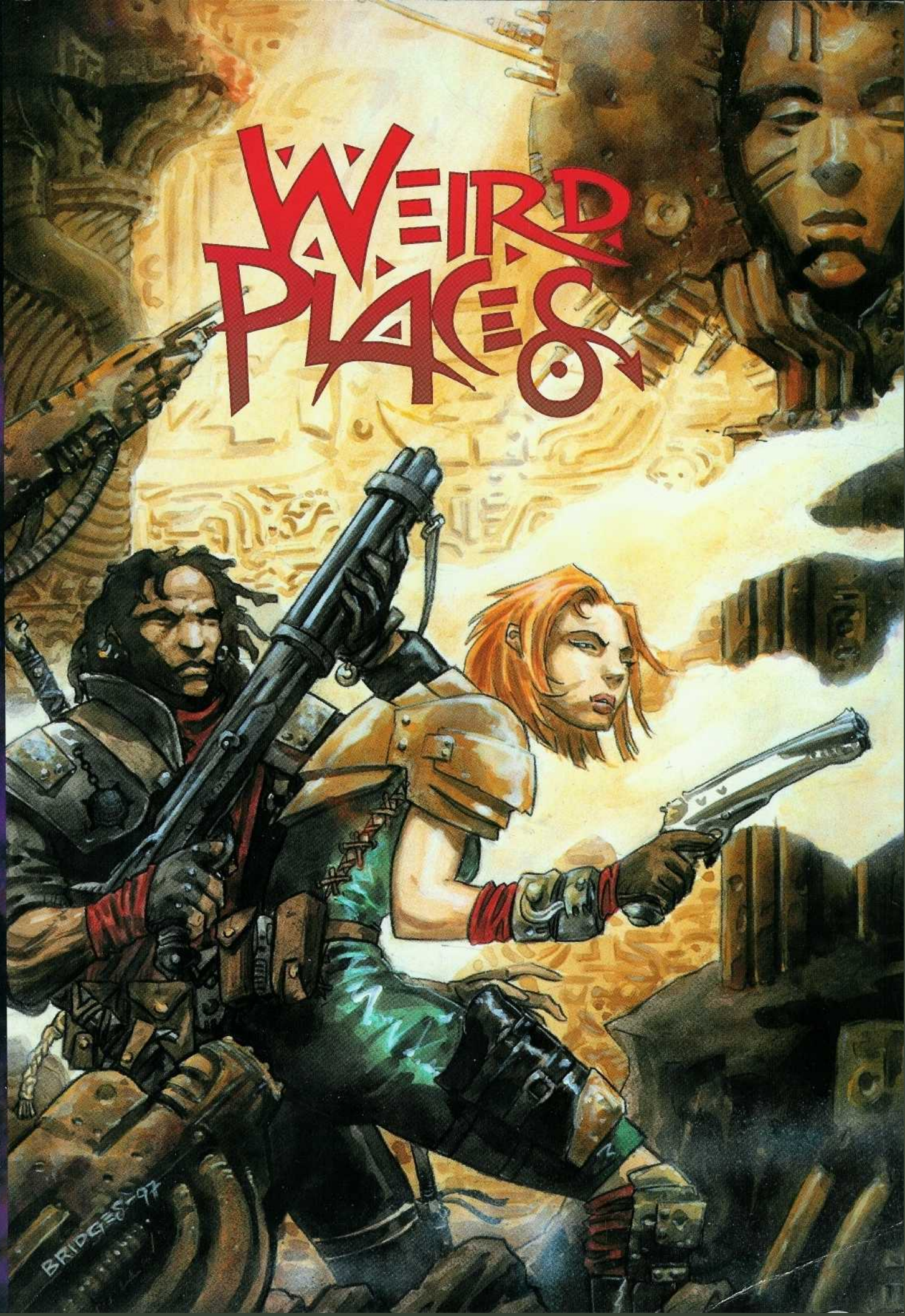




# WEIRD PLACES



FADING SUNS™



# WEIRD PLACES



by  
Bill Bridges, Jackie Cassada,  
Sam Chupp, James Estes, Ross Isaacs,  
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## Emblem:

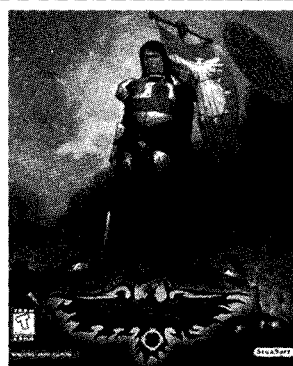
The strip along the spine displays the emblems of Doramos, the World Alchemist (used as a badge by modern terraformers), and the Mutasih, the al-Malik secret police, who patrol the Istakhr Market.

## Pilgrims:

There shall be a great going forth, an exodus of the restless to the beckoning stars. But think not that such a pilgrimage will be without hardship, for you open the gates at your peril. Hunger, fear, loneliness and doubt will assail thee within the orbits of distant stars. Divers beings birthed under strange skies and formed with odd gravities will threaten and tempt thee. But hold fast to the light that shines unseen, and make of your soul a mirror to reflect its flame outward onto these foreign lands. For only in such a radiance can you behold the other as your own.



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# Alustro's Journal: Tall Tales

"Hell, I've got the scar to prove it!"

For perhaps the seventh time that evening, Captain Gabriel Foote rolled back his garments to show off some elaborate scar tissue on one of his extremities. These old injuries were his prized possessions, his tangible proofs to the veracity of his amazing adventures, of his times spent daring dangers against harrowing enemies on far-flung worlds. I had already tired of them.

"I understand the trophy value of these wounds," I said, "but they are not healthy. At least, not in such number. Surely so much scar tissue must lead to health complications later on in life. If you anticipated such dangers, why did you not travel with a trained physick, or at least learn something of the arts of healing yourself, so that you could properly bind your own wounds?"

