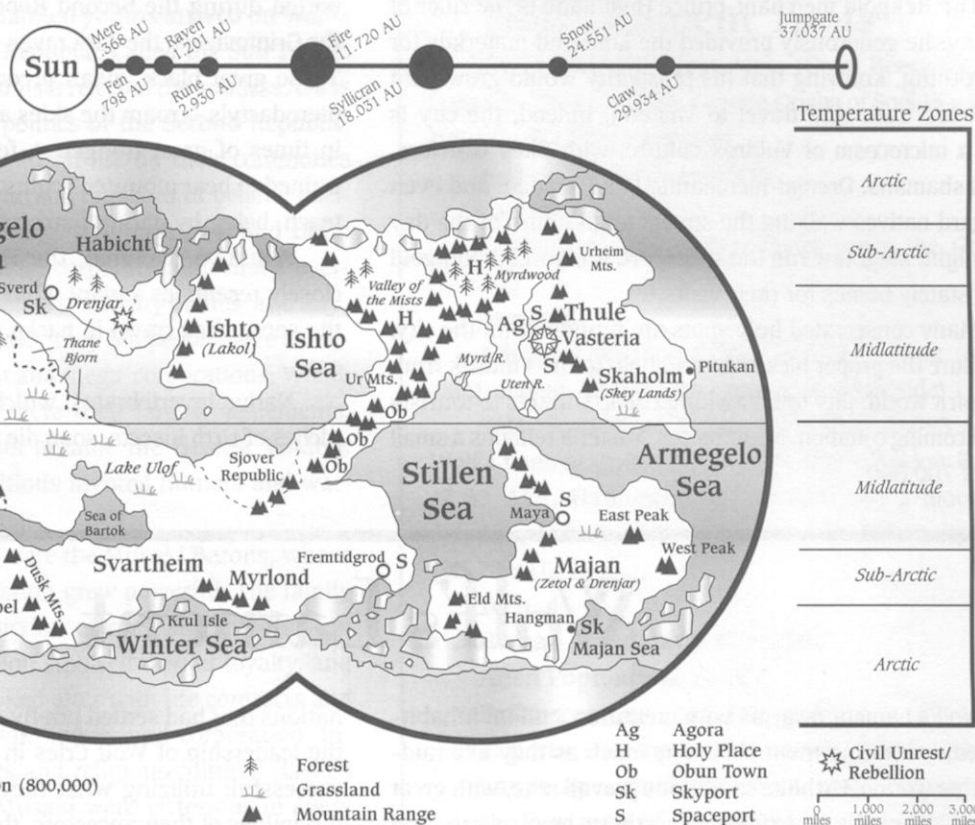
The Drenjar peoples were well represented on Raven, and a small colonies of the Lakol and Zetol nations also arose. In the 4400's, the shaman Rurik the Rune-Wise briefly united Raven, and under his leadership many of the diverse traditions and beliefs of various shamans were codified into the early Erdgeist religion. In 4523 King Froljir the Ill-Fated, in league with other thanes, swiftly conquered the world, and the fierce warriors of Raven joined the other Vuldrok in attacks on the Known Worlds and Kurgan Caliphate. After King Froljir's death, the planet fell to his loyal thane, Umatu. Upon Umatu's death, the brief period of Raven unity broke apart, as both the Traljir and Ragnor clans asserted themselves.

During the 4600-4800's, as first the Skey and later the Symbiots attacked, Raven's leadership in spiritual matters solidified as the heart of Vuldrok culture. It was on Raven that peace with the Skey was made, and they were admitted into the Vuldrok Star-Nation. Skey priests spoke long with many representatives of Vuldrok traditions, and it was found that they possessed certain beliefs in common. In 4897, Gundar the God-Possessed emerged from Raven, wreaking ruin among the Symbiots. A shaman-warrior, Gundar was adept at discovering Symbiot weaknesses, and he rallied the Vuldrok nations to continue the battle. Although the planet Abydos was lost, the Symbiots ceased their advance. Gundar returned to Raven and gave back his war-gift to the gods in the Valley of Mists, returning to live his life as a simple hunter and father.

During the wars between Frost and Wolf's Lament, the planet remained largely neutral, and was thus chosen as the location for the new Great Althing. Raven's proximity to Wolf's Lament, however, allowed this stronger neighbor to politically overshadow it. Many thanes allied with Wolf's



Raven



Lament, while a few stubbornly held out for Frost or clung to neutrality. A surprising victory by the neutral and Frost-allied thanes prevented Raven from becoming a mere pawn of Wolf's Lament, but those who support Raven's stronger neighbor still hold the most power. During and after these wars, the Raven shamans began to warn the planet's people of dire prophecies issuing from the spirits.

In 4992, the priest Ravgid heard the gods cry out in the Valley of Mists, and the sacred tree Wiftyr wept blood. A protector deity perished in the deep Myrdwood, muttering "Beware the coming of the Hawkwyrd." The omens were swiftly spread to the other Vuldrok worlds, and Raven's thanes are now eagerly questioning the shamans for signs of what the future might bring.

Planetary Conditions

In the northern continent of Thule lies the great Myrdwood. The only entrance to the region is found at a break in the Ur-mountains guarded by the Valley of Mists, where the rune-inscribed Elder Monolith overlooks the lands below. Here the Vuldrok priests and seekers go on pilgrimages to speak to the spirits and learn wisdom. Outside the valley, several wise-women hold a brisk trade in fortune-telling.

It is said that the power of the spirits lies strongest in the Myrdwood, and visions are sometimes granted to trav-

elers. In the midst of this fog-bound and mysterious forest lies the holy tree, Wiftyr, believed to have been planted by the Anunnaki in ages past. Only the greatest priests can endure the visions granted at the tree. Wiftyr's flowers are luminous, and even in the darkest night the tree shines a lunar radiance. Few have seen it, for only those worthy can find their way to it. The Vuldrok say "Wiftyr creates paths only for those she deems worthy."

Many untrained or eager seekers went mad studying the statues and runes in the Valley of Mists, and this tragic history eventually kept most people away from the region. Many claim an oppressive atmosphere covers the place like a shroud. The locals say little; they tend to be more quiet and grim than other Vuldrok, as illustrated by the tale of Bjorr's Quest, where one of the three treasures the great warrior had to retrieve to win Rania's hand was a smile from one of Raven's folk.

In the south, in Svartheim, the Ur-mountain ranges end, and the landscape is not unlike some regions on Wolf's Lament. The city of Vasteria, in the north amidst the great Urheim Mountains, hosts the Great Althing of the Vuldrok Star-Nation. Standing aside the great hill of Gemyndgad, its golden roof gleams in the illuminated lights which shine day and night. The walls of the Althing were built from rare Ur metals, strong as adamant. The city below holds repre-



representatives from all the Vuldrok worlds and nations.

The Rekgold merchant-prince Healfdane is the ruler of the city; he generously provided the land and materials for the Althing, knowing that his prosperity would grow with increased trade and travel to Vasteria. Indeed, the city is now a microcosm of Vuldrok culture, with Skey warriors, Zetol shamans, Drenjar merchants, Lakol traders and even Hargard natives walking the streets at all hours of the day and night. Maghtaw run the spaceport, and foreign Rekgold keep stately homes for their visits.

Many consecrated holy spots are found within the city, to ensure the proper blessings and help to the Vuldrok from the spirit world. City folk hawking cheap trinkets to tourists are becoming common. Nonetheless, Vasteria remains a small city of 700,000.

Although most of Raven's wildlife was originally imported during the Second Republic, one native lifeform is the Grimmagest, the dark raven (not related to the Urth bird). These great black, avian predators — larger than ancient pterodactyls — roam the skies and occasionally hunt people in times of great hunger. A few have been captured and trained to bear mounted scouts, but the birds are difficult to teach, being by nature fierce and independent.

A native mammal, the Hurricane Tiger, or *Ageleca*, closely resembles a giant white feline. Well camouflaged in the snow, they travel in packs, often waylaying lone hunters.

Native invertebrates, which fill many of the ecological niches of Urth insects, soon die when transported off-world.

Wolf's Lament

Wolf's Lament swarms with creatures, and its inhabitants enjoy hunting them almost as much as they like raiding other worlds. Urthlike conditions prevail here, with great forests and plains covering the northern hemisphere, and arable land, jungles and giant islands in the south.

Predators include the Tundra Wolves, indigenous carnivores that resemble gigantic Urth wolves with light spots for camouflage, and the Jotun — gigantic, two-horned mammalian hunters who can walk upright. The equatorial zones produce fierce, feline-type marsupial creatures, and giant carnivorous amphibians who inhabit the swamps.

It is said that the wildlife toughens the planet's people up — after surviving an attack by a Jotun herd, a life of raiding can seem tame by comparison. Wolf's Lament is also home to the mysterious marsupial Ishkin, a sentient race allied with the Vuldrok. They live in the deep forests, and can be indispensable friends to hunters and warriors, for their sense of smell and sight is far superior to those of humans. (See Appendix: Ishkin.)

History

The date of Wolf's Lament's discovery has been lost, but early colonists are believed to have come to the world via Eridol in 2609, founding the planet they called Seepcombe. After two generations, native diseases, harsh conditions and wildlife wiped most of them out, and 38 people returned to Eridol relating the colony's woes. Strange carnivorous wolf creatures had descended again and again on the colony and, aside from hunting and timber, little of value was found to keep the colony there.

The next arrivals are shrouded in legend. Around 2800, a group of people claiming descent from Native American

nations that had settled briefly on Criticorum arrived, under the leadership of Wolf Cries in the Night. They were more successful; utilizing what they claimed were the spiritual disciplines of their ancestors, they were able to interact better with the world's indigenous life.

Legend says that the planet agreed to their settlement but demanded a sacrifice; Wolf Cries in the Night gave his arm to the indigenous Tundra Wolves as a token. The Tundra Wolves took it, but said "You have not yet surrendered to us your greatest treasure." Wolf Cries in the Night became still, knowing they wanted his daughter, Tingleska First Dawn. This he could not do, but his daughter, seeing the people's plight, surrendered herself to them. The last sight Wolf Cries beheld of his daughter was the Tundra Wolves herding her into the snow. He died of grief soon after in the Great Canyons, and the world was renamed Wolf's Lament. The natives still say that if you listen to the wind in that region, you can hear the lamentations of Wolf Cries in the Night, echoing through the countless canyons of central Sunkmanitu.

In time, however, Tingleska First Dawn returned to the people and imparted knowledge the Tundra Wolves had given her about healing plants, hunting grounds and the great mysteries of the planet. The small settlement thrived.

Eventually, others off-worlders arrived, attempting to recreate the "pure" traditional cultures of ancient Urth Celtic, Native American, Australian and Oceanic societies, from before contact with the expanding European hegemony of the ancient 15th-20th centuries. Some claimed descent from the traditional peoples themselves, but most were cultural converters; over time, any notion of racial purity had been



diluted by new arrivals mingling with the first settlers.

Many groups of disenchanted youths arrived on Wolf's Lament during the Second Republic. Called the Star People of "Hoftsla," the pacifist colonists rejected the soulless, crass commercialism and power politics of the Second Republic, opting for a more simple, natural life on their communes and farms. They held a vague smorgasbord of beliefs: pacifism, free love, organic farming, neo-paganism and Obun philosophy were "in"; out were corporate conformity, overpopulated cities, authority figures, military values, and anything smacking of the normalcy they felt people were conditioned to by the government and mega-corporations. Womb Town and Diggerburrough were their largest settlements. Ironically, their descendants became the fiercest Vuldrok raiders, as over time, conditions favored hunters and warriors to protect their territories.

Chief among their foes were the Musaki Barons, whose mining and weapon corporation grew powerful. The family solely-controlled the production of ores and minerals on Wolf's Lament. Its corporation stressed worker loyalty, and in return, workers were looked after with life contracts and gave allegiance to the Musaki family and corporation. Inevitably, the free communes and religious cultures clashed with this mega-corp. The Musaki were victorious in every legal battle, but the Hoftsla soon they retaliated with guerilla raids that accelerated into a war. Within two centuries, two warrior cultures emerged. The Hoftsla were absorbed into mainstream Vuldrok society, while the Musaki peoples still possessed a fanatic loyalty to their corporate princes. The earlier colonist's descendants largely sided with the Hoftsla, while later communities favored the Musaki. Still, intermingling did occur, and alliances shifted, giving warfare a ceremonial, seasonal quality.

The planet also became home to interstellar smuggling rings and small pirate bases. Many of these groups formed loose alliances united by spiritual beliefs, claiming descent from Caribbean, African and Mesoamerican peoples. Calling themselves the Zetol, they also claimed lands on Raven and Frost, and found themselves at war with their contraband rivals, the Drenjar Brotherhood, a few of whom also landed on Wolf's Lament. Other, smaller raiding republics joined either of these two larger factions for protection, and from 3900-4200 a great rivalry between the two groups produced a thousand skirmishes on many worlds.

By 3900, the arable land on Wolf's Lament, created by small-scale terraforming, became scarce. Small wars broke out between the communities for dwindling supplies, and raiders from Frost established small settlements on the world. Second Republic negotiators occasionally intervened, or set up peace accords which were swiftly broken by the factions involved. Resentment of the distant Second Republic finally united Wolf Lament's factions under Minnur the Grim, a

Wolf's Lament Traits

Ruler: Warlord Wakan Mato (Great Bear), Thane Halga the Brave of Hrith, Captain Orisha of Soekin (Zetol Nation), the Skey Assembly

Agora: Vanaheim (in Hrith)

Garrison: 8

Capital: Althing in Vanaheim (once the Great Althing)

Jumps: 5

Adjacent Worlds: Eridol (dayside), Frost (dayside), Raven (nightside), Fingisvold (nightside)

Solar System: Ate (Sun), Wiyakpa (0.693 AU), Wolf's Lament (1.013 AU, Luna's Tear), Shadow Bride (2.87 AU), Hamund's End (5.404 AU, 2 moons), Atheling (12.17 AU), Akicita (23.82 AU) Jumpgate (43.28 AU)

Tech: 4

Human Population: 47 Million

Alien Population: 10,000

Resources: Ore, food, luxury items

Exports: Ore, food, luxury items, slaves, metal

Landscape: Wolf's Lament is more Urthlike and warmer than most of the Vuldrok worlds. The human population is remarkably stabilized, following old traditions. The Zetol are entrenched along the equatorial seas and on numerous islands, the Lakol have both permanent and nomadic communities in the northern and southern continents, and the Skey have settled deep in the south. Drenjar communities are found in the northern and equatorial zones, intermingling with the Zetol in places.