"I did pretty damn good by myself, son," Foote said, holding his head high. "But for this one — the jagged tear in my bicep opened up by that grackle fox — I didn't have any thread. I had to use the sinews of the grackle itself. Almost fainted from blood loss by the time I'd skinned him enough to get at the tough cords. If I didn't have my Martech Gold with me, never would've cut through it at all. That's stuff's tough! A knife'll go dull before slicing a grackle fox's guts up!"

I looked at my companions. Cardanzo nodded knowingly, as if Foote had stated some eternal verity. Even Ong nodded eagerly. Grackle foxes were native to his world; he surely had some experience in such matters. If he agreed, perhaps it was so. But I felt it more likely that the beast served the same purpose for Vorox hunters that it did now for Gabriel — a prey whose capture is greater in the telling than in the deed.

It was Julia who introduced us to Gabriel. She knew him from her apprentice days among the Charioteers. Ac-

tually, we had all heard of him. Who in the Known Worlds has not? The famed Captain Foote and his exploits for the guilds are well-told tales throughout the Known Worlds, providing proof of the virtues of heroism and duty. Of course, the occasional parish priest sermonizes against Foote, fearful that his exploits will provide example for fools to venture forth to the stars, and thus meet useless deaths on distant worlds. But his reputation was enshrined in most houses.

But now that I had met the legend, I thought him a blowhard. Most of his stories were sheer illusion, tall tales which — amazingly — everyone seemed to believe. Even my Lady, Erian Li Halan, was genuinely excited at meeting a man who, in most circumstances, would be her social inferior to an extreme degree. But she treated him with the deference due a count. For such he was, in her mind and the minds of others. A hero, regardless of actual worldly rank and station, is often considered a *de facto* lord.

And here this lord sat, on his well-worn bench in the Rampant Gurdvulf, the throne on which he gave audience to his visitors. The requirements for admission to such an audience? As much alcohol as the lord requested. And should the well run dry, the audience would end, the supplicants sent on their way to make room for the next batch. Such is the life of retirement for Captain Gabriel Foote, former pilot and explorer.

We had already been overlong on Criticorum when Julia heard word of Foote and his night roost. Now, we had spent another three nights here, plying Foote with liquor in return for tales of his exploits. The longer we stayed in one place, the closer the Inquisition would come. But Foote assured us that no Inquisitor would dare step foot in this district of Nueva Janeiro. So far, he was correct. But could we risk an exception to his rule?





My Lady believed the risk worth the prize, for she had grown up hearing of Foote's legendary adventures, told among the noble youth of Midian when their instructors were not listening. Such exciting stories, especially ones about a guildsman, were not considered proper for Li Halan lords and ladies, but they heard them nonetheless, spread by the children of householders, whose connection to the bustling world outside the palace was greater. For my Lady, Foote was a childhood hero, and she was proud to meet him. His slovenly ways and colorful language seemed only to reinforce his legend.

And so we listened to Foote. How many exploits can one man possible have? His seemed innumerable.

"Julia," Foote said, "Didn't you say you'd been to Nowhere?"

"Yeah," Julia replied. "We saw that Gargoyle thing in the desert. Erian and Alustro got some weird dreams after seeing it."

"Visions," I said. "We both had the same true vision."

"Okay, right," Julia said. "But we've been there. Why?"

"I've been there, too," Foote said. "Saw the Gargoyle also. I didn't get a vision, but my passenger did."

We all waited as he took a swig of ale. He certainly knew the art of suspense, purposefully pausing at just the right point in his narrative.

"Whatever it was he saw lit a fire under his butt," Foote continued. "We were off again the next day, hurrying to

Shaprut. Over the journey, he wouldn't tell anyone about it or why we were going to Shaprut. When we landed a week later —"

"A week?!" Julia said. "From Nowhere to Shaprut? That's at least half a month's journey, what with the time it takes to get to the gates—"

"Well, we had a fast ship."

"Fast is one thing, but that's not even counting the shakedown you get from the Stigmata Garrison before they let you take the jump out of the Stigmata system. How'd you avoid that?"

Foote shrugged. "The regent could go where he wanted, when he wanted."

"Regent! You mean Alexius was your passenger! No way!"

Foote smiled. "Ask anybody in the guild, Julia. I served as the regent's pilot for three years. Luckily, I went freelance before he crowned himself Emperor. Things would have gotten a bit hot even for my taste."

I rolled my eyes, but Julia saw me.

"All right, Alustro," she said. "I'm sick of your attitude. Gabriel's been an excellent host to us, yet you seem bored. Or disgusted. I can't tell which. What the hell's the problem?"

I gave her a glare. How dare she say this in front of Foote! I did not wish to openly insult the man, but I could not lie about my feelings once asked directly. "I am most grateful for your time and entertainment, Captain Foote—"

"Gabriel, please," Foote said, "I'm retired now, and my first name's good enough for friends." He flashed a smile which seemed to charm them all. Friends of the great Gabriel Foote. What a high honor.

"Gabriel. Thank you," I said. "But... Well... It just seems so... elaborate."

Foote raised a single eyebrow.

"I mean... You seem to have done an awful lot of things. So many things..."

Everyone was looking at me now, staring me down, telling me with intent alone not to say what I was about to say.

"They cannot all be true. These are tall tales."

"Alustro!" Erian said. "How dare you!"

Foote chuckled. "Can't fool a confessor, I guess. Of course some of it's overblown, priest. Tales grow in the telling even if you don't mean them to. Do you think your friends here don't know that? Only a fool would take it all at face value. But I tell you this: the important things happened. I did fly for Alexius, for a time. Were we friends? No. I doubt he'd even remember me. Hell, boy! Ask me anything about any place you know and I'll bet I've been there. Go ahead, ask."

I frowned, but thought for a moment. "Pentateuch. Have you been there?"

"Ha! Of course."

"Then surely you visited Heliopolis. In which quarter

is the Basilica?"

"Son, anybody could answer that question even if they'd never been there. Let me ask you: Have you been in the Sirocco from atop Mount Tabor?"

"No. And you have?"

"Aye, I have. An old friend of mine led me there — we went through flight school together here on Criticorum when we were as wet behind the ears as you were. He's a Marabout now. Saw the World Fire and it changed his life. Out of remembrance for our youth, he took me there when I asked him to. I waited for three nights and nothing happened. I gave up and left.

"But on the way down, the storm came. Next I knew, I was in the desert, miles from where I'd been standing, my friend and pack beast no where to be seen. I had to walk without water or food for three more days before I came across the Ur-Obun pilgrims train. But I did it without complaint. I'd seen something in that storm. Something I've never talked about to anyone. But I'll tell you. As naive you are in the ways of people and the worlds, I think you'd understand this best of all — begging the Lady's forgiveness, of course, but she's not a priest and you are."

He leaned forward, staring intently at me. All the bluster had left him, and he seemed instantly sober, as if his drunken cheer was all just in jest. Despite my earlier feelings, I had a slight chill. He seemed to be in the grip of some deep passion as he spoke about his holy experience. I could not help but respect it.

"I saw myself in the cockpit of my ship, flying through an atmospheric storm. My instruments were out and it was too dark to steer by sight. I was freaking out, flying wild. Then my navigator told me to fly by instinct, that faith in myself would get me through this. And he was right. I calmed down and just flew like there was nothing I couldn't fly through. Next thing I knew, the storm cleared, and the sun broke through, so bright I had to squint. It felt like victory. And only then did I remember that I don't have a navigator — I fly alone.

"I looked at the seat next to me and there was this pilot, smiling at me. I knew he was a pilot, 'cause he had on flight gear, except it was old, like they used to wear a long, long time ago. He said that only when everybody could trust themselves enough to weather any storm would the light of the sun shine bright enough to blind us. I knew then who it was. I can tell by the look on your face that you also know."

"Yes," I said in awe. "Saint Paulus. Those were the words the Prophet spoke to him after he had safely flown through the terrible storms of Manitou, before the Prophet made his final journey. But this is not in the Omega Gospels! It appears only in the apocryphal scripture of Darius, apprentice to Paulus after the Prophet's death. Only the Eskatonic Order keeps this scripture and they do not reveal it to the unordained. How did you know this?"

"I certainly didn't read it in your books. It was what

the World Fire gave me. And it changed by life. You think I'd travel to all those worlds and get into all the trouble I told you about because I like it? What kind of idiot prefers getting shot at, stabbed, chased, locked in dungeons or possessed by demons just for the fun of it? I was questing, son, because the Prophet demanded it. Only out there, among the stars, was the answer to my fate.

"Only on worlds unseen by other men, in places damned by priests and peasants, did the answer to my destiny lie. And I wasn't alone. It was my going to such places that led me to Alexius's service. My time with him saw some of the strangest things I've yet seen. Weird things which I'm under vow not to tell of — a vow which I'll keep. You don't break an oath to the Emperor. Hell, if he hadn't gone questing, he wouldn't be Emperor now and we'd — probably have some Decados or Hazat pig ruling us all.

"And my travels weren't all heroic, either. There was a lot of misery, too. And heartbreak. Times of such despair that I'd liked to have killed myself — and I almost did, taking risks no sane man would. But I survived it all, lived to tell of it. And the telling's just as important as the doing. When someone hears about such quests, it's sort of like they're participating in them, even when they're just sitting on a barstool farting. What's the difference between questing in the body and questing in the mind? It's questing either way. 'As long as our hearts are ever expanding to distant orbits.'"

"Paulus 23:5," I said.

"I'm not just telling stories, I'm telling sermons. Parables of sorts about the places I've been and what they mean to me. What they could mean to others. If it gets even one person up off his butt to find out what's what — what his purpose is — then it's not a lie."

I nodded, beginning to understand. Gabriel Foote was no priest and no lord. He sought to change the world the only way he knew how: through example.

"It is true that our own experiences would not be believed even were I tell them with no art whatsoever," I said.

"But the secret of storytelling," Foote said, "is to weave the truth with a little art — even with a lie. If the art's good enough, they'll want to believe it with all their hearts. The Prophet knew that. When you tell folks about your own adventures — and you will, come time — remember that." He sat back and winked at Julia. "Sorry I never told you any of this. I hope you understand."

Julia nodded. "Oh, I understand."

And I, too, finally understood Julia's fondness for the man. His deeds light the way for us. Without the possibility of great deeds, what use are our travails? Is our suffering and hardship simply for naught? Or can we forge from them something worthy of the telling?



# Introduction: Beyond the Worlds We Know

Strange places have always beckoned and intrigued the imagination, providing glimpses beyond the fields we know. Places where anything can happen. Places where adventure lives: The Fields of Faerie, the Giant's Castle, the Abode of the Gods, the Witch's Hut, Mars, Aldeberan. Stories about such places told around the communal fire/dinner table/theater are ever popular. They take us away from the boring and mundane rut of everyday living, spicing up the world with mystery.

But when faced with the possibility of actually going to one of these fabled places, most people nervously shake their heads and mutter, "Too dangerous. Only a fool would actually go there." Content to adventure in their dreams, most people have no real desire to risk life and limb on such odysseys. It is one thing to tell ghost stories about a strange place, and another thing entirely to brave it in reality. For those who are so bold, the rewards are often heroism or death.

In the **Fading Suns** universe, those weird places whispered of in the midnight tales of simple folk are often even more deadly than their storytellers imagine. Dangerous things wait among the stars, from creatures barely understood to the near-magical machinery of advanced and extinct races.