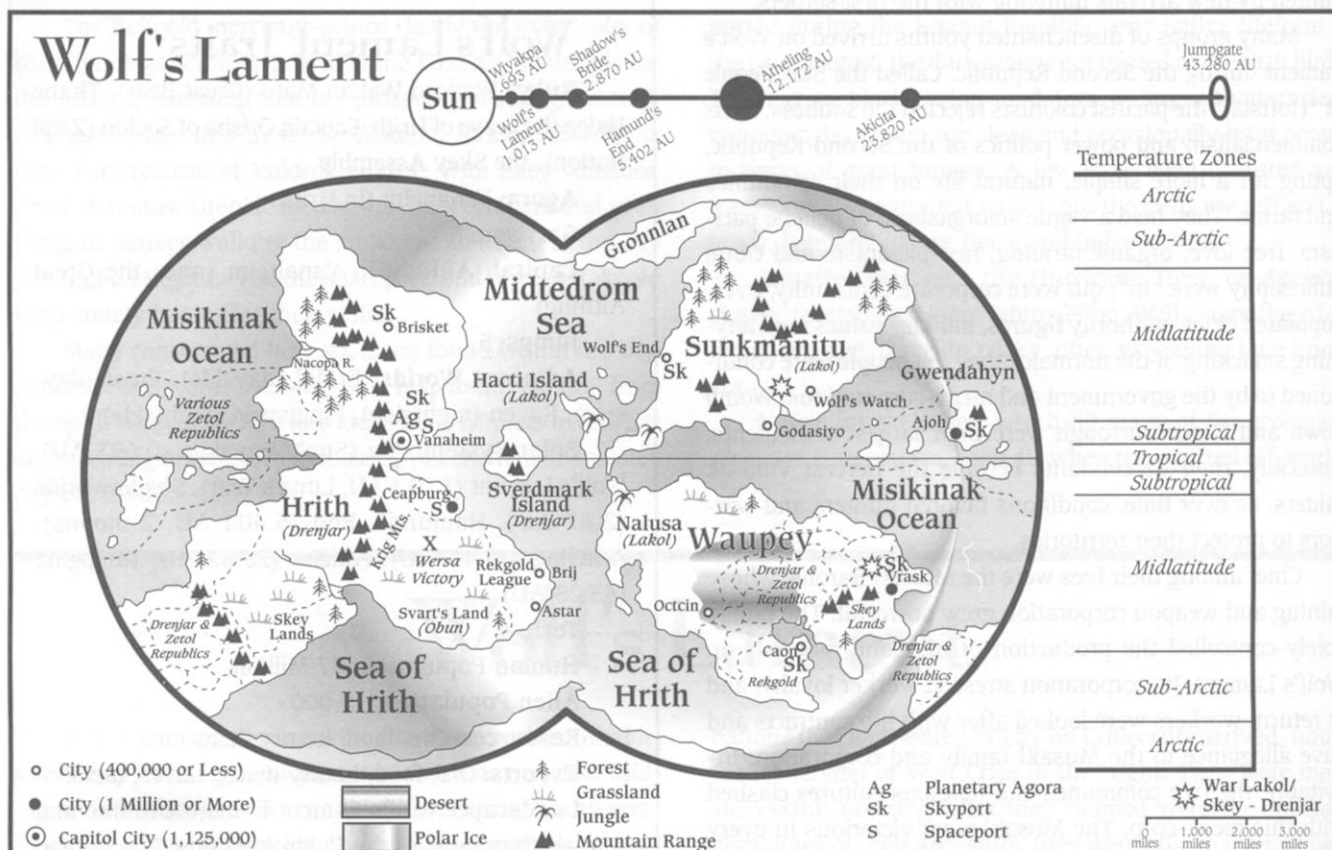
The planet is known for its great variety of native animals and forests, in addition to various predators and herbivores introduced from other worlds.

raider descended from Frost grandparents, and Chief Tokala of the Lakol nation (leading an alliance of numerous groups claiming physical or cultural descent from the native inhabitants of North and South America). They called for the First Althing on Wolf's Lament, which united Wolf's Lament, Frost, Fingisvold and Raven against the Second Republic.

When Admiral Marcellus Morgan brought his Republican fleet to the planet, aiming to squash the rebellion of the 12 Thanes, he found that the local outpost of Republican government, the Centralized Bureau Authority, had already surrendered to the local rebellion. The 12 Thanes drew up their armies, but Morgan's forces controlled the air, mercilessly bombarding the planet below. Morgan almost won the day, but the howling of a distant Tundra Wolf rallied the Lakol warriors, and the 12 Thanes finally broke through



Wolf's Lament



Morgan's advancing Ukari and augmented-human (Changed) forces, causing great slaughter. Morgan's fleet suddenly suffered attack, and the admiral barely escaped the system. Republican rule of Wolf's Lament had ended.

Wolf's Lament rapidly became the most powerful of the emerging Vuldrok worlds. The Lakol, allied with the Ishkin, fought off other Vuldrok from their lands, emerging as a powerful force. By 4453, Gunnar the Grim had unified the world and began extending his power to Raven. His great-grandson, Froljir, united all the Vuldrok worlds under his sway, and crowned himself king. With powers of taxation, he built up a huge fleet, augmented by the fleets of his allies and thanes, and attacked both the Caliphate and Known Worlds with lightning speed. His daughter Freya, whom he wished to rule Wolf's Lament, insisted on participating in the wars, and led the attack on the Caliphate. For a brief time, Vuldrok power stretched from Khayyam to Ravenna and beyond. Untold riches returned to Wolf's Lament. But the deaths in battle of both Freya and King Froljir the Ill-Fated shattered Vuldrok unity, and the returning thanes carved up the unified Vuldrok kingdom.

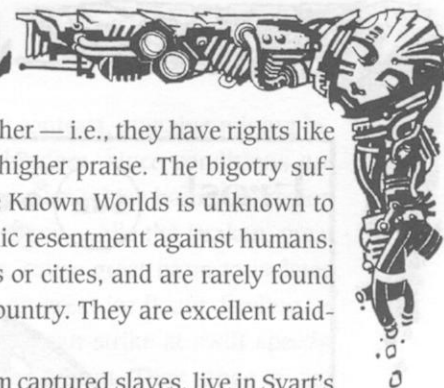
Wolf's Lament fell to Chief Wanblee, one of Froljir's loyal thanes. Wanblee purposely broke up the centralized power structure set up by Froljir, offering it back to the nations.

For a time Wolf's Lament suffered from wars caused by

shifting alliances between the Lakol, Drenjar and Zetol nations, with the Lakol being largely victorious. Thanes from Wolf's Lament also warred with Frost, rebuilding the Great Althing, once the pride of Frost, on Wolf's Lament instead. These wars ended when the Skey peoples invaded. Long battles followed, but the Skey were admitted to the Vuldrok nation when the Symbiot threat loomed. The Skey Nation settled in the empty southern lands, and proved to be a powerful presence in deterring raiding parties from other worlds, helping Wolf's Lament to regain its ancient power and resist the growing centralizing tendencies of Frost.

When Hafdan the Red of Frost began his drive for renewed Vuldrok unity, the warlord Orin One Eye of Wolf's Lament successfully destroyed his conquest in a long war. The great warlord died soon after, but Wolf's Lament has remained the counterbalance to Frost. It voluntarily allowed the removal of the Great Althing to Raven, in the hopes of unifying the Vuldrok.

The current warlord, Wakan Mato (Great Bear), rules over the planet in alliance with Halga the Brave. Great Bear allows for the freedom of the nations on Wolf's Lament, but stands united against Frost. He worries, however, that the Vuldrok's old foes from beyond Hawkwyrd space are becoming too strong. Halga urges him to fight them, but Great Bear wonders if this can be done without the aid of Frost.



Drawing on wisdom, Great Bear called for a defense tax. Halga urges the warlord to become the next unifier of the Vuldrok, Frost be damned; it is largely through Halga that Fingisvold and other worlds feel the might of Wolf's Lament. Hesitantly, Great Bear begins to follow the captain's advice.

Alien Communities

A colony of Ukari lives on Wolf's Lament, descended from the original Republican troops left there after Admiral Morgan's defeat. They are called Ondvolk by the Vuldrok, and are considered to be their own nation with representation in the Althing. They are treated with as much respect

as any Vuldrok accords another — i.e., they have rights like any human, but must earn higher praise. The bigotry suffered by their cousins in the Known Worlds is unknown to them, and they bear no ethnic resentment against humans. Most of them live in caverns or cities, and are rarely found in the vast woods or open country. They are excellent raiders and shamans.

Ur-Obun, descended from captured slaves, live in Svart's Land, and have representation in the Althing. Some raid, but their community is left in peace, and the Vuldrok attribute mysterious powers to them.

Frost

Along with Raven, Frost is the origin world of much of Vuldrok culture. An extremely cold planet, Frost was settled by hardened hunters and obscure religious groups from Wolf's Lament who sought even greater freedom than they could find on that world. Stellar pirates also found sanctuary here, since it was largely unsettled by the Second Republic, with wide unpoliced areas. Much of Frost's earlier history is shrouded in legend. She seems to have first been colonized in the 2900's-3100's. The settlers seemed to have found raiding mandatory, as the necessities of life were too bare to otherwise live comfortably.

These pirate communities — ancestors of the Drenjar Brotherhood — provided a teeming ground where various cultural influences met and meshed. When Frost joined the Second Republic, the planet was theoretically under the control of a governor, elected by the people, but this soon became the elected seat of the strongest captain with the most followers. After the Fall, the pirating culture of Frost swiftly spread to other worlds, and Frost colonists established themselves forcibly on Wolf's Lament, while Lamorak and Khotan often suffered from Frost's raiding parties.

It was Frost's governor, Vafadir, who first raised the call for unity against the Second Republic. After the Fall, Frost long remained the most warlike and unruly of the Vuldrok worlds, split into small republics and nations, fighting each other for scarce resources. However, a powerful captain, Weidor the Law Giver, arose among them, and he constructed the Great Althing (4350?), where all the Wersa worlds and nations were represented.

Frost produced the warrior societies that formed the backbone of Vuldrok power. If the Wersa era was more peaceful than the later Vuldrok age, Frost was the harbinger of things to come. Yet this feuding planet briefly united under King Froljir the Ill-Fated, who was popular among the local

thanes who pledged loyalty to him. But when Froljir died, Frost fell to one of his generals, Ingolf, who became warlord. Ingolf slew the sons of Froljir when they mounted an unsuccessful invasion to reclaim the kingdom of their fa-

Frost Traits

Name: Frost

Ruler: Warlord Greolf the Grim

Agora: Modruviler's Market (in Hostogrod)

Capital: Hostogrod

Garrison: 8

Jumps: 4

Adjacent Worlds: Khotan (dayside), Lamorak (nightside), Wolf's Lament (nightside)

Solar System: Steora (0.807 AU), Frost (2.15 AU, Offrian), Hyrde (22.15 AU, Trum, Swidost, Tobrecan, Weard), Granite (30.88 AU), Lostfall (36.21 AU), Jumpgate (48.63 AU)

Tech: 5

Human Population: 41 million

Alien Population: 30,000 (descendants of captured Ukari dwell in primitive conditions beneath the mountains)

Resources: Metal, industry, lumber, ores, oil, fish

Exports: Metal, fish, lumber, slaves (a halfway station to the rest of Vuldrok space)

Landscape: An extremely cold planet, Frost's inhabitants have little hope of living well without raiding their neighbors. Ice covers two-thirds of the world from the poles over the seas and land masses, only absent along the equator. Heavy clouds and an irregular tilt keep the northern hemisphere in six months of winter, followed by brief spring, summer and autumn seasons.

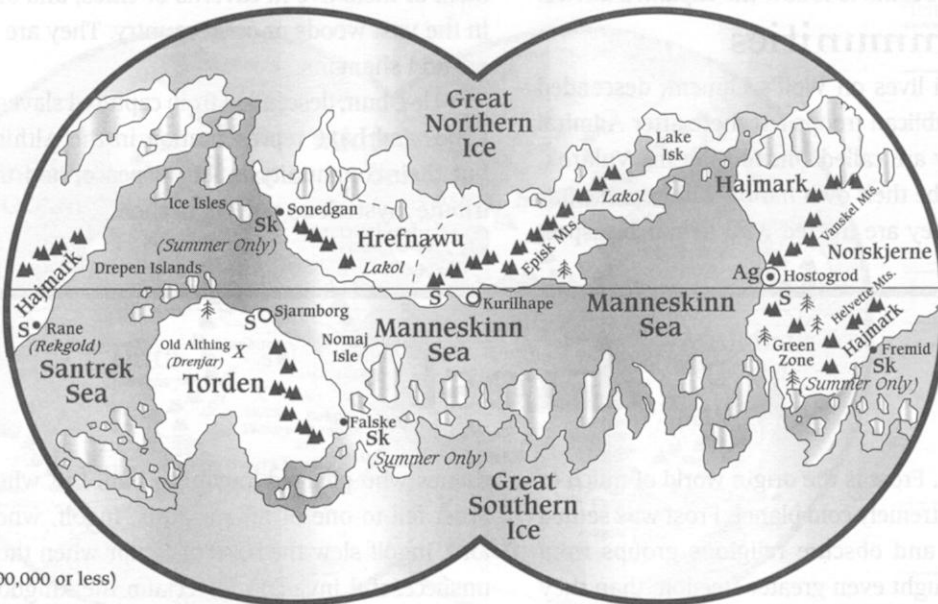


Frost



Temperature Zones

Arctic
Sub-Arctic
Midlatitude
Midlatitude
Sub-Arctic
Arctic



- City (400,000 or less)
- City (1,000,000 or less)
- ⊙ Capitol City (1,275,000)



Mountain Range
Forest

Ag Agora
C Citadel
Sk Skyport
S Spaceport

Conflict: Ukari/
Drenjar
0 miles 1,000 miles 2,000 miles 3,000 miles

ther. Ingolf himself was slain attacking Khotan, and Frost reverted to her quarreling factions. Known for the ferocity of her warriors, Frost became a backwater in Vuldrok affairs, a place to launch attacks against neighboring worlds, too stubborn to be conquered and too stubborn to unite. Her lack of a hospitable climate aided her in remaining free; unwanted, she was left alone.

For two centuries Frost continued in her factious fighting, uniting briefly to throw off the invasions of Jarl Egil Muspelson of Wolf's Lament (4688-97), who briefly controlled much of the world. Jarl Egil rebuilt the Great Althing on Wolf's Lament, a bitter blow to Frost's pride, where the first Great Althing of the Vuldrok nations had originally been built. What finally united Frost in the late 4800's was the Symbiot invasions. Hellish battles were fought on Frost herself, and the death toll climbed high among the defending natives. Using the excursions of the Symbiot menace as an excuse, Frost began to solidify power away from local communities into the hands of powerful thanes. By the time the Symbiot menace ended, Frost's ancient freedoms and communities had also changed.

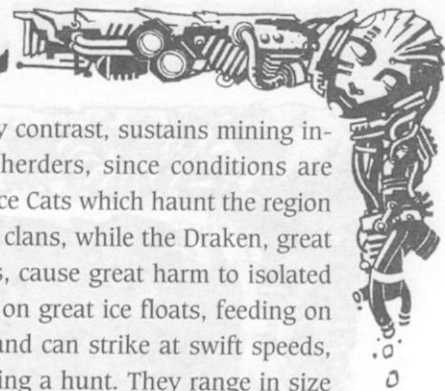
The consolidation of power first by the fifteen Strogodor, or "Strong Leaders," in the 4800's over the local chieftains

caused a shift away from local authority and began the stratification of society. By the 4900's, the fifteen had become "the Six Families," who attempted to carve princely domains out of the kingless society. Hafdan the Red, from one of the Six, defeated Skerd Svennerson and cemented a series of alliances which left him in control of the planet (reducing, in the process, the Six to the Three). Looking outward, he began a series of wars to cement Vuldrok unity, but his plans fell to ruin warring with Orin One Arm of Wolf's Lament. Hafdan perished in a sudden Lakol/Skey raid, but he was already a bitter, defeated man, having lost his bid for Vuldrok unity. However, his political structure remained intact.

His grandson Olaf proved a strong warlord, regaining some of Hafdan's lands. His half-brother Eyjolfr, who ruled after him, sent Vuldrok fleets into Known Worlds space. After Eyjolfr's death, a power struggle ensued between Raynor and Greolf, Eyjolfr's sons, which Greolf won. Trained as a shaman, Greolf attributed his victories to supernatural aid, and he often wandered disguised into enemy camps to gather news from his foes.

Greolf now seeks to resurrect Vuldrok unity. He has formed a centralized government, with powers of taxation and a standing military, and is supported by some Vuldrok





factions. His spies report on the recent incursions of the Questing Knights into Vuldrok space, and he builds fear of an Imperial assault to cement alliances around him.

He is rumored to have dreams of becoming the second king of the Vuldrok, but he denies this; his war machinery and growing control of the Althing speak otherwise. Greolf wants to move the Great Althing from Raven back to Frost.

Geography

The northern island continent of Hrefnawu, or Ravenswood, is half ice. Settled by warriors from Raven, it stands in the Maneskin Sea. The southern city of Kurilhape is a starport. Mining is found in the Episk Mountains, as well as great beasts, ranging from the tool-bearing Storm Trolls to the reptilian Fire Drakes, great winged beasts resembling mythological dragons. Ruled by Captain Unferth, the people largely stick to their own affairs, although a steady amount take to space piracy.

The great continent of Norskjerne stretches from the northern pole down into the southern hemisphere. Arable farming land is found in the equatorial belt and in the adjoining southern lands, making this a fought over area for centuries, as various thanes seek its rich agricultural base.

Frost's capital of Hostogrod is found north of the green zone, where the Hajmark jarls and thanes rule as planetary warlords. A warlord's military control over the green-belt ensures his supremacy on Frost. North of Hostogrod, only the hardest hunters and farmers eke out a precarious existence.

Southern Norskjerne, by contrast, sustains mining industry, fishing towns and herders, since conditions are slightly warmer. The great Ice Cats which haunt the region are the terror of the herding clans, while the Draken, great marine mammalian serpents, cause great harm to isolated fishing vessels. Draken live on great ice floats, feeding on the lesser marine animals, and can strike at swift speeds, swimming over 80 KPH during a hunt. They range in size from three to 30 meters, and are extremely cunning.

The Hajmark region, in southern Norskjerne, is a mountainous area bordering the great glaciers; this place produced the great warriors who originally conquered the world.

Descendants of Republican Ukari live under the mountains; they have largely reverted to a primitive life. Each year, 300 Ukari warriors battle 300 Vuldrok to the death; large-scale wars have reduced the Ukari numbers drastically.

The continent of Torden, in the southern hemisphere, claims to be the original home of the Drenjar. Half covered in ice, many of its sons and daughters still take to pirating to survive. Reindeer and Vontu (a six legged yak-like mammal native to the continent) are herded here. Sjarmborg is the great city, where ships leave to prey on other worlds. This violent place is full of warriors, pirates and fierce tradesmen. Law is maintained by a special police force of retired warriors, veterans of countless raids, called the Blood Guard. Sjarmborg's thanes resent the rule of Hostogrod, remembering when Frost's leaders once ruled in Torden.



Drenjar



Lakol



Zetol



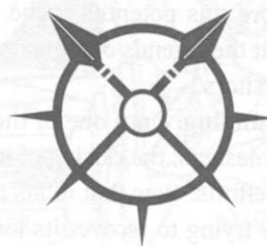
Skey



Maghtaw

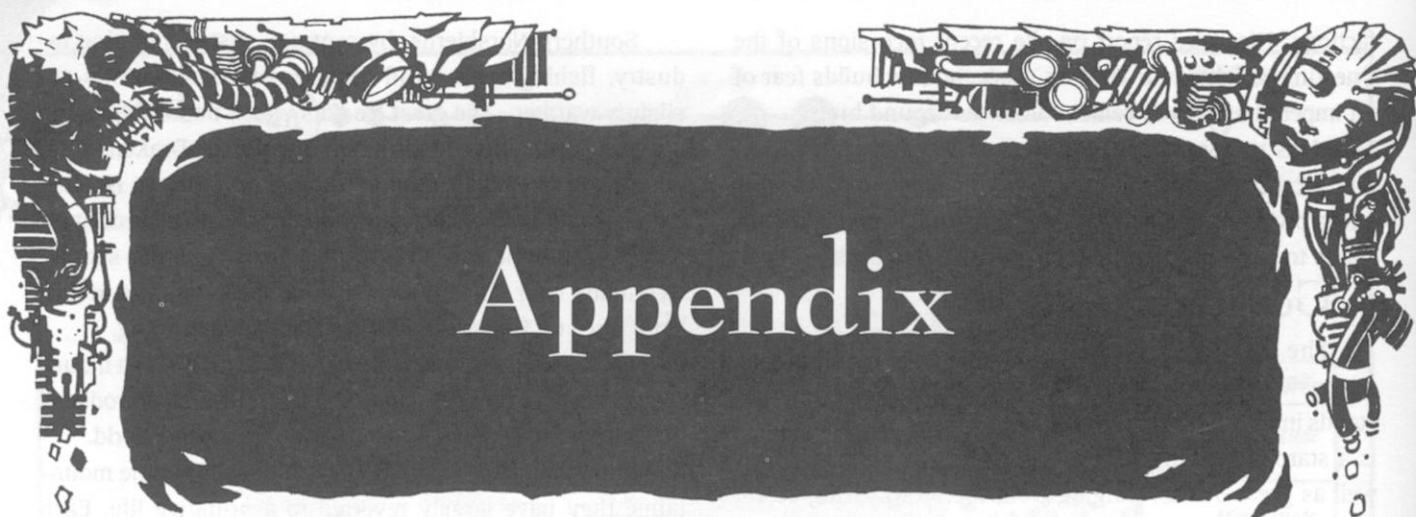


Rekgold



Vuldrok Star-Nation





The New Frontier

This stellar region is too large to fully describe in one volume. Hence, full details on the independent barbarian worlds will appear in the forthcoming supplement: "Lost Worlds: Star Crusade 2." This jumpweb has barely opened to outside exploration. While some of these worlds have been known to Kurgans and Vuldrok for some time now, many have just opened their gates once more, or have been rediscovered by Questing Knights roaming the stars. See the "Jumpweb of Barbarian Space" map on the inside cover.

Antioch: The Palindindrax, immortal god-king of Antioch, has kept this world free from outside rule since the Fall of the Second Republic, in no small part due to the diplomatic genius of the Qabirim, genetically-engineered super-intellects. Although the planet pays tribute to the Caliph, it remains independent. It is only a matter of time, however, until this world — caught between the Hawkwoods on Twilight and the Kurgan Caliphate — must choose sides.

Aspiration: Few have ever even heard of this planet. The system was recently rediscovered but the planet itself has so far eluded most of the explorers who tried to land on it. Orbiting somewhere in a planetary-emissions nebula surrounding a hot little star, Aspiration's past remains a mystery. It supposedly hosted one of the most advanced energy field technology facilities of the Second Republic. Many seek a way to explore this potential cache of techno-wonders, but worry about the legends of monstrous crustaceans who devour most visitors.

Collier's Landing: Once one of the leading worlds for pilots and ship designs, the closing of its jumpgate severely hindered such efforts. Now that it has reopened, the people are desperately trying to recover its lost technology. Dare-devils from the wind-ravaged archipelagoes are already gain-

ing a reputation among the Questing Knights and Vuldrok raiders as starpilots to be reckoned with.

Egg: Almost no mountains cover this world, though lava does flow through innumerable cracks in its surface. The white ash that often forms has proven invaluable for farming. The Kurgan Caliphate rediscovered this world barely a century ago and has slowly begun colonizing efforts. It is perplexed by the odd human inhabitants of the world, subjects of either genetic-manipulation or — if rumors be true — interbreeding with a vanished sentient alien race.

Epiphany: Caught between the Vuldrok and the Caliphate, Epiphany's people have become experts at playing one against the other, siding with the raiders one day and the Caliph the next. The inhabitants of this water world live in constant fear that one day both sides may decide to attack them.

Eridol: The primitive people of this watery world suffer Vuldrok raids and desperately pray that the prophecy of Thana will one day be fulfilled and their hardships alleviated.

Gizeh: A desert world whose native population spends much of its time constructing or maintaining monuments to the Anunnaki who visited millennia ago. Some whisper that a strange sentient race lives hidden here, beings of crystal bodies and ancient memory.

Heaven's Ridge: Giant mountains reach into the sky, topped by golden-domed cities ruled by a priestly caste of sun-worshippers. Descended from Anunnaki cultists who seized the world from its Second Republic colonists and shut the gate, these rugged folk have never bent knee to any conqueror. The deep valleys between mountains host lakes of primordial ooze and are said to hide Anunnaki secrets.



Khotan: Giant plateaus highlight the continuing difficulties between the “high” people and the “low” people. The two have fought for generations, and only a serious external threat could ever bring them together.

Kun Lun: A center of psychic research during the Second Republic, Kun Lun has continued this tradition during the time it was sealed off from the rest of civilization. Its jumpgate has since unsealed itself, but its people opted to stay hidden, trying to keep access a one-way affair. Only now have they decided to end their concealment.

Lamorak: Once a mainstay of the Second Republic's giant entertainment industries, Lamorak used to crank out hundreds of cheap dramas every month. With the Fall, however, these holovids and flesh fantasies became all that the people had to sustain themselves. During the height of their troubles they turned to the actions of these dramatic stars for guidance. Now, Lamorak's heroes have taken to space, hoping to bring the glory of their enlightened way of life to the rest of the stars, just as Laser P.I. did centuries ago.

Novgorod: A vast clash of biomes covers this world, hosting an astonishing array of diversity. Its people, descended from hardy Vuldrok colonists, hunt its dangerous creatures and explore its treacherous, untrammelled regions.

Pandora: Rebellious even during the First Republic, Pandora shut itself off from star travel before the rise of the Second Republic. Unaware of the dramatic history of interstellar civilization's rise and fall into a new Dark Ages, its techno-fetishist inhabitants squabble in filthy, nightmarishly overpopulated cities. Its jumpgates are now secretly open, and new visitors risk street gang riots and silent cutthroats — or the taint of technosophy. When the Avestites become aware of this world, a conflagration is sure to result.

Sky Tear: Giant clouds swirl endlessly around this jungle planet, creating areas of stark contrast between day and night: some zones stay in shadow for years, while other areas never feel the touch of shade. Its colonists occasionally suffer from a strange delirium that drives them to unpredictable extremes. Sky Tear is home to the mysterious sentient fungal race known as the Muazi, whose flesh is used in religious rites by both Kurgan and Vuldrok.

Twilight: A world wracked by war and nuclear fallout, Twilight's moons keep it covered in patches of darkness, and its inhabitants have a reputation as a sullen, moody people. Remnants of the Hawkwood family still rule in one nation, providing a foothold for new Hawkwood incursions into barbarian space.



Ramakrishna Nobles

Heirs to a highly-cultivated society, nobles from this Hargard house pride themselves on their civility and keen learning, something which separates them from the brutish Vuldrok louts who surround them. They know little about their Known Worlds neighbors (especially their relatives on Shaprut), but do respect the Hawkwood based on what they've heard (they often doubt Vuldrok sources). However, they are extremely disturbed about the Inquisition, a seemingly monstrous organization; open intolerance is a peasant trait in their eyes, for being able to turn the other cheek (at least in public) has prevented much violence with the Vuldrok.

While they retain much of the house's original ethnicity (from Urth's Indian subcontinent), there has been some inter-marriage over the centuries with Vuldrok

of various ethnic backgrounds. For clothing, they prefer silks and soft cloths, embroidered with beautiful patterns and decorations, often worked with gold or silver thread. Fencing duels are not popular among them; contests of poetry, musical composition or learning instead prove the better noble. However, when they do fence, sabers are favored (use scimitar traits).

Suggested Traits

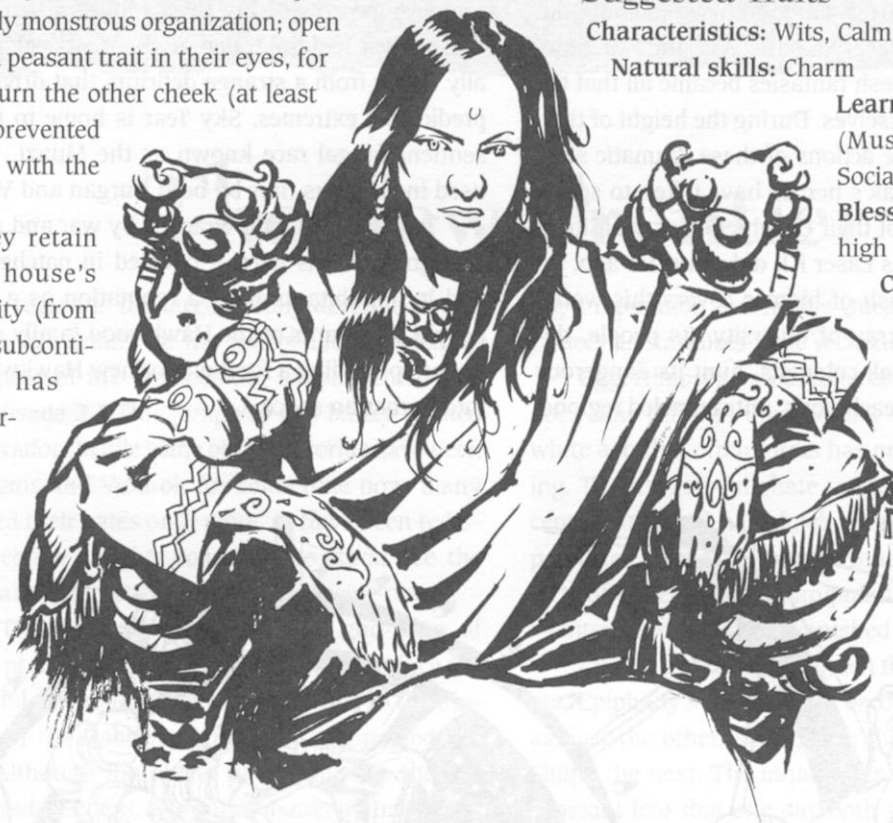
Characteristics: Wits, Calm

Natural skills: Charm

Learned skills: Academia, Arts (Music or Poetry), Etiquette, Social (Leadership), Stoic Mind
Blessing: Elan (+2 Etiquette at high society functions)

Curse: Vain (-2 Perception when being flattered)

Benefices: Gossip Network (1 pt)



Ishkin

Grebbik cursed such a blistering storm of filth that Mari couldn't help but cover her ears. She sighed as he continued to beat his hands on the cart and roll his eyes to the heavens. She wandered off by herself to the edge of the path to sit beside a tree, still holding her hands over her ears. She'd heard the words before, but didn't like them. Mother didn't like them either, and if she were here, Grebbik would be fleeing a stout switch at his behind.

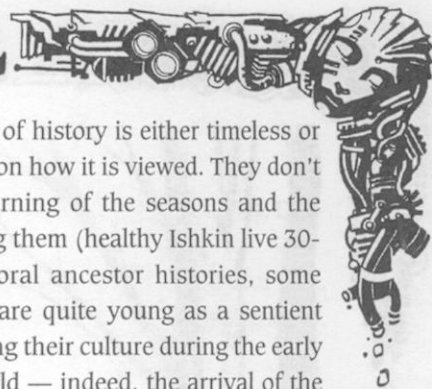
Something glittered in the trees across the path from her, and she cocked her head inquisitively, squinting to focus on it. She smiled and breathed a sigh of relief, hurrying over to snatch the locket from the tree branch. At least they left this for me, she thought, her favorite picture of Da, who

she rarely saw, so busy was he with raiding off-world.

"Thank you," she whispered to the woods, and returned to her seat to polish the locket.

A voice behind her spoke: "The rest of your things are around the next bend. I don't want them. I just took them to see the look on that fellow's face. It's more than even I could have wished for."

She turned to see a short, weasel-like creature standing on two legs and leaning against a tree. He wore a small leather harness with a holstered pistol, but little else. His fur was nearly the exact color and texture of the tree behind him; the only reason she saw him was because he wanted her to.



"It's rude, you know," Mari said, but with a smile. "Grebbik needs those crafts to make his bride-price."

"Ah, no wonder he's so overworked. Well, I apologize further. Never meant to come between a man and his true love."

Mari giggled. "Actually, you're doing her a favor. It'd be better if he could never afford her!"