This book details seven such weird places. Why weird? Because there's something strange going on at every one. Mysteries to be solved, enigmas to be unraveled, or visions to be captivated by. Even the seemingly mundane places, such as the famed Istakhr Market, have more than their share of strange goings-on.

Each place is meant to provide an imaginative kickstart for the gamemaster, giving him or her an idea of

what types of stories can be told in the **Fading Suns** universe. Depending on the outcomes of the characters' initial encounters with these sites, many of them can be revisited, providing a base of operations or a meeting place for cronies. Some can provide the initial act to a sweeping epic, as characters search the stars for the answers to the mystical visions granted them at these mysterious locales.

This book is, as all **Fading Suns** supplements are, yours to use as you see fit.

## Places in This Book

### **Pentateuch: Planet of Enigmas**

Governed by the Eskatonic Order, this holy world displays the effect of the Holy Flame set free. Terraformed by Doramos, the World Architect, the very science which formed the planet now threatens its inhabitants with bizarre, unexplainable storms. So far, no one has yet solved the riddle of the planet's "natural" laws, coded with arcane and occult methods by its maker. Pilgrims come from across Human Space, hoping to glimpse some meaning for their lives in the chaotic, holy storms.

### **Rimpoche: Lost World**

Not all worlds are on the star charts. Some Lost Worlds have secretly been rediscovered, their new jumproutes kept secret from even the Emperor. One such world, Rimpoche, holds a powerful Anunnaki artifact — one worth risking charges of treason to hide from others. A secret plot between an al-Malik noble, a Charioteer and an Engineer keeps the world hidden for now. But new arrivals may throw a wild card into the deck: will they join the conspiracy, or try to sell the secret for money or power?

### **Kurga: Valley of the Chervins**

On the embattled barbarian world of Kurga, the native inhabitants try to live their lives in the traditional ways, all the while dodging the bombs of the Hazat and the Kurgan armies. One valley holds the key to breaking the Kurgans' new cavalry — but getting into the valley is easier than getting out.

### **Bannockburn: Symbiot Isle**

The Stigmata Garrison cannot hold back every Symbiot incursion into the Known Worlds. On a deserted island in the wilds of Bannockburn, a Symbiot and her followers have encamped, ready to spread their taint to a new world.

### **Manitou: The Haunted Chapel**

A legendary Sathraist monastery is said to hide many treasures, including a valuable fragment from a forbidden book of occult lore. But it now sits in Vau territory, unreachable by law-abiding humans. And those few who have braved its corridors and returned speak of an elder horror that haunts its halls, devouring the souls of previous intruders.

### **Bazaars of the Known Worlds:**

#### **Barter and Istakhr Market**

The Church bans many things from sale on certain worlds. For those who need such proscribed goods, two famed bazaars exist: Barter, a conglomeration of starships floating through space out of the reach of the Church, and the Istakhr Market. Everything is for sale at these markets — but the costs may be more than mere money.







# Pentateuch: Planet of Enigmas

by James Estes

*"How much longer?" Lara asked her guide, looking up to the darkening skies.*

*He shrugged, and looked up as well. "Another day to Heliopolis. The World Fire will hit in about half an hour."*

*"World Fire?" Lara repeated, drawing her cloak tighter about her and hoisting her backpack to her shoulders. Her guide, a still, nameless Marabout, did not respond. He had said remarkably little since he rescued her from the wreckage of her shuttle two days outside of Heliopolis and offered her safe conduct home.*

*"You must mean the Sirocco," she finally said, not expecting an answer. She had been on Pentateuch only a few weeks, but she had long ago heard of the paranormal storms which sometimes wracked the surface.*

*Again no response.*

*Already the wind was picking up. In the distance, the sky was even darker, as the eerie storm clouds rushed forward. A crackling light could be seen piercing the clouds at times, tracing a filigree of energy across the sky. Lara drew closer to her host, who continued walking ahead across the plains.*

*Lara looked up at the storm again. She was getting colder — but it was the chill of fear. I'm coming for you, the storm said.*

Pentateuch is one of the greatest mysteries of the Known Worlds — seemingly chosen at random for terraforming by the great Doramos of Tyre, this planet is the home of occultists, poets, artists and agrarians. To many, the world itself is a puzzle defying explanation: some see it as an occult construct, terraformed according to ancient esoteric principles.

The world's history is filled with violence, as the planet's inhabitants chafed under the yoke of an unwelcome sovereign. Now, the planet is at peace — but it is a fragile peace, threatened by a suspicious Church and an Empire seeking an answer to the riddle of the fading suns.

And across the planet, the eerie Sirocco blows, leaving mysteries in its wake.

## History

Explorers first discovered the world now called Pentateuch in the 25th century. Scouting parties reported a dry, rocky world with a methane atmosphere and few extractable resources, covered with numerous craters believed to have once been oceans. Its solar system was underwhelming, and after a few sensor sweeps, the explorers left, naming the system's single sun Daleth. Perhaps one day Daleth-4 — the fourth planet from the sun — might be inhabitable, but it would hardly be worth the effort. Some raised questions about why the Anunnaki would place a jumpgate in such a seemingly worthless system, but the question was forgotten in the face of other, more exciting discoveries. Daleth-4 was thus ignored for centuries — an undesirable rock in a system which would be obscure were it not for the discovery that the jumpgate led directly to Terra. The planet itself was ignored.

Until 3774, when Doramos announced Daleth-4 would be his next, and final, undertaking. He was at the height of his career, and any planet was his to terraform. Many corporations had petitioned him to reconstruct their holdings into something more inhabitable, and more aesthetic (and ultimately, more profitable), yet he chose Daleth-4.

As news of his decision spread across the Second Republic, corporate leaders either cursed his name or openly wept, knowing that their requests would never be fulfilled by the Master Terraformer. Doramos would not debate the issue, and offered no explanations. One pupil related how, late in the night before the announcement, he overheard Doramos shouting excitedly, "I've found it! At last!"



## Pentateuch's Traits

**Ruler:** Eskatonic Order

**Cathedral:** Basilica of Saints Paulus and Horace (Eskatonic Order)

**Agora:** A (sometimes) collaborative effort between the Charioteers and the Rajahs (a coalition of local arts traders)

**Garrison:** 2

**Capital:** Heliopolis

**Jumps:** 1

**Adjacent worlds:** Byzantium Secundus (dayside), Delphi and Holy Terra (nightside)

**Solar System:** Moroni 1, Bani 2, Bubastis 3, Pentateuch 4 (Nuz), Tanis 5

**Tech:** 5

**Human population:** 300,000

**Alien population:** 150+ (primarily in Aztlan)

**Resources:** Various grains and crops

**Exports:** Spices and herbs. Arts and crafts. Joloba bean, a cousin to Urth's coffee bean, and used in similar beverages. Cantha-weed, a form of tobacco. Mellior, a rich, dark timber used in fine furnishings.

**Landscape:** Terraforming turned Pentateuch into a planet with the biological and geological diversity of Urth. There is less water on Pentateuch, however; seas make up perhaps half of the planet's surface.

In 3777, terraforming began. The process took exactly 32 years, though most terraformers insisted that the job could have been done in 10 years. Doramos carefully oversaw the terraforming process. No step would be overlooked, no shortcuts taken — this would be a perfect world.

Rivers and fjords were sculpted, and oceans filled. Species of life were imported for the new world, some genetically altered into new lifeforms. This would be a new Eden, Doramos claimed, and even his critics believed him. While all his work was splendid, this planet began to look like it was touched by the Pancreator, with its soft azure skies and a tapestry of forests and mountains.

Finally, in 3809, his task was complete: Daleth-4 — which he renamed first Arcadia, then Kolob, and finally Pentateuch — was complete, and awaited the arrival of its new inhabitants. The groundwork for the capital city of Heliopolis was already laid, following his grand designs. Over the next century the planet was settled and built up, promoted as the new Utopia and the epitome of Second Republic ideals and capabilities.

Doramos died mere months after Pentateuch's terraforming was complete. He disappeared in a shuttle somewhere past Daleth-5 (now named Tanis) and was found weeks later, his shuttle in orbit around the planet. Doramos was slumped over a flickering station, dead of an apparent heart attack. Beneath his hands were blue-

prints for Pentateuch, covered with an arcane script — a script which would be seen time and again as historians began researching through his private journals, and has yet to be deciphered, though connections to a number of esoteric languages have been discerned.

Pentateuch was praised as Doramos' greatest work: simple, beautiful, and pure. In addition to terraforming the planet he also named its features and indicated where cities should be built and what they should be named. Indeed, he was reported to have a complete list of codes on the way Pentateuch was — and was not — to be developed, from building heights to construction materials. But this was not, he argued, mere creative despotism: Pentateuch would be developed in harmony with what he called "the Empyric accord."

With his death, though, much of his plan was discarded. By the end of the first century of settlement, some city-sites were ignored and other places chosen, and some places were given different names.

## A Green and Pleasant Land

Pentateuch was eagerly settled by those who wanted to be part of history or were eager for new adventure. And though it was praised as the paragon of the Second Republic's accomplishments, it was also in many ways seen as a return to a more quiet time, when humanity lived in accord with nature.

Though technology was certainly a part of the settlements begun on Pentateuch, it was only a component, and a non-technological method would often be chosen over high-technology. The bohemians of the Second Republic flocked to Pentateuch to settle down and live "as one." Mysticism and pagan religions burgeoned on Pentateuch — much to the Church's chagrin — as settlers felt the need to greater commune with the spirit of the planet.

## The Weltgeist

And then strange happenings began. Ultimately, the term *Weltgeist* was used to include the spectrum of bizarre events which transpired on Pentateuch.

Some of the more notable events include:

- In 3812, contact was lost with Patolli, a small town-ship in the Shulel rainforest; its residents were among the first to settle Pentateuch, and chose a site 25 kilometers south of the site which Doramos had selected. When a ship was sent to determine the trouble, the entire town was empty — seemingly abandoned in the midst of normal activity. Letters were found half-composed, plates and tableware set for meals, toys in the playground; but no townspeople were ever found, nor were any clues to their fates discovered.

- In 3822, a resident of the town of Heshbon journeyed to Heliopolis and barricaded himself in the central Basilica, slaughtering every worshipper and priest he came across, until he himself was slain. This exact same incident occurred every 12 years. Authorities would not reveal any

## The World Alchemist

The science of terraforming reached its zenith during the Second Republic, as humanity strove to tame space; planet after planet was re-engineered to be more Urthlike, and the terraformers imposed their will over what nature had wrought. Some planets were modified only a little, a mountain sculpted or a river rerouted at the terraformer's whim. Others were wholly altered and shaped anew, transformed from barren, lifeless rocks to lush utopias, as an alchemist's lead was changed to gold. Indeed, many terraformers likened their own practice to alchemy, considering it a sacred science.

Foremost among these world-alchemists was Doramos of Tyre, acknowledged by all as Master Terraformer. He revolutionized the science, taking it to new heights of artistic and philosophical achievement; indeed, it was Doramos who first likened terraforming to alchemy, and saw it as a sacred science. "When I sculpt a planet," he wrote, "when I subtly alter its flows of energy, I am bringing purpose and design to a once meaningless rock. I am igniting the Holy Fire within the world's soul, and as I fan the sacred flames of a world so does the Holy Flame burn even brighter within me."

Even over 1,000 years after his death, engineers and mystics alike study his many journals, filled with arcane scripts, drawings, and other notes — some still inexplicable. Indeed, some of the greatest inventions in the planetary sciences (such as the portable terraformer) were tossed off as whims in his journal — items which he conceived but later forgot as other, more grand projects sought his attention.