The creature smiled an evil grin — at least, she thought it looked like a smile — and disappeared with a slight blur of motion. She heard a whispered "In that case..." and no more.

"Wait!" she cried. "I was joking!" She leapt up and ran down the road, past her now-moping brother by the empty cart and around the bend. There was nothing there but a single wooden flask, something the filthy creature probably dropped as he fetched the sack once more.

"Oh! You idiot Ishkin!" she yelled out to the woods. "I didn't mean it!"

But there was only silence in response. Mari sighed and turned back to her brother. That would teach her. One had to watch one's words around the Ishkin...

Mic'pocti — "the invisible people" — in their own tongue (called Kitlosh), a language of glottal stops and alveolars. Their own word for their kind represents their place in the woodland community, as a hidden force removed from social contact with other sentients and as expert trackers and hunters among animalkind.

"Chameleon weasels" or "backstabbing rats" is a term often applied to them by the local Drenjar of Wolf's Lament, the Ishkin's homeworld. The name Ishkin was given them by the Lakol.

Sentient marsupials, Ishkin managed to not only survive amidst the giant predators of Wolf's Lament, but they learned to thrive and become the most successful native animal — if not the most ubiquitous or obvious. Their edge is in their amazing camouflage abilities and their sly, cunning stealth, allowing them to avoid and hide from the larger predators, and launch surprise attacks on their prey using spears and arrows — tool-use they developed on their own, aided by opposable thumbs.

Although they can stand upright, they are equally comfortable on all fours. Their hands developed slender fingers for fine-manipulation (once used to dig into tight holes for maggots and other easily-caught insects), but their palms and the tops of their fingers have thick pads, allowing them to still run on all fours.

Origins

Even though Wolf's Lament was colonised in the Diaspora, the Ishkin were unknown to humankind until after the Fall, although the Lakol claim that their earliest ancestors on the world had met the furtive marsupials and helped to keep their secret hidden, fearing an influx of Second Republican xenologists.

The Ishkin's own sense of history is either timeless or somewhat short, depending on how it is viewed. They don't mark time except by the turning of the seasons and the lifespans of the eldest among them (healthy Ishkin live 30-40 years). Tracing Ishkin oral ancestor histories, some Vuldrok believe the Ishkin are quite young as a sentient race, perhaps only formalizing their culture during the early colonizing of their homeworld — indeed, the arrival of the colonists may have been the spur for them to gather into greater family groups and clans. Before, small, tight-knit families of parent and offspring were the largest social unit, with fierce competition over resources between local families.

Others scoff at even this long a history, and there is a widely held rumour among the Vuldrok that the Ishkin were created by a powerful vitki runecaster or an Anunnaki artifact. The trickster entity called Kluuto in Ishkin mythology is pointed to as the culprit — a thin disguise for some nameless vitki. Ishkin are, of course, insulted by this claim, attributing their origins more properly to Sleevea, the Moon.

Myth History

Long ago as Ishkin mark the tide of seasons, Wolf's Lament (Tiktanta) was a fierce, untamed wilderness where all the beasts of fields and woods forgot the ancient pact they had once agreed to, the pact explaining the rules about who may hunt whom and in what territories and times each creature was allowed to roam. Looking down upon this wild and unkind world, Sleevea, the Person of the Moon, saw that only one creature kept its word: the Mee Pocti, or "pouched people," who bore their young in pouches.

She chose some of these people and blew the Breath of Cunning in their ears, so that they grew wiser than all the others on the world. But this sparked jealousy and rage in the other creatures, and they ignored all remnants of the pact and began to hunt the Mee Pocti, not simply for food, but for revenge.

Their new Cunning served them well, however, and they guessed how the earth could aid them by providing pieces of itself which the Ishkin could remold and carve into weapons and tools. They begged Sleevea for help, and she sent Kluuto to them. He was the Moon's Shadow, and was the most Cunning of all beings. He showed them the moon's Going Away power, so that they could hide from sight yet still exist.

With this new secret, they thrived by hiding from their enemies and attacking when unseen. Soon, all creatures feared the Mic'pocti, the "invisible people." But new people came from the sky, strange people who stood tall but on two legs, like the Mic'pocti, and who also knew the ways of Cunning. But the Mic'pocti were more cunning yet, for they used their Going Away power to hide even from these people, so that they were unknown to them.





For long they watched from behind the trees and under the earth as these new people grew and became many, and fought with one another. They called them the Mag Pocti, the "angry people."

One day, in the deep twilight, one of these new people walked through the woods, watched by the Ishkin, and he looked up and saw the Mic'pocti — he was more Cunning than all his kind. He did not cry out or run away, but instead greeted them with an offering of food. The Mic'pocti crept away, fearful of this one's Cunning. But he returned and offered food every day. After many a turning of seasons, one among the Mic'pocti approached this one and accepted his food, offering berries in return.

For many moons and seasons they met together, and shared sounds, until one could understand the sounds of the other. And so the Mic'pocti befriended the Lakol, and the Lakol swore to keep the invisible people's secret.

Eventually, the angry people got very angry, and warred with angry people beyond the sky. Once their enemies came no more to the earth, the Ishkin came forth to reveal themselves to the remaining angry people, with the help of their friends the Lakol. Some were happy and glad to see these new friends, but some were fearful and suspicious, as a Mee Pocti is around a bear. But they did not get angry, and asked the Mic'pocti to join their counsels and families, and taught the invisible people many of their ways, including how to steal better weapons and tools from the earth.

After this meeting, the Mic'pocti changed. They forgot many of their own ways and became like the Angry People, sometimes going to live in their stone dens with them. But many remembered, and still live hidden, keeping the pact and honoring Sleva. They call upon Kluuto to trick their enemies and turn them away, so that the true invisible people are always unseen.

Modern Times

Ishkin have their own representative in the Great Althing, and are considered their own nation. Many Ishkin have forsaken their wilderness homes and live among or near humans, in cities or just outside of towns. The young are enamored of human tools and technology, and some have successfully joined the Maghtaw to become inventors and engineers.

But not all Vuldrok appreciate the Ishkin; many are suspicious of them, wondering what these secretive creatures are hiding. Some Ishkin don't recognize rights of property, and gleefully steal items that intrigue them. While they sometimes return these once the novelty has worn off, this does little to mollify the original owners — or the authorities. Ishkin suffer the same penalties for theft as others — mutilation (hands cut off), death, exile or imprisonment. The latter is rarely chosen, since the lengths jailors must go to

trap an Ishkin are considered cost inefficient (more than one jailor has overlooked a camouflaged Ishkin in an "empty" cell, inadvertently loosing the captive once he opened the cell to investigate how the prisoner escaped).

These punishments are considered harsh by most Ishkin, who fail to understand the seriousness humans place on uninvited "borrowing." Wild Ishkin elders tell horrifying tales of torture enacted on Ishkin who cross the Angry People, all designed to keep the young from leaving the wilderness. But wild tales of Ishkin trickster heroes who continually defy human law — Robin Hood Ishkin — thrill even the wild Ishkin and often draw them out to the towns and cities to attempt their own glorious banditry. Ishkin fail to draw the distinction between pirating — glorified by many Vuldrok — and cunning stealing; both activities are just as daring in their eyes. For this reason, Ishkin are fixtures in the thieves guilds of most cities.

Physiology

The Ishkin's amazing ability to camouflage themselves operates on a fairly simple principle known to high-tech stealth science — that of fiber-optic cables. Ishkin hair is composed of thin, hollow reeds capped with a translucent jelly. Their fur wraps in multiple layers about their bodies. Light and images from one side of an Ishkin's body are captured and funneled through the fur to the other side; when looked at straight on, the hair stems project an image identical to that on the other side of the Ishkin. (Ishkin fur is odd in that it branches in two directions away from its root; both directions share the same hollow tube, although the root does not.)

When the Ishkin is relaxed, its fur lies smoothly in layers. When agitated or attempting to purposefully camouflage, the hair rises, so that the stems' ends are presented to any viewer. Their hair is numerous and abundant enough to cover multiple angles of viewing.

Obviously, the camouflage capabilities work better when the Ishkin remains still and unmoving, but even when in motion, the Ishkin's background travels with him, although a blur or shimmer in the air may clue careful observers in.

If an Ishkin were to lose its fur, it could no longer camouflage. However, even a week's worth of regrowth may be enough to provide it with half of its full coat's abilities (+1 Sneak when moving; +3 when hiding). Ishkin are sometimes hunted and skinned for their fur, since two or three pelts can be sewn together to produce a human-sized "stealth coat," conferring their camouflage abilities to any who wears one (the hair must be made artificially erect, usually through a careful application of laquer). For such a suit to work, the fur must retain its roots; shaved fur cannot be collected and sewn into a suit.

Ishkin Traits

Cost: 5 Extras points

Characteristics: Strength (base 2, max 9; +4 pts), Dexterity (base 4, max 12; 7 pts)

Learned skills: All Ishkin gain Speak Kitlosh for free. However, they must spend points to speak other languages, like Vuldrok or Urthish (2 pts each).

Species Traits:

Blessings: Keen Senses (5 pts: +2 Per with sight, sound and smell), Scamper (3 pts: run on four legs, +6 meters base run)

Curses: Dwarf (+5 pts: -2 Vitality, base run = 6 meters, requires tailored clothing), Jumpy (+2 pts: -2 Calm in unfamiliar territory), Secretive (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert around strangers)

Benefices: Bite (2 pts: Dx + Fight, Init -2, DMG 2), Camouflage (5 pts: Ishkin can change fur color to reflect environment; +3 Sneak when moving, +5 Sneak when still)

Afflictions: Hunted (+3 pts: Ishkin fur is valuable on the black market as stealth coats; although its trade is illegal, unscrupulous hunters do track Ishkin), Short-lived (+1 pt: average Ishkin lifespan is 35 years)

Total base run = 12 meters

Favored Weapons: Wild (non-civilized) Ishkin use blowguns, bows and arrows, spears and knives (made from flint). Civilised Ishkin prefer steel dirks, frap sticks and sniper carbines (Dante Farshot 10 mm, DMG 7, RNH 50/70, Shots 5, Rate 2, SIZ L, Cost 600).

Wild Ishkin wear leather harnesses but no armor, as their camouflaged fur is a necessary defense. Civilized Ishkin yearn for energy shields, but those who can't afford such extravagance adopt light leather cloaks that can be removed and folded into a bundle in one turn (3d defense).



Nizdharim

Long believed extinct in the Known Worlds, where they were hunted to extinction by the amphibious Oro'ym on the watery world of Madoc, this 12-tentacled, sentient mollusk race resurfaced recently in Vuldrok space. The Vuldrok first became aware of them around 4840, and mistook their organic, squid-shaped spacecraft for Symbiot ships. After a few skirmishes, the Vuldrok discovered that the Nizdharim were not Symbiots, and a limited communication began with the strange starfarers. Initially, the Vuldrok thought them trained animals, operating their scout ships for another, more advanced, race.

The Vuldrok shamans could not themselves communicate with the Nizdharim via traditional methods. Certain Vuldrok were wary, and the ambassadors from the Skey Nation believed them an ancient people, curiously tainted. Eventually, a small trading colony was allowed in the oceans of Hargard, where the Nizdharim ply their strange goods, some not manufactured by them but found elsewhere (the Nizdharim will not say where). The jumproutes to their worlds are unknown; they don't use jumpkeys, instead encrypting jumproute information into their think machines, built on completely different models than human tech. No warlord has yet been able to follow them to their rumored treasure hoards. Even the small sea colony on Hargard seems to be made up of exiles or rejects who have no power in the greater spacefaring Nizdharim society.

The Nizdharim number about 10,000 on Hargard. They are a secretive people, coexisting with their neighbors peacefully, trading exotic sea-herbs (some with medicinal cures) and strange art artifacts from unknown origins, which usually produce a calming effect at first but later send nightmares to their owners. They also deal in "dreamweed," a harvested aquatic drug which produces euphoric visions and is highly addictive.

A strange cult has begun to spread to the ports, where whispers of Nidderdak From Beyond the Stars and Ultharroth the Great Maw have found adherents among remote fishing communities. It is known by some that Nidderdak From Beyond the Stars is their progenitor god, who seeded them on numerous worlds to await his call when the stars began to dim. It is said that Ultharroth is the final entropy, a maddening hunger which is sated on light, which was pushed to the darkest regions aeons ago in the God Wars, and who hungers for a way back into the universe.

Some Nizdharim have turned their backs on Nidderdak, worshiping instead Nao, the Pulsating Life-Force of the Universe. How this splinter group broke from the larger colony is unclear, for the Nizdharim do not mention their

beliefs to outsiders. Most still serve their ominous patron, and would treat any encountered Oro'ym like a monster from myth come alive. Nizdharim legends are filled with tales of the maddened amphibian race, who killed for sport, hunting their distant ancestors to their graves in half-remembered seas.

Residents of Hargard are dimly aware that war has broken out between the followers of Nao and Nidderdak. The nature of Nao is not understood by humans. Some state it is a rival god to Nidderdak, while others say it is a neutral force, representing nature. A few have suggested that Nao may be a god of light, and the Sons of Zebulon ponder if the Nizdharim have come to recognize the Celestial Sun.

The few followers of Nao who have communicated with humans express Nao as the original source of the present universe, and claim that Nidderdak is a relic from an older, forgotten cosmos, attempting to prolong its existence by seeding child races. The Vuldrok view Nidderdak more as grim than evil, for they have grim gods as well, and thus do not oppose the Nizdharim on religious grounds.

Description

Nizdharim are 12-tentacled mollusks standing 1.2 meters tall, resembling Urth cephalopods. They possess two eyes each with a horizontal iris, a head with a radula (a file-like feeding organ) and beak for eating food, sucker bearing tentacles and digestive, reproductive and circulatory systems (including a systemic heart and branchial heart) located in the visceral hump. Glands below each eye emit poison in the form of a green spray. Calling themselves the Third Race (the earlier Modoc Nizdharim were the Second Race), they have a hardened skull-like substance guarding their brains, as well as a shell over their visceral humps (neither possessed by the Second Race). Able to live in most Urthlike salt water habitats, they can exist on land for short periods of time, where they can often overtake a human in speed.

They have specialized environmental suits for extended periods on land, and use small mollusk creatures called *akarhim*, or "glue squids," that attach themselves, lampreylike, to a tentacle, providing the Nizdharim with salt water while feeding off waste products in the Nizdharim's digestive and circulatory systems.

Nizdharim have energy staves which operate like laser rifles, and they also use swords. Their tentacles can manipulate tools faster than the human hand, and they are extremely dexterous. Recently, a new type of Nizdharim has appeared, one who can breathe both air and water, and the humans on Hargard fear this is part of a breeding program designed to conquer the planet.



Society

The Nizdharim dwell in organic underwater cities of unearthly architecture, resembling gigantic phosphorescent oblong jellyfish, (called *tlong* in their tongue) whose tentacles root them to the ocean floor, but which can disengage when moving the colony. The Nizdharim breed these organic homes from invertebrate sea predators. They enter these colonies from closed skin flaps, which they can open with their tentacles. These living buildings easily house hundreds of Nizdharim, who dwell in soft, mesoglea-lined rooms, with transparent walls. A city has 10 to 15 tlongs, and a specialized tlong houses starships. A symbiotic relationship exists between the two species, for the tlong feed off Nizdharim waste. Four small colony cities exist on Hargard. The northernmost, Akorr, is in the hands of the rebel Nao worshippers.