Doramos himself terraformed nearly a dozen planets, and his handful of students terraformed over a dozen more. While each planet touched by Doramos or his school is unique, they all share the Master Terraformer's profound vision and exemplary skill.

details of their investigations, but in each instance the killer's home was sealed and destroyed.

- The Phavian Institute set up a satellite office in Heliopolis, and reported after a century-long study that psychic powers are 23% more likely to occur on Pentateuch. This conclusion was disputed, however — since Pentateuch may attract more psychics, it is more likely that they will breed more psychics. However, the Phavian Institute insisted that its figures relied on subjects who were not the children of known psychics.

- In 3956, a message buoy was found on icy Thule. Its recorded message was from the sole survivor of an expedition which had discovered a network of caverns beneath Pentateuch's magnetic north pole. Deep within the caverns was an enormous round door, with Doramos' per-



# The Sirocco

Perhaps one of the most widespread manifestations of the Weltgeist is the Sirocco (also sometimes called the Ghost Wind or a psi-storm): a sudden storm accompanied by massive energy flows. High winds and dark clouds (but no rain) are accompanied by a coruscating energy only marginally similar to lightning.

The Sirocco occurs roughly once a week in various locales; it can be noted in multiple places at the same time. Sirocco storms can last anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours. The more regular appearances of the Sirocco are fairly mild, and often have no effect other than the storm's unusual appearance. On occasion, the effects are more dramatic, and can produce a number of paranormal side effects.

The Phavian Institute — which identified the Sirocco as a nubilous psi-anomaly — set up a number of stations to collect data on the Sirocco, but these were destroyed after the Fall when the Church claimed the world. Some geomancers propose that the Sirocco is a physical manifestation of the world's Holy Flame traversing the world's meridians, but the less mystically-inclined ignore this suggestion.

## Effects

The Sirocco appears to be a thunderstorm without rain — heavy winds (sometimes reaching gale force), dark clouds overhead and the sky filled with crackling bolts of energy that occasionally strike like lightning (but do not otherwise resemble it).

Stronger storms can produce even more unusual effects. Gamemasters choosing to have characters experience a Ghost Wind can have any number of things happen, including (but not limited to):

- **Visions** — Characters share a vision, or each one receives an individual vision. The vision may be prophetic, or it may simply be hallucinatory, or even a mixture of both.

- **Psionics** — Non-psychics may suddenly find psychic perceptions and abilities opened to them, either temporarily or permanently. Psychics may find their powers diminished or even negated. Certain powers may be made more difficult or easy (-3 to +3 on psychic power rolls). New or greater psychic powers are temporary, from a day to a week. They can only be maintained through effort and training (and ultimately the expenditure of experience points).

- **Technology** — Electrical devices may run out of power or be recharged, or temporarily malfunction. Even worse, some may experience tremendous power surges, resulting in their destruction.

- **Transportation** — Characters may find themselves in a different location on the planet, a few feet or a few hundred miles away.

- **Wyrd** — Characters may find Wyrd points drained or replenished.

- **Theurgy** — Theurgy is only minimally affected by the Sirocco: -1 to +1 on theurgic rolls.

Only rarely does someone have repeated experiences of powerful Siroccos. Some mystics travel to Pentateuch in the hopes of experiencing a profound Sirocco-induced vision, but they are typically disappointed.

## Gamemaster's Note

Using the Sirocco without thought can be dangerous. It should not be used simply to mess around with characters (robbing them of Wyrd and destroying their equipment). It is a dramatic device, not a random encounter!

sonal seal in the center. A multitude of tests could not determine what lay beyond the door, how to open it, or what the door itself was made of. The investigations were cut short by a massive cave-in which killed all but one member of the party, who escaped to the surface and recorded his tale before succumbing to the harsh cold.

- The residents of New Moab confirm that in 3852 a rain of fire fell from the skies; though it struck many places, nothing burned. Most residents took cover, but some were exposed to the strange fire. They reported that though it did indeed burn, the burning was a cleansing purification of the soul. These witnesses underwent a variety of personal transformations in the years that followed: some joined the priesthood, others spoke in tongues or claimed to see the Holy Fire within all humanity, and some simply went mad. (A similar celestial event

occurred in 4856 over Shaitan — which, unlike New Moab, simply burned to the ground in an uncontrollable conflagration.)

- An albino child with a third eye in the center of his forehead was born in 4995. He was immediately taken by the local Eskatonic priest to the Order. Witnesses allege that within hours after the newborn's birth, he was conversing with a full, adult vocabulary.

## The Heliopolis Congress

Thus did Pentateuch's reputation as a planet steeped in magic spread across the Second Republic, and even more people traveled to Pentateuch to study the Weltgeist. In 3984, a conference was held by would-be mystics, scholars and scientists to discern the secrets of the Weltgeist. They turned to the original notes of Doramos to try to



understand what had happened.

His journals proved to be a gold mine of esoteric beliefs. Though his journals were studied before, they were never scrutinized as deeply as by those seeking to understand the Weltgeist. In addition to various notes on Pentateuch, his earliest maps indicate a series of lines traversing the planet. Geomancers present at the conference determined these to be ley lines.

To geomancers, the molten core at the heart of a planet was a part of the Holy Flame, and the energy of the Holy Flame would burst through the surface in certain locations. Ley lines were lines drawn through these points — lines which themselves became meridians, carrying the sacred fire from point to point.

Unfortunately, much of geomancy is speculative: one geomancer's "hot spot" may be invalidated by another geomancer. Doramos himself seemed unable to conclude the location of Pentateuch's leys; his maps of the planet show different lines. (Of course, some question whether he was locating the lines, or placing them.) One thing is certain: some of Doramos' plans placed cities at the junctures of ley lines, and occasionally even indicated danger spots — spots which have since been ignored.