Nizdharim nurture their young for years before they receive initiation into adult life, which begins with a group telepathic merging called the "awakening." Some humans believe that there are no individual Nizdharim, and that all possess the same hive mind. The rebel Nao worshippers disprove this; while Nizdharim often seem to act in unison to outsiders, individuality exists despite the telepathy. However, until recently, no Nizdharim ever challenged accepted orthodoxy. Nao worshipers represent a break in group telepathy. Some believe ancient Ur ruins, explored by bold Nizdharim on Hargard, possessed some artifact which broke the telepathic contact.

Nizdharim possess artisans, warriors, hunters, merchants and priests. While some are more powerful than others, the society as a whole does not believe in great discrepancies, for it is an article of faith among them that Nidderdak will one day call upon all his children to help him. The priests are the rulers, but they also function as judges and military leaders. Only the brightest are chosen for this position, and fed on *Nidderdaki*, the food of Nidderdak, which enhances their powers and abilities. Their leaders are thus often larger and stronger than their followers. The Nizdharim have not, until recently, warred on each other. When several priests meet, it is usually to confer on long term goals for the race. The Nizdharim believe they are the favored race, and when Nidderdak returns the other races will perish or serve as slaves.

Within the last five years, the Nizdharim have perfected an organic translator, shaped like a fantastic sea-sponge. Thus, verbal communication is possible between humans and the Nizdharim. Vuldrok merchants have kept these exchanges open to matters of commerce, wary of becoming overly familiar with the alien culture of the Nizdharim. No one has asked for their representation in the Althing, since on Hargard they are outside the core worlds. A few have sought them out to learn something of them.

Traits

Cost: 14 Extras points

Characteristics: Dexterity (max 13; cost 6 pts)

Learned skills: All Nizdharim gain Speak Nizdharim for free. They cannot speak Urthish without a translation device.

Racial Traits:

Blessing: Ambidextrous (4 pts; no penalty for off-tentacle use)

Curse: Short (+3 pts: -1 Vitality)

Benefices: Carapace (3 pts: 3d armor), Gills (3 pts: breath underwater), Hazardous Breath (4 pts: poison cloud emitted from glands under eyes; only spreads underwater), Tentacles (8 pts: total of 12 tentacles; Nizdharim can fire guns or sword fight with their four upper tentacles, the rest are used for movement and balance; base running distance on eight tentacles: 14 meters)

Afflictions: Cannot speak Urthish (+1 pt), Requires Moisture (+5 pts), Ostrasized (+5 pts: suffers vast prejudice from most humans)

Suggested skills: Dodge, Melee, Shoot, Vigor, Drive Watercraft, Focus, Stoic Body



Runecasting

No one knows what the runes really are.

Strange and unnerving to gaze upon, these glyphs found among Anunnaki ruins have perplexed humans since their first discovery. The Elder Monolith on Raven, near the Valley of Mists and the Myrdwood, first revealed the glyphs to humankind. Second Republic xenologists wondered at these new, abstract symbols — did they represent some form of writing? An ideographic language or complex phonetic symbology? Or were they just decorative motifs?

The xenologists came, they studied, and they left without answers for their questions. Hologram images, charcoal rubbings, spectrographic analysis, molecular soundings — all forms of archaeological technology were brought to bear on the monolith. None bore fruit. Nothing new could be gleaned than that Ur tech was incomprehensible to the modern sciences of the day. Packing up their kits, they returned to the core worlds with massive data files to crunch through and file away. For all they knew, the glyphs were simply what they appeared to be: two-dimensional images.

None of them had the eyes to see the truth.

After the Fall, as the Wersa of Raven struggled to survive with their new-won freedom, mystics came on pilgrimage to the mysterious ruins, seeking visions and answers to the problems plaguing their people: questions of fate and destiny, or mere puzzles of governance or power. While some left with odd dreams or bizarre inspirations seemingly delivered by unseen and alien muses, most went away with no more than they came.

One, however, saw what before had been unseen, witnessing wonders with a mind unchained by reason. Govan Glitterbeard was considered mad and “touched” by even his mystical-minded comrades. A priest of Metsa, a local Raven wind spirit, he wandered the world wherever Metsa whispered for him to go — or so he claimed. Most other priests thought him a liar, but he had demonstrated enough remarkable luck — showing up at places by the most amazing circumstance at the most propitious time — that others believed him truly chosen by his god.

The middle-aged man traveled alone, relying on the charity of others for his meals and to mend his clothes. Rarely could he hold a steady conversation for long, for so quick was his mind that he ever jumped from one topic to another, so that his words seemed a chaos of meaningless banter. But if one truly listened, and had the learning to place his words in their contexts, he could understand that Govan was perhaps a genius, one of those rare few whose imaginations jump the gulfs separating fields of knowledge from one another — but one who could barely converse with other men, so odd were his mannerisms and manic pronounce-

ments. If he were in the core worlds of the Second Republic, he might have become a theoretical scientist, an Einstein of his age or a Doramos. Instead, raised among the Wersa, he recognized magic instead of mathematics, numinous spirits instead of natural law.

And so Govan came to the Valley of Mists and the Anunnaki ruins scattered about, and he gazed upon the Elder Monolith, and where others saw glyphs, he saw swimming, revolving and changing three-dimensional constructs spinning in the air and within the monolith, as if matter provided no barrier around them.

He reached to try and grasp them, but his hand met the surface of the monolith, and rubbed only the two-dimensional images. His perception saw more than his physical reality allowed. Realizing they were mental constructs existing on some other-dimensional level, he sought a way to understand them better. He camped in the ruins and spent the next five years staring at the glyphs, walking around them, studying them from all angles and in all seasons, stopping only to eat the food the locals left him.

The people would come and watch him, but leave spooked and not completely convinced he was not dangerously insane. One day, they witnessed him chopping off his own hand and holding the stump to the sky, yelling “See what I have given you! An offering for your lore!”

He then began to laugh maniacally and hop about in a dance of joy. He bent down over a rock and scrawled upon it with a charcoal brick. Standing back from it, he glared at it — and it melted as if putty. His hands worked upon it and shaped from it a sword, which he held high, proud of his achievement. The people watching him ran, fearful of this new power he revealed.

Soon, Govan was seen in the towns and villages nearby, traveling again onwards to unknown regions, but around his neck clattered a necklace of bones, each with a glyph drawn upon it. Before he left the last house, he cried out to the village: “I have seen the runes! I understand the ways of the ancients! I go to remake the world. Any who seeks this lore may follow. I leave behind a trail for those who are earnest.” And then he left.

Over the years, he was sighted exhibiting amazing powers that rivaled those of even the greatest theurges, and many came to fear even rumour of him in their region. He was said to be able to paint a runemark on an item and gain complete control of that thing, shaping it however he liked, or making things from nothing. He could change his own shape or that of others who displeased him. He could also disappear before a person's eyes, and word of his deeds from far places would reach that person through the God-Box,

although there was no time for Govan to have traveled to that place, except by rare air-car.

Some overcame their wariness and sought him out, desperate to learn from him his power. He taught the way of runecasting, as he called it, to some, but never revealed his greatest secrets to them. The older he got, the more powerful he became, but also the more maimed and wizened, as if the runes sapped his strength and crippled his body. Besides his lost hand, he fatigued easily and exhibited manias, such as an obsession with cleanliness and a fear of starships, and some could see that he had runes carved onto his body like Ukari ritual scars. He would say that "the runes are harsh masters. They demand complete allegiance. You must sacrifice a part of yourself to them to free a piece of your mind, a bed of soil in which the rune seed will grow, becoming a part of you, its image intertwining with your mind until you are one with it."

Eventually, his power overcame even him. He often wandered to strange places and returned with new runes never before seen. Once, he appeared before his pupils with a new rune, but he was ill and weak, for he had sacrificed his own health to gain knowledge of it. He claimed it was among the greatest of all runes, for it governed the movements of time itself. He swore to wield it and return to the past, to the time of the Anunnaki runemasters. Before any could beg him to reconsider such hubris, he carved the rune upon his chest and incanted to release his Wyrđ. His very being seemed to unravel before those who watched, and some had to avert their eyes lest the glimpse of the torn fabric of time rend their minds. Others who continued to see, however, swear that the image was euphoric to watch, even though it lasted but the merest of moments. Afterwards, there was no sign of Govan, nor of any disturbance at all.

His greatest pupil, Chasek Tornbrow, took Govan's teachings and recorded them, helping to codify what was to Govan a loose, chaotic and aesthetic mode of feeling rather than intellect. Some say he diminished the runepower in doing so, so that all who learned through his methods could never completely master the runes. But others say he had one advantage in this: that not so many of his followers grew mad, or became weird, so that other men could still understand them, and they could become popular and powerful in the counsels of chiefs and jarls.

Other students of Govan also handed down his ways, but differently than Chasek. They taught a method of learning and even living that relied on intuition over conscious intent. These two major schools still exist among runecasters (sing. = *vitki*, pl. = *vitkar*) today, called the Well of Wyrđ (*Urdur*) or Runelearners, and the Lucky (*Hamingjur*), the mad wisdom seekers. The former is Chasek's legacy, and actually forms an organization with membership roles and



means of handing down runelore to apprentices. The latter follows the spirit of Govan, with individual runecasters making their own ways in the world by hook and crook, choosing their own apprentices based on their own criteria.

Urdur — Well of Wyrð

Govan and Chasek were both Wersa from the culture that would eventually become the Drenjar Nation. While Govan used the Old Urth Norse terms popular among his culture to help explain the runes, he did not slavishly hold to them, often using other metaphors to help explain the complex topic. Chasek, however, sought a means by which Govan's method could be easily taught to others, to codify the lore. He chose to emphasize Govan's teaching stories which used Old Norse rune myths as examples, but without the pretense of fable, presenting the Anunnaki glyphs as if they were the same thing spoken of in ancient Urth mythology.

Thus, the sacrifices Govan taught to free the mind were equated with those the old god Odin made when hanging from the World Tree and putting out his eye in return for the knowledge of the runes. The names of the runes were likewise codified in familiar terms to the Wersa pagans, although some vitkar (mostly Hamingjur) claim that by using such strict names, they limit the runes' powers.

The advantages of joining the Well are access to other runecasters and their lore (at least, what lore they choose to share; most still keep their deeper secrets), spread across the Vuldrok worlds in various cities or steadings of their own. In addition, many jarls or other leaders seek to ally with the Well, and offer protection and boarding in return for their aid — although few are so foolish to not first bind the vitkar with oaths of loyalty (not binding in any occult sense, but any who break it will lose regard).

Disadvantages include swearing an oath of loyalty to the school, which includes recognizing a hierarchy of ranks and obeying those of higher rank — much like a guild. Members must follow orders given by the higher ranks, even if they seem insane or immoral. The rank titles are as follows:

Cost	Rank Title
3	Athling
5	Ondling
7	Erulian
9	Runeskald
11	Erilaz
13	Theal

Hamingjur — The Lucky

While the majority of vitkar join or are apprenticed to the Urdur school, some prefer a less-structured path to power. These are called *myrkir vitkar*, or dark and untrustworthy, by the Urdur vitkar, although Hamingjur (sing. = *Hamingja*) rarely recognize themselves as such, let alone agree that they form a "school." They include wise and conscientious

vitkar working to better everybody's lives to megalomaniacal scum seeking only power and fame, or even nigh-insane wanderers and beggars whom none — let alone other vitkar — can always recognize as runecasters.

Learning runelore from such a loner requires the applicant to petition a vitki and hope he is accepted as a pupil. Once accepted, there are certain traditional rules he must usually uphold: the pupil looks after the mundane, wordly concerns of the vitki (cooking, cleaning, managing expenses) while the vitki occasional imparts runelore to the pupil at a pace he deems acceptable. Often, pupils feel they are being purposefully held back by a jealous teacher, and abandon the tutelage to join the Urdur instead — or cut out on their own if they feel they have learned enough.

While the disadvantages to this relationship are obvious, many of the most powerful vitki are Hamingjur, and their pupils have a great advantage in being so close to such mastery. While wordly wealth and regard may not be as readily available as for the Urdur, a Hamingja's chances of rising in true rune wisdom — if he truly seeks it — are high.

Hamingjur vitkar are usually regarded by their ricu skill (see the *Regard* trait, in the Vuldrok chapter) rather than a set of rank titles.

Rarest of the Rare

Even though runecasting has enough of a tradition in Vuldrok space to develop such schools, it is still extremely rare — no other occult path, whether it be psychic powers, theurgy, or even Antinomy, can be said to be as difficult or so rarely practiced as runecasting. The ability to become a vitki is not in everyone's make-up. Vitkar themselves argue over tired old questions of nature versus nurture in rune ability, but all they can conclusively say is that not all applicants can work the runes, regardless of desire and perseverance.

Even the rawest vitki pupils elicit awe and fear wherever they walk in Vuldrok society. Both luck and ruin seem to accompany them, and others either court or shun them for it.

The Mystery of the Runes

Rune scholars of both schools have speculated about the nature of the runes over the millennia since their discovery. Few theories have been universally accepted, but a general picture of their metaphysics can be compiled. Note that these opinions have been formed by Vuldrok vitkar (the only kind, at least presently), most of whom have rarely been of a scientific bent.

The two-dimensional glyphs used by vitkar to represent runes are gleaned from images found among Ur ruins. These simple ideograms or pictograms bely the vast intel-

lect that created them. In actuality, they illustrate the limited consciousness of humans and most other sentients, who fail to perceive the third (or higher) dimensional nature of these glyphs. Vitkar can see three-dimensions to a rune where others see only two. While a warlord may see a square, the vitki sees a cube, or even a tetrahedron. A curving 's' for the warlord might be a spiraling helix for the vitki, and so on.

Runes seem to be vast, multi-dimensional lattices or crystals tied to mental processes. They were built and placed by the Anunnaki and perhaps form the very basis of their technology, for they seem to tap into — if not control or weave — the very laws of the universe. These laws seem to include mental processes as well as more material phenomena.

Consciousness is the key to working the runes. Built by and for an alien intelligence's consciousness, they can still be comprehended on a lower level by humans with a particular bent for holistic thinking. However, partitions in the human soul and brain must be made to comprehend and hold the memory of the runes; this is done by sacrificing aspects of the runecaster's person — whether physical, mental or spiritual — to make room for this data or power.

This explanation is a point of contention, for there is some speculation that the runes possess organic properties: that they change and evolve over time in a self-willed manner, and are now wild in the absence of their creators. The sacrifices demanded of a vitki are meant to fuel the runes' needs, or to create a psychic bond between the vitki and the rune.

Some have even opined that the runes are to the Anunnaku what an alphabet block is to a child — a crude learning tool for a more advanced Anunnaki mind science.

Using the Runescrye skill, a vitki can recognize runes by their common two-dimensional images, and sometimes see their multiple dimensions. The Urdur catalog rune images and teach them to all members, in case one of their kind finds one amidst ruins — or even finds a new one. (The search for new or lost runes is a fanatical affair for most vitkar of any school.)

The wisest vitkar speculate that certain runes are actually the same rune seen from different angles or perspectives. Some even speculate that all runes are but many aspects of one rune; if one could gain a higher-dimensional perspective, he might perceive this ur-rune stretching throughout the universe.

Rules

Runecasting is an incredibly powerful activity — so immense are the energies the vitki must master that they can maim, mutilate and drive him mad. Some swear that the runes were not meant for humankind, that only the ancient

Anunnaki can decipher and use them properly.

It is not recommended that player characters be runecasters. There are two good reasons for this: One, the rules are so open ended and powerful that we can't possibly present a complete system here that can satisfy all (or even most) of the questions a player might ask, let alone provide the gamemaster the necessary guidelines to allow such a chaotic thing as a player to so freely wreak havoc. Two, to provide such details would strip the runes of their mystery; they must be learned in shadowy whispers or from forboding figures, over the course of an epic.

That said, it is possible to allow player characters to learn the rudiments of runecasting, for it is hard to rise in ability to the upper levels — most runecasters never get past level three! Additionally, further details on the runes will be revealed in future **Fading Suns** sourcebooks. Diligent and obsessed player characters may avail themselves of these and future clues toward becoming runecasters. For now, the art should remain firmly in the gamemaster's camp.

The following details about runecasting are provided for the gamemaster, with enough detail to satisfy low-level player character vitkar.

Runecasting Trait

A vitki must learn the occult characteristic: Runecasting. Like Psi or Theurgy, its levels range from 1-10. Unlike those other characteristics, Runecasting does not have an opposing trait: no Urge or Hubris equivalent. However, vitkar don't get off easy — learning the runes requires harsh sacrifices; one sacrifice is required at certain stages (most often at levels 1, 3, 6 and 9; see the Rune and Sacrifice Charts). Vitkar rarely get powerful without suffering physical or mental mutilation.

Vitkar cannot possess psychic powers or theurgic rites (or Antinomy). The first sacrifice such a vitki must make is to forsake his previous occult powers (if any). See the *Sacrifice Chart*.

Rune Types

While there are many actual runes, they can each be categorized into three different types: Power (or action), Form (object), and Condition (modifier). The act of runecasting is like forming a sentence with these three rune types: "I (the vitki) shape (Power rune) that human (Form rune) over there (Space rune) for the next 30 seconds (Time rune)."

These types are described below. See the Rune Chart for a list of the runes themselves and their costs.

Power runes: Each Power rune forms the basis for an occult path; as with psychic paths, the vitki progresses by learning levels of powers, from level 1 through 9+. His Runecasting occult characteristic determines the maximum level he can raise any Power rune path. Learning a Power rune requires a sacrifice at certain levels of achievement (usually at levels 1, 3, 6 and 9 — for each Power rune path



learned!) and the expenditure of Extra points or experience points.

Form runes: The Form runes a vitki knows determine what kinds of targets he can use his Power runes against. For instance, if he does not know the Human rune, he can't Shape human flesh. If he doesn't know the Human and Emotion runes, he cannot manipulate a person's emotions. Each Form rune is rated by the Runecasting level required to learn it, although there are no different effects available per level, as with Power runes. Once a Form rune is learned, it can be used with any Power rune. It requires no sacrifice to learn a Form rune; just Extra points or experience points.

Form runes are grouped into classes which form a continuum from the most familiar to most grand, or the easiest to manipulate to the most difficult (at least for the human mind): Element, Life, Mind, Artifact and Cosmic. Only the most adept rise to become Mindworkers; the Artifact and Cosmic runes are nigh-incomprehensible to humans.

Condition runes: The Condition runes govern a runecasting's duration (Time rune), range (Space rune) and number of targets (Quantity rune). There are no levels to Condition runes; a vitki either knows them or he doesn't. However, knowledge of these runes is necessary if the vitki wishes to extend any of these effects.

Like psychic powers, the amount of Wyrđ spent determines extra duration, range and number of targets, as per the charts on p. 141 of the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook. The default duration, range and number of targets for any runecasting without these Condition runes is instant, touch, and self. (Note: Unless otherwise noted in a rune's description, rune effects can be extended to perpetual with the Time rune and the expenditure of the proper amount of Wyrđ.)

Once a Condition rune is learned, it can be used with any Power rune. It requires no sacrifice to learn a Condition rune; just Extra points or experience points.

Casting

Each Power rune level requires a particular combination of a characteristic and a skill — just like psychic powers or theurgic rites. When casting that Power rune level, the vitki totals those two traits to get his goal for the roll.

Unless stated otherwise in a Power rune description, the vitki must know one or more Form runes; without knowledge of that rune, the vitki cannot manipulate that form (substance, object, thing, etc.).

Additionally, the Condition runes must be known to change the duration, range or number of targets of the casting beyond the defaults of instant, touch and self.

Like theurgic rites, it takes one turn to perform a runecasting, during which time no other actions may be taken.

Drawing the Rune: The vitki must first "draw the rune" onto her target — she must paint, carve or in some visual way represent all the Power runes being used on the target (it is not necessary to draw Form or Condition runes). The drawing does not have to be permanent; it must simply exist for as long as it takes the vitki to cast the effect. It must also be physical — laser pointers or other projectors are not properly efficacious.

Obviously, some targets may object to being painted or carved upon. Vitki can also pass an image of the rune(s) to the target, in the form of a slip of paper or book with the rune painted inside it — the rune does not have to be visible for the effect to work (although the vitki must have her own image of all the runes involved — see Components, below). This can be done surreptitiously without the target's knowledge, as long as Stealth or Sleight of Hand rolls (whichever best fits the situation) are made.

The rune does not have to be drawn by the vitki performing the runecasting. As long as the proper rune image is on the target, the rune is considered drawn for any vitki who can use that rune. For instance, the target may be carrying a runescroll given to him earlier by another vitki, or he might hold the vitki's own runestaff (see below).

The more mastery a vitki gains with a Power rune, the less beholden he is to drawing the rune on his targets. It requires a Runecasting characteristic two levels higher than the desired effect to cast it without drawing the rune (similar to inventing/coding new technology with the Tech characteristic). For example, a vitki with a Runecasting score of 3 can cast level one effects without having to draw the rune on her targets. (However, she must still have her rune image component unless she has memorized the rune — see Components, below.)

Components: Just as a theurgic rite has certain components (liturgy, gestures, and prayer), runes have a component of their own: image — the actual image of the rune being used.

Theoretically, it is the image of a rune in one's mind that actually fuels the power, not the physical representation of the rune. Drawing or tracing the rune in one's mind and then projecting the completed image onto a target is what "casts" a rune. However, very few vitkar can properly form the runes in their minds unaided — they are more complex than they at first appear, and the visual mnemonic of the rune's common two-dimensional image (as gleaned from Anunnaki ruins) is necessary.

Thus, most vitkar carry runestones, necklaces or bags holding rune images painted or carved onto bone, stone, plastic or even ceramsteel. Others prefer runestaves, staffs carved up and down their lengths with all the runes a vitki is liable to need quick access to. A rare few vitkar — usually those allied with the Maghtaw — avail themselves of more



technological means, such as portable think machines or cyber implants that display three-dimensional computer models of the runes in their minds as needed.

It is possible to perform a runecasting without seeing the necessary runes, to call up the image in memory alone. However, this is incredibly difficult and is considered a Severe task (-8 penalty); this modifier applies to both the goal roll and the vitki's initiative. A turn may be spent in concentration, allowing the vitki to make a complementary Introvert + Focus roll; the victory points can help offset the -8 penalty.

A vitki can spend time deeply meditating on a rune to try and memorize it so that she no longer needs to reference its image in future runecasting. This requires a week of uninterrupted contemplation, a successful Introvert + Runescribe roll, and the expenditure of Extra or experience points equal to half of what was spent on the rune to first learn it (round up). This memorization must be done for each level of a Power rune (knowledge of each level brings a comprehension of different dimensions to the rune), although it need be done only once per Form or Condition rune. (Mark memorized rune levels on a character sheet with an "M" in parentheses.)

In addition, although the runes are mainly visual, a vitki can train himself to learn and use them through touch, which requires carved versions of the runes to feel when casting. It

costs +1 Extra and +2 experience points (added to the normal cost) to learn a tactile rune.

Using Multiple Form Runes: It is not uncommon for a runecasting to require the use of multiple Form runes, such as using the Human rune to target a man and the Earth rune to turn him to stone (with the Shaping rune). However, the vitki suffers a goal penalty of -1 per extra Form rune used (no penalty for using a single Form rune).

Using Multiple Power Runes: Most castings involve a single Power rune. Multiple power runes can be bound together in one casting (*bandrun*) with the following conditions: one turn must be spent per Power rune used (the casting takes effect on the final turn, at the runecaster's Initiative), and one additional Wyrd point must be spent per Power rune used. Only one roll is made for the casting; if the goal numbers of the Power rune effects are different, the lowest goal is used.

Critical Failure: A "fumble" on a runecasting roll can lead to dire consequences. The desired effect may turn back on the caster, although in a mild and unpredictable way — if he sought to turn a bridge to stone and fumbled, his hand might instead turn to stone for that turn and the next (regardless of the intended duration of the casting). Or he might develop a temporary insanity, such as a fear of the runecasting's intended target, or people or things like him/it, or just a behavioral quirk, such as an inability to stop



Rune Chart

Traits

Trait

Runecasting (occult characteristic)

Runescrye (learned skill)

Power Runes (*Orlogrunar*)

Rune

Sacrifice*

Concealing	Mild 1, Major 3, Major 6, Severe 9
Knowing	Mild 1, Major 3, Major 6, Severe 9
Making	Major 1, Major 3, Severe 6, Severe 9
Revealing	Mild 1, Major 3, Major 6, Severe 9
Shaping	Mild 1, Major 3, Severe 6, Severe 9
Shielding	Mild 1, Major 3, Major 6, Severe 9
Traveling	Mild 1, Major 3, Major 6, Severe 9
Unmaking	Mild 1, Major 3, Severe 6, Severe 9

* The listed sacrifice must be made upon learning each of the listed levels; those levels not noted require no sacrifice.

Extra cost

3 per level

1 per level

Experience cost

3x current rating

2x current rating

Extra cost

1 per level

1 per level

3 per level

1 per level

2 per level

1 per level

1 per level

2 per level

Experience cost

2x current rating

2x current rating

4x current rating

2x current rating

3x current rating

2x current rating

2x current rating

3x current rating

continued...

cursing around warlords or priests for the next 10 turns.

Members of the Urdur enforce a degree of training to prevent such side effects. They can make Calm or Introvert + Runescrye rolls to avoid exhibiting negative mental afflictions, but they must take no actions the duration of the ill effect; if they do, their attempts to avoid it fail.

Wyrð

Working with or casting runes costs a vitki much energy — it is exhausting opening one's mind and bending one's will to alien technology. Thus, casting a Power rune costs Wyrð; unless otherwise noted in the description of a rune, the cost is one Wyrð per casting. Condition runes can change duration, range or number of targets as per the Wyrð costs for psychic powers (see p. 141 of the *Fading Suns* Second Edition rulebook).

Runescrye Skill

Runescrye is a learned skill used to make rolls for certain runes and in sensory rolls to actually perceive runes and rune effects. A vitki trying to understand the runes a rival uses must have a good Runescrye skill. This usually requires a Perception + Runescrye (to see the effect) or a Wits + Runescrye roll (to analyze it). This skill can be learned by anyone, but only those with at least one level in the Runecasting characteristic can actually see the true occult dimensions of a rune, and thus analyze it fully.

Defending Against Runecasting

One defends against runecasting as with most occult effects, as per the rules on p. 140 of the *Fading Suns* Sec-

ond Edition rulebook. In addition, those with Runescrye skill have a chance to detect and analyze runecasting when they see it (see *Runescrye*, above).

Power Rune Paths

Provided below are descriptions of effects available with each level of the known Power runes. Space precludes a detailed explanation of how each level can work for, against or with certain Form runes; gamemasters must improvise decisions concerning their workings.

Unless otherwise stated, Power rune effects last only as long as the runecasting's duration. For example, a temporary Shaping runecasting will only last for 10 turns, so a human turned to stone with that casting would revert back to flesh 10 turns later.



Concealing

This rune hides things from even the most expert physical and occult scrying, or locks them away.

Various skills may be used depending on the circumstances, some of which could include: Stealth, Focus, Stoic Mind or Knavery. The

characteristic is almost always Calm, but Wits and Tech may be used for more cunning or technical achievements.

Lvl Power

- 1 Camouflage: victory points provide penalties to other's rolls as long as vitki remains still.
- 2 Innocuous: actions go unnoticed (victory points provide penalties to other's rolls even when he moves and talks).



Rune Chart continued...

Form Runes (*Hamrunar*)

Learning Form runes does not require sacrifices, but the vitki's Runecasting trait must equal the listed level. Learning a rune also provides the vitki with knowledge of objects that rune governs, as if he had a Lore skill in that subject (equal to the Vitki's Wits score); this is general lore only, more specific details can be had using the Revealing rune.

The Extra points cost for learning a Form rune is equal to its level; the experience point cost is two times its level.

Some vitki claim that, between the Artifact and Cosmic rune classes, belongs an Entity class, which includes gods and demons. However, none have been able to produce such runes — or none have revealed them yet.

1. Element (*Midgardrunar*)

Rune	Level
Earth (solids)	1
Water (fluids)	2
Air (gases)	3
Fire (energy)	4
Ether (fields)	5

continued...

- 3 Misdirection/Lie: Project image of something you're not.
- 4 Dull sense: blacken another's senses (blind, deaf, dumb, etc.).
- 5 Hide moment/cover up deed (hide moment in time from scrying).
- 6 Runeseal: create a lock on something (window, door, box, etc. — victory points x2 equals the amount of v.p. someone must collect on a sustained action to unlock it).
- 7 Cache/Sanctum: create a dimensional pocket where things may be stored (each v.p. represents one size level: i.e., XS, S, M, L, XL, Huge, etc.). This pocket can be detected with any occult sense oriented to Wyrð (Wyrð Sense, Wyrð rune castings, Second Sight).
- 8 Invisibility: vitki is invisible to one physical sense (sight, sound, touch, occult, etc.) per victory point.
- 9 Intangible: vitki is invisible to all senses; he cannot physically affect the world except through runecasting.

Knowing

This rune reveals meanings, relationships and knowledge. No Knowing runecasting can be perpetual.

Various skills may be used depending on the circumstances, some of which could include: Charm, Ob-

Form runes continued...

2. Life (*Ondrunar*)

There are different runes for each type.

Rune	Level
Plants (Fungi, Flowers, etc.)	1
Beasts (Mammals, Birds, etc.)	2
Sentients (Human, Vau, etc.)	3

3. Mind (*Hugrunar*)

The vitki must first possess the proper Life rune — i.e. Human and Emotion to affect a human being's emotions. Unless otherwise noted, no Mind rune effects can be made perpetual.

Rune	Level
Emotion	2
Intellect	3
Dream	4
Golem	5
Wyrð	6
Psi	7
Theurgy	7
Shadow Mind (Urge, Hubris)	8

4. Artifact (*Taufrunar*)

Rune	Level
Soul Shard	6
Jumpgate	7
Gargoyle†	8
Philosophers Stone†	9

† Per item — each rune is specific to a particular stone or statue.

5. Cosmic (*Ginnrunar*)

Unless otherwise noted, no Cosmic rune effects can be made perpetual.

Rune	Level
Infinity	6
Eternity	7
Night (void)	8
Day (solar) †	9

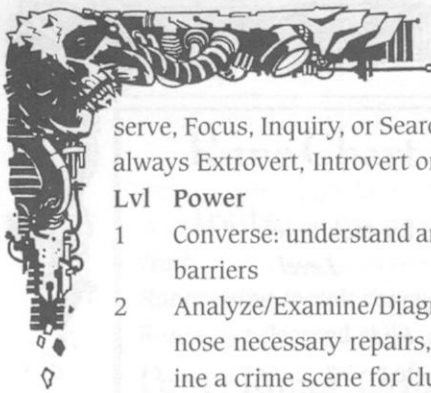
† This rune is rumored to exist, but is lost.

Condition Runes (*Formalrunar*)

No sacrifice is required to learn a Condition rune. Costs are the same as for Form runes.

Rune	Level
Time (duration)	1
Space (range)	2
Quantity (targets)	3





serve, Focus, Inquiry, or Search. The characteristic is almost always Extrovert, Introvert or Wits.