Another factor the geomancers considered is Doramos' known interest in gematria, which prescribed an occult meaning to certain words: if Doramos applied these principles to his works, then the very names of cities and places could be significant. Certainly Doramos had

very specific intentions, but was this gematria at work?

Thus, the geomancers concluded a potential source of the Weltgeist: deviation from Doramos's plan. Doramos had intended Pentateuch to be a perfect creation, following his Empyric accord: from the shape of the continents to the names of the land and waters themselves, every element of Pentateuch was to be a piece of a puzzle. Even the layout of Heliopolis was assuredly a mandala of some sort, and is similar in design to some ancient talismans from Urth.

The history of Pentateuch proved to be a deviation from Doramos's plan almost from the very beginning. If Doramos had constructed his world according to esoteric philosophies, they argued, yet his final plan was ignored, that could be akin to constructing a fusion reactor without radiation shielding.

But what was the solution? Simply moving cities and renaming them? It was unlikely that the corporations that controlled Pentateuch would agree to such an expensive plan. Equally pressing was the question of intent — what had Doramos truly meant to accomplish with Pentateuch? To these questions there were no conclusive answers.

Privately, some muttered accusations of Antinomy, but none would be so bold as to publicly allege that the great Doramos was involved in so disreputable a practice.

Until the Fall.





## A World Afire

After the Fall, Pentateuch was seen as a planet of ill-repute, created through the demonic pride of the Second Republic. The Weltgeist was hubris on a planetary scale and would continue as long as heretical and contraband paganism and theurgies continued unchecked. At least, this was the excuse the Church used to lay claim to the world. After the seizure of Byzantium Secundus by the Ten, noble houses and other interests began moving against other planets, seeking to claim them for their own. The Church had to move, if for no other reason than to protect Holy Terra. The ships of the Church arrived at neighboring Pentateuch, and the planet was bombarded.

Pentateuch was a thriving commune of artists and agrarians, with few defenses. The planet's leaders surrendered almost immediately, and Church forces claimed the world as the spoils of war. It was not, however, enough to simply claim Pentateuch: it had to be cleansed of the "stain of Antinomy" which the Church asserted was part of the planet from its origins. Inquisitors began combing the planet for the dangerous malfesants which Pentateuch obviously harbored.

But the settlers of Pentateuch were not sheep for the slaughter: they had some measure of autonomy under the Republic, and from the earliest days the settlers of Pentateuch felt a sense of stewardship to their world. Farmers turned plowshares into swords, and artists learned the arts of war. But the Orthoclast Party, those who wanted to do away with the rule of the Urth Orthodox on Pentateuch, were not limited to simply poets and gardeners. Alongside them fought mystics and psychics, and all those whom the Church would have crushed, including some members of the verboten Eskatonic Order, which was just emerging after centuries of secrecy.

Of course, the Church retaliated. Church knights flexed their muscles against the rebels when open resistance was encountered, and Inquisitors strode through the seemingly docile towns and communities, in keen pursuit of sinners. It soon became obvious that the Church held sway in the more populated areas, but its grip was weaker outside the cities — in the more remote towns and places of Pentateuch, the presence of the Church was ignored.

Certain families of Pentateuch tried to rise up and claim noble lineage, gathering the support of the local populations behind them. But the Church quickly put an end to such claims with threat of excommunication. While the Church's retaliation against these would-be lords was quick, it did not prevent some of the nobles from cementing alliances with off-world houses who moved to aid them. Thus, House Hawkwood and the Hazat, each seeking fiefs, became embroiled in the war for the planet. Only the immediate action of the Patriarch, desperate to defend the system which lead directly to Holy Terra, halted these houses' actions. In return for a few small fiefs — previously owned by the local pretender houses —

Hawkwood and Hazat lords pulled their forces from the war.

Ultimately, Pentateuch became a planet of managed violence. Terrorism was periodic, expected and even relatively controlled. Urban areas became increasingly Orthodox, and more homogenous with the rest of the Known Worlds, and the outlying areas remained publicly respectful of their new overlords. Violence would erupt periodically, in varying measures, as the Orthoclast Party struck against the cities, or Orthodox forces retaliated in the outlands. And though few of Pentateuch's natives favored the Orthodox regime, Orthoclast terrorism was not always appreciated by the oppressed masses it was meant to save.

The Weltgeist continued, of course; but instead of attempting to study it, the Church merely denounced it as proof of Pentateuch's hubris.

## A New Regime

With the triumph of psychic abilities and theurgy over the Symbiots in the Symbiot War, psychics and theurges no longer became targets of the Inquisition. In 4955, the Church called a Synod to meet with the Eskatonics, and chose Pentateuch as the setting. Syneculla Salados led a retinue to Pentateuch to discuss the conditions of rapprochement with the Eskatonics.

It was in the last week of the Synod that Syneculla Salados was caught in a Sirocco over Megiddo. Though his ship was undamaged, he was strangely silent about his first and only experience with the Ghost Wind. It was this solitary experience which many credit with influencing the outcome of the Synod.

The last day of the Synod, Salados met in private with Eskatonic delegates. After a three-hour discussion, they met in public with the entire Synod, and revealed the Pentateuch Concordat, a document signed by Salados, on behalf of the Patriarch, and Magus Atalanta, representing the Eskatonics. This was legal and holy writ ensuring the Eskatonics' obedience to the Church and the Church's acceptance of the Eskatonics. Furthermore, it granted the Eskatonic Order governance of Pentateuch.

Church delegates were outraged, but Salados reminded them that he acted as the voice of the Patriarch, and the concordat was final. The Orthodox handed over control of the administrative offices, and Pentateuch rejoiced. It is possible that the Church might have reversed its actions given time, but in 4956 the Emperor Wars began, and the Patriarch had far more important matters on his mind. Cynics openly voice the opinion that, were it not for a clause declaring that the new governors give a portion of the planetary tithes to the Patriarch, the Orthodoxy would have nevertheless found some excuse to retake the planet.