Lvl Power

- 1 Converse: understand another person across language barriers
- 2 Analyze/Examine/Diagnose a person or thing: diagnose necessary repairs, analyze a book's text, examine a crime scene for clues, etc.
- 3 Clue: acts as the Eskatonic Order Divine Revelation rite, but more effective.
- 4 Know unknown: detect lies and others' unstated intentions or goals.
- 5 Converse with Other: understand another living thing governed by different Form runes other than one's own (beast, plant).
- 6 Wordless conversation (telepathy). The Quantity rune governs the number of targets involved, while the victory points provides the amount of ideas that can be conveyed or read per turn.
- 7 Converse with Other: understand another thing governed by Form runes in different classes (Earth — tracking; Air — weather; Soul Shard — understand its use, etc.)
- 8 Advisor: basic lore skill (equal to one or two levels) on any desired topic.
- 9 Akashic Records: complete lore on a topic (equal to Wits score) — including private or secret matters ("how does the queen feel about me?"); does not disclose meanings and understanding beyond one's means (all the data in the world about Ur tech means nothing unless you have Tech score of 11 or 12).

Making



Perhaps the most powerful rune, Making creates things from nothing. The vitki must know the Form rune that governs the new thing created (and the one that governs the target, if any). With this rune and various Mind runes (along with

the proper Sentient Race rune), he can also make targets do things they don't want to.

Various skills may be used depending on the targets and the desired effects, some of which could include: Remedy or Physick, Artisan, Science (Biology, etc.), or Lore. The characteristic is almost always Faith or Ego.

Note: Unless a target is required, things created from nothing require no runemark (the vitki does not need to "draw" a rune on anything that does not yet exist).

Lvl Power

- 1 Increase mass: make a person or thing 1.5x victory points larger, fatter, taller, heavier, etc.
- 2 Create a small, simple thing: ignite candle flame, con-

jure pebble, algae or fungi (simple living things); or deliver a single word mental command or feeling (using the Mind rune) which the target must obey/experience.

- 3 Replenish renewable function: refill a drained pond, recharge a fusion cel (one charge per victory point), restore spent or lost Wyrd or Vitality points (one per victory point).
- 4 Create large, simple thing: bonfire, boulder, tree; or deliver a one sentence mental command.
- 5 Increase/Improve function: fire burns brighter and more efficiently, rock or metal is stronger, a character's traits (characteristics, skills, Wyrd, Vitality) are boosted (one level per victory point). This effect cannot be made perpetual.
- 5 Create small, complex thing: firearm, fruit fly or sparrow (any animal with a central nervous system is complex); detailed mental command.
- 6 Restore nonrenewable function: fire burns without fuel, living things regrow lost limbs or regain lowered traits, starship hulls or systems are repaired (one point, level or system per victory point).
- 7 Create large, complex thing: landcraft, mastodon, self-regulating environment bubble (to keep someone alive in a vaccum); complete mental control
- 8 Restore destroyed or dead thing: rebuild gutted spacecraft (Earth, Air, Fire, Ether), ressurect a human being (Human, Emotion, Intellect, Dream, Wyrd runes)
- 9 Enliven: add a new Form to an object or living thing's being (bring a stone to life with a Life rune, make a dog sentient with Mind runes, etc.). Note that this power can be made perpetual by spending the requisite Wyrd and devising a new rune to govern the newly-made target. Some believe this level (or a higher version of this rune) raised the Ishkin to sentience.

Revealing



This rune provides perception and sensation. The vitki must know the Form rune that governs the target or object of the casting.

Various skills may be used depending on the circumstances, some of which could include: Observe, Focus, Inquiry, or Search. The characteristic is almost always Perception or Extrovert.

Lvl Power

- 1 Keen sense (boost existing sense: +1 per victory point)
- 2 Kinaesthesia: senses mix — "hear" sights or "smell" sounds. This can be confusing, but skilled use can allow one to operate in situations of sensory overload or deprivation (touch can become a form of sight).
- 3 Weird sense: use a Form rune to develop a new sense

organ associated with that rune (IR vision = Fire; UV vision = Ether; Empathy = Emotion; Aura vision = Psi; Second sight = Wyrd). Note: Using the Intellect rune can sense thoughts, but not understand them — that requires the 6th level Knowing rune effect.

- 4 See Inside: sort of like "X-ray vision," the vitki can see the interior of a target (a person's organs, a box's contents, etc.).
- 5 Detect/Dowse: find or track an unseen person or thing.
- 6 Shared sense: project sense perceptions onto another or read that person's senses (not thoughts).
- 7 Unseal: unlock any barred entrance or blockage; victory points overcome difficulty (1= simple key locks, 4 = physically barred doors, 5 = gen locks, 6 = jumpgate). In the case of Runeseals (level 6 Concealing rune), victory points x2 are used to overcome the lock.
- 8 Past Vision: reveals the past, similar to the 8th level Omen psychic power Voice from the Past.
- 9 Omen: reveals the future, similar to the 9th level Omen psychic power Oracle.

Shaping



This rune remolds existing objects, but does not create new things from nothing (see Making). In other words, to turn a human into stone, a human and a stone must be present to merge together — and the vitki must know both the Human and Earth Form runes. (Note: The

target will still live, but will suffer a loss of tactile sense, and may have trouble moving if his Strength cannot accommodate his new bulk — the gamemaster should devise reasonable boons and limitations for such effects, remembering that unless the Unmaking rune is involved or damage is inflicted, targets of Shapings will not be injured — their bodies adjust to their new states.)

The vitki cannot add size or mass not already present, but can rearrange present elements.

The goal roll can vary with the desired effect, and can involve any one of a number of skills, most often: Artisan, Tech Redemption, Science, Beast Lore or Lore. The characteristic is almost always Extrovert, but Wits or Tech may be required for complicated or technical achievements.

Lvl Power

- 1 Mold basic shapes (bend knives)
- 2 Carve shapes (make a sword from metal)
- 3 Carve complex shapes (change facial features, give a dog opposable thumbs)
- 4 Carve complex shapes with moving parts (make a clock or landcraft)
- 5 Change function: reverse gravity (Ether rune), make a Human breath water instead of air (Human rune)

- 6 Carve complex shapes that require multiple Forms (starship fusion drives = Earth, Fire and Ether)
- 7 Merge one or more Forms (mix Earth and Water to create mud, or Human and Bird to make a human-animal hybrid, or Human and Psi to make a psychic — remember, all Forms must already be present in some fashion)
- 8 Change target's Form completely to another within the same class (Human into newt)
- 9 Change target's Form completely to another within a different class (Human to Earth: i.e., turn a man into stone)



Shielding

This rune protects things from physical and occult harm, and can even resist runecastings.

Various skills may be used depending on the circumstances, some of which could include: Impress, Vigor, Focus, or Stoic Body or Mind. The characteristic is almost always

Calm or sometimes Passion, but Faith or Ego can be used in certain trying cases.

Lvl Power

- 1 Harden: increase endurance
- 2 Armor: victory points add to armor.
- 3 Good Offense: spikes, thorns, etc. damage incoming attacks (victory points equal damage dice).
- 4 Repulse: an energy shield equivalent (5/10 defense, number of v.p. = number of hits).
- 5 Protection: armor against a variety of attacks, depending on the Form runes used — Fire defends against energy, Psi against psychic powers, etc.
- 6 Ward: creates an area of repulsion (see level 3); plus one meter radius per Wyrd point spent.
- 7 Absorb: damage from a successful attack is converted into a bonus to a declared trait (Vitality, Wyrd, Dexterity, etc.). Victory points determine how much damage can be absorbed.
- 8 Counter: turn an attack or occult effect back on its user.
- 9 Impervious: complete immunity to all attacks from one declared Form. Cannot be made perpetual.

Traveling

This rune empowers motion and even allows the vitki to travel without moving.

Various skills may be used depending on the circumstances, some of which could include: Vigor, Focus, or Stoic Body. The characteristic is



almost always Extrovert or sometimes Dexterity.



Lvl Power

- 1 Sense of direction (similar to the 1st level Eskatonic Order rite Celestial Alignment).
- 2 Move: add to person or thing's speed (victory points equal bonus to meters per turn movement). This also allows inanimate things to gain motion.
- 4 Impede: slow a person or thing's speed (victory points equal penalty to meters per turn movement).
- 5 Flight/Swim: must know the Form rune for the new medium traveled in.
- 6 Kinetics: impart extra motion to items (bullets, etc.); victory points equal damage bonus.
- 7 Phase: Walk through an obstructing substance without being affected by it; must use proper Form rune (Earth for walls, Fire for flame, Human for a man, etc.). The amount of meters moved is equal to victory points.
- 8 Teleport: teleport across distances. The vitki can take others, as long as he knows the Form runes governing his targets and spends the Wyrd to affect them. The distance traveled and the Wyrd cost is the same as for psychic powers. Note that, in this instance, the interstellar distance (10 Wyrd points) is the equivalent of one jump. If the vitkar wishes to travel multiple jumps, he must know the Infinity rune, and then spend one extra Wyrd per jump.

The vitki cannot travel to unfamiliar places — he can only go to places he (or a fellow runecaster) has left a "travelmark," a unique runic inscription, as long as it is within range. This inscription can be small and innocuous, but must be within sight of the vitki when he appears (it cannot be hidden behind a panel or curtain).

- 9 Runegate: two-way teleportation portal, or automatic teleportation of anyone who touches a declared object painted with a unique runemark.

Unmaking

This rune damages objects, negates experiences and destroys Forms. Remember, unless otherwise noted, the effect lasts only as long as the casting's duration. Unless otherwise noted, no Unmaking

effect can be made perpetual.

Various skills may be used depending on the method of delivery for the desired effects (a punch or death ray), some of which could include: any combat skill, Impress, Focus, Remedy or Physick. The characteristic is almost always Passion.

Lvl Power

- 1 Decrease mass: make person or thing 1.5x victory point smaller, thinner, shorter, lighter, etc.

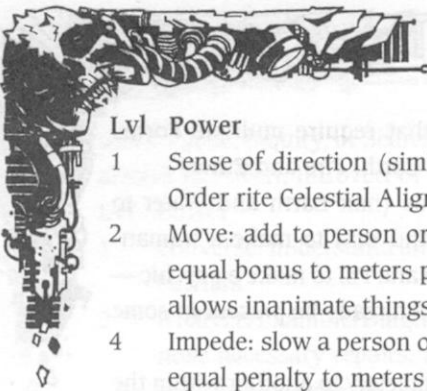
- 2 Wound: deliver three dice of damage (plus victory points on the runecasting) to target. If the Fire and Ether Form runes are used in the attack, energy shields are ignored. The damage is permanent, although it may be healed.
- 3 Weaken: fire burns dimly and provides less heat, rock or metal is weaker, a character's traits (characteristics, skills, Wyrd, Vitality) are lowered (one level/point per victory point), armor is eroded.
- 4 Unravel: things fall apart, but the pieces are not damaged (leaving little evidence of cause) — starships engines malfunction, money bags develop holes, people catch colds or suffer aches and pains (no damage, but uncomfortable).
- 5 Severe: deliver six dice of damage (plus victory points on the runecasting) to target. If the Fire and Ether Form runes are used in the attack, energy shields are ignored. The damage is permanent, although it may be healed.
- 6 Negate: permanently undo a recent (last turn) action or occult effect (it is not replayed or forgotten, but its effects are undone). The proper Form rune used is that which governs the target (Human for a person, Psi for a psychic power, etc.). Use the Quantity rune to increase the number of actions affected.
- 7 Destroy: deliver nine dice of damage (plus victory points on the runecasting) to target. If the Fire and Ether Form runes are used in the attack, energy shields are ignored. The damage is permanent, although it may be healed.
- 8 Nullify: creates an "energy shield" like effect around the vitki which can permanently negate undesired actions or powers affecting her; whenever such an event occurs, the vitki decides whether or not to activate the "shield," up to a maximum number of times equal to the victory points on the casting roll (as long as the duration lasts). The shield nullifies effects from which ever Form runes were used in the casting (Human for a person's physical actions, Intellect for a decision or command, Psi for a psychic power, etc.)
- 9 Unmake a Form: remove all oxygen in an area (Air rune), undo a human's sentience (Intellect rune).

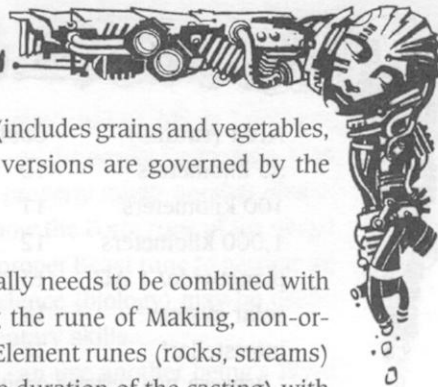
Form Runes

1. Elemental

Note: When the target of an Elemental Form runecasting is an indistinct patch of ground, region of air or a river rather than a thing (rock, door, tank), an area of one meter radius is affected. The vitki must know the Infinity rune to affect a larger region.

Earth: This rune governs solid, non-organic objects and materials, such as stone, metal, ceramsteel, etc. When com-





bined with the Water rune, it can affect semi-solid masses, like mud. When combined with the proper Life rune, it can affect organic solid objects, like bone or carapace.

Water: This rune governs non-organic fluids, such as water, oil, beer, etc. When combined with the Air rune, it can affect disparate fluids, like fogs or mists. When combined with the proper Life rune, it can affect organic fluids, like blood or plant sap.

Air: This rune governs non-organic gaseous material, such as oxygen, and cold temperatures. When combined with the Fire rune, it can ignite unstable or flammable gases; with the Water rune it affects ice. When combined with the proper Life rune, it affects the breath.

Fire: This rune governs gross energy, such as fire, electricity or even fusion. It also governs hot temperatures. When combined with the Ether rune, it can affect energy fields, like jumpdrives or those of personal energy shields. When combined with the proper Life rune, it can affect metabolic systems.

Ether: This rune governs subtle energy fields, such as gravity or the subtle fields generated by certain Vau tech. When combined with the proper Life rune, it can affect an organism's sense of balance.

2. Life

Sentient Race Runes: Theoretically, each sentient race has a rune that governs it. Most vitkar, unfamiliar with many Known Worlds races, have not yet identified the runes for many species. The most commonly exchanged rune is the Human (also called Man) rune. Without this rune, vitkar cannot affect a human being directly with runecasting (although elemental Form runes can be used to affect a person's environment).

Some races seem to have no runes, perhaps because their runes are lost or the race achieved sentience after the Anunnaki disappeared. Known (although not necessarily properly identified) alien race runes include: Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar, Ascorbite, Vau, Symbiots, Gannok, Oro'ym, Nizdharim, Ishkin and Ming (of Gizeh). Most vitkar believe that the Ishkin were created with runepower, and that, in doing so, some mysterious vitki made that race's rune. Also, some Hamingjur swear that whenever a race is "scanned" by a Gargoyle or Philosopher's Stone, a rune is created for it somewhere in the universe.

Beast Runes: As with the sentient races, above, there are many beast runes, seemingly one for each animal type. The following runes have been classified: Fish, Amphibian, Reptile, Bird and Mammal. In addition, there are some as-yet unidentified runes that some vitkar speculate belong to unknown alien species (one of these is for silicates, like the ancestors of the sentient Ming of Gizeh).

Plant Runes: As with Beasts, above: Monera (bacteria), Protist (algae), Fungi, Flower (includes herbs), Tree

(includes shrubs), and Crops (includes grains and vegetables, anything cultivated — wild versions are governed by the Flower rune).

3. Mind

Each of these runes usually needs to be combined with a Life rune. However, using the rune of Making, non-organic things represented by Element runes (rocks, streams) can be made sentient (for the duration of the casting) with one or more of the following runes.

Emotion: This rune governs emotions or feelings.

Intellect: This rune governs conscious thought.

Dream: This rune governs unconscious thoughts (including memories) and dreams.

Golem: This odd rune seemingly governs the thought processes of an artificially intelligent mind, one that works from programming rather than organic brain-functions. It also works on think machine programs.

Wyrd: This rune governs spiritual energy or willpower.

Psi: This rune governs psychic powers.

Theurgy: This rune governs theurgic rituals. Interestingly, it also governs Antinomic rituals.

Shadow Mind: This rune governs psychic Urge, theurgic Hubris (including Gjartin Antipathy) or Antinomic Fealty.

4. Artifact

Runes in this class govern super-tech items made by the Anunnaki.

5. Cosmic

Runes in this class govern cosmic forces, such as stars (the Day rune), the stellar void (Night), past, present and future (Eternity) and space (Infinity). Vitkar theorize that the last two runes are integral to jumpgates.

Infinity: This rune governs space. Instead of changing the number of targets on a runecasting, a vitki might want to affect an area that many targets are standing in. The runecasting must be performed on the area (the ground, region of space, etc.), rather than directly against a target, and thus the effects are indirect — the target cannot resist them normally (although he may try to counter them with other runecasting or occult powers). The Wyrd costs for increasing area of effect — governed by the Infinity rune — are as follows:

Area (radius)	Cost
1 meter	1
5 meters	2
10 meters	3
50 meters	4
100 meters	5
1 kilometer	6
5 kilometers	7
10 kilometers	8
25 kilometers	9

Area (radius)	Cost
50 kilometers	10
100 kilometers	11
1,000 kilometers	12
planetwide/ 1 AU	13
solar system	14
interstellar*	15

* Between two systems connected by a jump route. +1 Wyrd per jump to extend the runic jumpweb to other worlds.

It is possible, with enough Wyrd, for a vitki using the Traveling rune to teleport a house or even a region somewhere else. It is also conceivable (with extreme amounts of Wyrd) for a vitki using the Shaping, Making or Unmaking runes to temporarily change the laws of physics in entire regions of space by extending the area of effect to interstellar distances.

Eternity: This rune controls time itself. One of the rarest of runes, it supposedly allows vitkar to speed up or slow down time, or to travel in time.

Night (void): This rune controls the spaces between the stars, including all those outside of planetary atmospheres. Very few vitkar have experience with it, but some claim to be able to create livable environments in space, or vaccums on a planet. Some claim that Froljir the Ill-Fated had a vitki aboard his flagship that could steer the ship through the void even when its engines were damaged.

Day (solar): This rune is rumored to exist but even the Urdr cannot claim to know what it looks like. They theorize that a powerful vitki with this rune could remake the stars and prevent their fading.

Condition Runes

These runes are concerned exclusively with a runecasting's effect, and govern only runecasting. A vitki using these runes can increase the duration, range and number of targets of his runecasting; see p. 141 of the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook.



Time: This rune governs the duration of a runecasting. The default duration for runecastings without this rune is instant. With this rune, an effect can be extended with Wyrd points.



Space: This rune governs the range of a runecasting. The default range for runecastings without this rune is touch. With this rune, range can be extended with Wyrd points.



Quantity: This rune governs the number of targets affected by a runecasting. The default number for runecastings without this rune is self. With this rune, more targets can be added with Wyrd points.

Rune Effects

The number of possible effects from runecasting are nigh

infinite, as long as the vitki has mastery of the proper runes and the ingenuity to use them. Some sample powers attributed to runecasters are listed below. Many more have been witnessed or rumored besides.

Bend the Laws of Physics: Vitkar have been known to make rocks roll uphill, water flow backwards, gravity reverse itself, etc. This most often involves a Shaping of a particular Form — Earth for the rocks, Ether for gravity, etc. Sometimes, the Making rune is used to create entirely new laws rather than bending existing laws, but this requires ingenuity. As with any runecasting, its duration, range and area of effect are governed by the Condition runes and Wyrd expenditure. A Wits + Science (physics) roll may be helpful in refining the effects.

Decipher Ur Tech: As below with Detect/Find, but the rune of Knowing is used to understand the tech's operation and use (only high levels of mastery will reveal its working, however). A Wits + Lore (Ur tech) roll may be complementary.

Detect/Find Ur Tech: The proper Form rune must be used (an Artifact class rune) for the particular tech item sought (i.e., when searching for the Gargoyle of Nowhere, its rune must be known). The rune of Revealing is used to find it, and a Perception + Search roll can be complementary.

Detect Occult Powers: The Revealing rune is used in conjunction with any of the occult power Form runes.

Enliven Tech/Matter: One of the most impressive runecasting feats is to make inanimate objects and things come to life. Using the Making rune, a vitki can grant a form of intelligence and animation to nature or technology. Various Form runes govern what objects can be brought to life. The duration, of course, depends on the Time rune and Wyrd expended. Various Science skills (biology, psychology, etc.) may be helpful in refining the effects.

Generate Wyrd: By combining the Making and Wyrd runes, vitkar can generate new Wyrd points. They will only last as long as the duration of the runecasting, and the Human rune must be used to grant these points to others. Using the Time rune and Wyrd point expenditure (these new points can't be spent on the runecasting used to generate them!), the generated points can be made perpetual, and thus will last until they are spent.

Vitkar often invest objects with Wyrd or the proper Form rune to invest them in an object (Earth for a leather pouch, Water for a draft of ale, Fire for a fusion cel, etc.). (Note: If invested in a living being, the points cannot be taken from that being for expenditure by the vitki except by further runecasting — see Stealing Wyrd, below).

Occult Protection: Ur artifacts like Gargoyles are renowned for providing protection against occult powers such as psi and theurgy. A vitki can replicate similar effects with



the Shielding rune. The Psi or Theurgy Form runes are required to block those particular effects.

Repair Technology: Depending on the nature of the tech, various Form runes may be involved. A sword or gun may simply involve the Earth rune (it represents solid things like metal). A starship drive, however, would involve Earth (mechanics), Fire (fusion energy), and Ether (the field emitted by the jumpdrive). The actual act of repair would involve the Shaping or Making rune. A Tech + proper Tech Redemption skill roll may be necessary in determining what kind of repairs are needed.

Seal/Unseal Jumpgates: The required Form rune is Jumpgate (an Artifact class rune), while the Concealing rune will seal a gate and the Revealing rune unseal it.

Scrying/Mind Reading: Remote viewing, clairvoyance and clairsaudience can be mimicked with the Revealing rune in conjunction with the Space rune. The Form runes are determined by whichever aspect of the mind one wants to read (Emotion, Intellect, Dreams) and the Human rune (or proper sentient race). Alternatively, simple scrying (sending out a distant eye or camera) requires no Mind rune, but Element runes may be useful — the vitki can see through walls with the Revealing and Earth runes. Perception + Observe rolls may be complementary or even necessary, depending on the situation.

Shapeshifting: A vitki may change his or another's shape with the Shaping rune and the proper Form rune (Man for a human being, etc.). To properly mimic another shape, however, he also needs to know the Form rune of the shape he intends to mimic: i.e. the proper Beast rune to become an animal, etc. Beast Lore or Science (biology) may be useful or even necessary complementary skills.

Stealing Wyrd: A vitki can use another being's Wyrd points to fuel his runecasting or to add to his own. The Shaping rune, in combination with the Wyrd and Human runes, is used.

Teleportation: See the Traveling rune description.

Terraforming: Vitki have performed terraforming acts (some even with perpetual effects) using the Shaping and Making runes, as with *Bend the Laws of Physics*, above. The Science (Terraforming) skill is necessary to understand the ramifications of any such perpetual runecasting.

Time Warp: The legendary vitki, Smolder Satrar Foe, was said to have the power to speed up or slow down time itself. Rune scholars theorize that he used the Eternity Form rune, along with either Shaping (to stretch or condense time) or Making (to create more time) or Unmaking (to destroy moments of time). Needless to say, such mastery is extremely rare.



Earth



Water



Air



Fire



Ether



Human



Bird



Crops



Dream



Golem



Psi



Wyrd

Glamskald
(Gargoyle of Raven)

Sacrifice Chart

Sacrifices are rated as mild, major and severe. Vitkar can choose which sacrifices they make to gain runelore.

Actions

While this category can be sacrificed for many times, the same sacrifice may not be used twice. For instance, a vitki performing a dangerous quest, such as to rescue a jarl's daughter from pirates, cannot later take the same quest. While he may subsequently rescue as many jarl's daughters as he likes, only the first such rescue counts as a sacrifice (as long as it was declared as such before the quest).

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Perform an important deed/task/quest: a vision quest, a selfless and unsolicited act of compassion, etc.
Major	Perform dangerous/harsh deed: sell oneself into slavery, etc.
Severe	Perform deadly deed: harass a Grackle Fox, kiss a Symbiot, etc.

Vows

Vows do not have to be completed to gain the rune they are pledged for, as long as the vitki works towards that goal in good faith. Breaking a vow results in losing the runelore sacrificed for. For instance, if the sacrifice was an oath to humiliate a famous jarl of Frost to gain the third level (and thus the ability to later gain 4th and 5th levels) of the Shaping rune, the vitki must work towards that goal. If an instance to successfully perform the feat arises and he does not take it, he loses the runepower until the oath is completed.

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Swear oath: loyalty to another, to spiritual or political ideals, etc.
Major	Swear dangerous oath: seek revenge against powerful foe, etc.
Severe	Swear deadly oath: vow to assassinate Emperor Alexius or the Caliph, etc.
Mild	Adopt mild taboo: never curse, eat meat, etc.
Major	Adopt major taboo: celibacy, vow of silence
Severe	Adopt severe taboo: avoid all contact with fellow kind, never walk or ride in vehicles but always crawl, etc.

Scarification

The vitki cannot heal the scar or cover it with plastic surgery (although hiding it under clothing or bandages is acceptable) as long as he wishes to retain the runelore. If he does, then the level(s) sacrificed for is lost until the scar is reproduced. If a tattoo is ever broken or smudged beyond recognition (perhaps by a wound), it must be reapplied within a month or else the runepower is lost until it is recovered.

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Concealable tattoo, scar or piercing. A vitki can take multiple different such scars for sacrifices.
Major	Nonconcealable tattoo, scar or piercing (on one's face perhaps). Only one such sacrifice can be made; other nonconcealables only count as Mild sacrifices.
Severe	Full body tattoo, scar or piercing. Only one such sacrifice can be made.

Bodily Ailment

The vitki cannot heal or repair these loses except through the means listed below. If he does, then the runepower is lost until the sacrifice is again made. Occult powers which permanently repair these loses can inadvertently cause the lose of the runelore, until the traits are again lowered.

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Palsy: The vitki permanently loses one level of Dexterity characteristic due to uncontrollable shaking. The Dexterity score cannot go below 1; this sacrifice cannot be chosen if the Dexterity level is already 1. The vitki can later raise his Dexterity again through physical therapy and the expenditure of experience points.
Major	Extreme Palsy: The vitki loses two levels of Dexterity (otherwise treat as above).
Mild	Frailty: The vitki permanently loses one level of Strength characteristic due to muscle degeneration. The Strength score cannot go below 1; this sacrifice cannot be chosen if the Strength level is already 1. The vitki can later raise his Strength again through physical therapy and the expenditure of experience points.
Major	Extreme Frailty: The vitki loses two levels of Strength (otherwise treat as above).
Mild	Deterioration: The vitki permanently loses one level of Endurance characteristic due to immune system disorder, anemia, etc. The Endurance score cannot go below 1; this sacrifice cannot be chosen if the Endurance level is already 1. The vitki can later raise his Endurance again through physical therapy and the expenditure of experience points. (Note: This does not affect Vitality levels.)
Major	Extreme Deterioration: The vitki loses two levels of Endurance (otherwise treat as above).
Severe	Enervation: The vitki permanently loses one level of Vitality due to a loss of lifeforce, elan vital, or spark of life. This level cannot be regained. The sacrifice can be made multiple times; each level loss is considered a severe sacrifice.

continued...

Sacrifice Chart continued...

Flesh Offering

The vitki cannot heal or replace the lost limb or organ as long as he wishes to retain the runelore. If he does, such as with a cybernetic replacement, then the runepower is lost until the pseudo-limb is removed. Occult powers which regenerate such a sacrificed limb or organ can inadvertently cause the lose of the runelore, until the limb or organ is again removed.

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Lose minor body part: tooth, hair (at the roots)
Major	Lose digit (finger, toe)
Severe	Lose limb (arm, leg)
Severe	Lose sensory organ (eye, ear, tongue)
Severe	Lose redundant organ (lung, kidney)

Mental

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Stupefaction: The vitki permanently loses one level of Wits characteristic due to neuronal degeneration. The Wits score cannot go below 1; this sacrifice cannot be chosen if the Wits level is already 1. The vitki can later raise his Wits again through mental acuity games (puzzles, brain teasers) and mental focus practice (meditation) and the expenditure of experience points.
Major	Extreme Stupefaction: The vitki loses two levels of Wits (otherwise treat as above).
Mild – Major	Suffer a mental block concerning a certain important or cherished memory: your mother's name, the face of a loved one, the last time your deceased lover kissed you, etc.
Mild	Develop a neurosis about something: must always wash hands, must pray at five set times throughout the day, etc. Effects are permanent until the vitki willingly forsakes the runelore sacrificed for (this does not count as another sacrifice).
Major	Develop a phobia (fear) of something: Kurgans, Ukari, rats, runes, etc. Effects are permanent until the vitki willingly forsakes the runelore sacrificed for (this does not count as another sacrifice).
Severe	Develop a psychosis about something: urge to murder strangers, urge to jump out of high windows, etc. Effects are permanent until the vitki willingly forsakes the runelore sacrificed for (this does not count as another sacrifice).
Severe	Descend into complete madness: schizophrenia, megalomania, etc. Effects are permanent until the vitki willingly forsakes the runelore sacrificed for (this does not count as another sacrifice).

Occult Powers

Psychic or theurgic vitkar must forsake their occult powers to learn runecasting.

Rating	Sacrifice
Varies	Forsake all Psi characteristic levels and powers. While the character can no longer gain Urge, he does not lose any existing Urge levels until he performs deeds to lower his score (see the <i>Losing Urge</i> chart, p. 155 Fading Suns Second Edition rulebook). If the character's Psi level was below 4, this is considered a Mild sacrifice; if it was 4-6, it is a Major sacrifice; if it was 7 or above, it is a Severe sacrifice.
Varies	Forsake all Theurgy (or Antinomy) characteristic levels and powers. While the character can no longer gain Hubris, he does not lose any existing Hubris levels until he performs deeds to lower his score. Note: The vitki does not gain the benefits of "Forsaking Theurgy" from the <i>Losing Hubris</i> chart (p. 171 Fading Suns Second Edition rulebook). If the character's Theurgy level was below 4, this is considered a Mild sacrifice; if it was 4-6, it is a Major sacrifice; if it was 7 or above, it is a Severe sacrifice.
Mild	Forsaking a Condition rune: Give up all knowledge of a previously-learned rune. The lost rune can be relearned in the normal fashion (i.e. it must be sacrificed for and the proper amount of experience points must be spent).
Major	Forsaking a Form rune (as above).
Severe	Forsaking a Power rune (as above); includes loss of all levels of that rune.

Events

Certain rare events that occur or happen to the vitki can catalyze runelore, and act as sacrifices in place of the more debilitating ones listed above. These do not need to be "spent" immediately; the experiences can be saved until needed.

Rating	Sacrifice
Mild	Exposure to religious (theurgic) relic
Mild	Exposure to Second Republic Psi Clinic
Mild	Exposure to Soul Shard
Major	Exposure to Philosophers Stone
Major	Exposure to Gargoyle
Major	Experience the Sathra Effect for the first time



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jumpweb of barbarian space

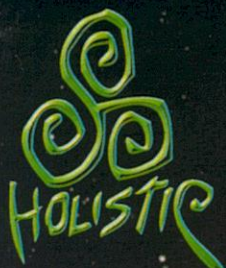
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