The Pentateuch Concordat declared that, while governance of the planet was given over to the Eskatonic Order, the order must nonetheless give a portion of the planetary tithes to the Orthodoxy.

During the Emperor Wars, Pentateuch was all but ignored. Noble houses made occasional raids on Pentateuch, but there was little of value there. The Hazat made it clear that they wanted the planet, but Church forces always managed to deter the Hazat from anything other than the occasional strike.

## Pentateuch Today

Pentateuch is finally at peace — as much as any world can be in the time of the fading suns. Orthoclast terrorism and Orthodox reprisals are a thing of the past, but the ships of the Inquisition still hover dangerously close to Pentateuch, keen for any reasons to challenge Eskatonic autonomy — not all within the Church willingly accept Eskatonic theurgy or Penitent psychics, and Pentateuch is under a close watch for any sign of subversive behavior.

A token Orthodox fleet remains at Pentateuch to represent the Church and protect the planet from any would-be marauders; though too small to protect the planet from a serious invasion, it is effective against lesser forces. More significantly, the presence of the fleet speaks volumes — attack this planet and you face the wrath of the Church. Perhaps that alone is sufficient to keep potential invaders (including the Hazat) from attacking.

As millennial fever grows and the suns continue to fade, more within the Empire see Pentateuch as either holding the solution or the cause of the fading suns, and soon the planet may be besieged by a desperate Empire seeking answers.

## Places of Note

Centuries of violence have touched the paradise that Doramos created. From the patchwork towns rebuilt after periodic violence, to the charred, lifeless earth which used to be farmlands, to the abandoned ghost towns, Pentateuch is pockmarked with scars of the Church occupation and the Orthoclast resistance.

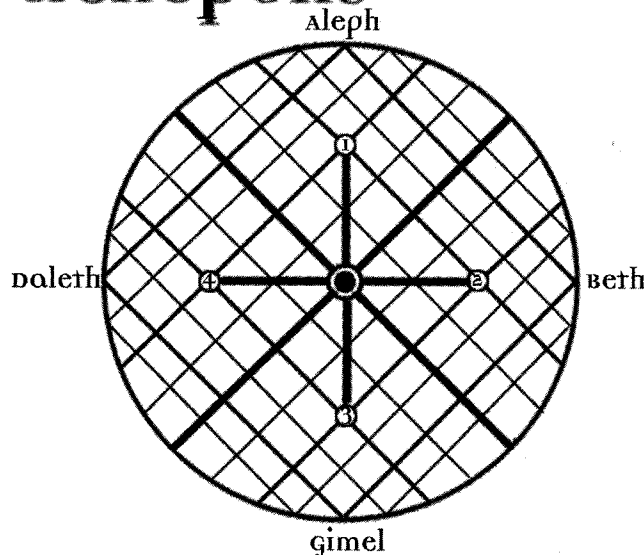
## Heliopolis

Resting on the shores of the Goshen Sea, Heliopolis (population 95,000) is the capital of Pentateuch. Although touched by the violence of the Dark Ages, it has managed to avoid widespread damage: the majority of its original architecture remains intact, with delicate and graceful spires ascending heavenward.

Pentateuch's oldest and grandest city was built according to Doramos' original plans. The city is circular, with roads leading from the perimeter to the central plaza. Two major thoroughfares run northeast-southwest and southeast-northwest, intersecting through Omega Plaza: within this plaza is the Basilica of Saints Paulus and Horace.

Heliopolis is thus divided by these major thoroughfares into four quadrants: Aleph (north), Beth (east), Gimel (south) and Daleth (west). At the center of each quadrant is a smaller plaza, each containing a statue of creatures

# Heliopolis



● omega plaza  
(basilica of ss. paulus & horace)

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1 boreas plaza | 2 eurus plaza    |
| 3 notus plaza  | 4 zephyrus plaza |

from ancient Urth mythology. To the north is Boreas Plaza, with a statue of a gnome; in the east is Eurus Plaza, with a statue of a sylph; southward is Notus Plaza, with a statue of a salamander; and to the west is Zephyrus plaza, with a statue of an undine.

A complex sewer system runs beneath Heliopolis. Orthoclast rebels used this system regularly for covert transport of goods and people beneath the city streets, but public access is now forbidden — even with a map, one can get lost in the labyrinth below the city streets.

**Omega Plaza:** Omega Plaza rests at the very center of Heliopolis; within the center of the Plaza is the Basilica of Saints Paulus and Horace, a towering structure with a central dome and five minarets. The stained glass and mosaics within the Basilica are original, having miraculously survived the violence of the Dark Ages.

**Aleph:** Pentateuch's northern district is primarily commercial and industrial; the main gate from this region leads to the Pentateuch spaceport, and it was natural that most traded goods end up in this region. The Merchant League has ultimately claimed most of this quadrant, from its housing to commercial space. The agora is adjacent to Boreas Plaza. What little nightlife Heliopolis has can mostly be found in this quadrant.

**Beth:** Beth is the Arts Quarter, where the city's artists, philosophers, and poets live and create. Housing and studio space varies here, depending upon success — from squalor to splendor. Eurus Plaza is frequently used as a smaller agora by those artists and performers who have no space of their own in which to ply their wares.

**Gimel:** Heliopolis's government can be found mostly in the Gimel district, which contains the various offices

## Technology on Pentateuch

Heliopolis is among the more technologically current cities on Pentateuch, as befits a planetary capitol. Medical care, engineering, communication and transportation are more likely to be advanced (and working) on Heliopolis than elsewhere.

When the Known Worlds plunged into the barbarism of the Dark Ages, Pentateuch was only marginally affected. Much of the planet was already possessed of a "back to nature" sentiment, and the people were far more reliant on their own abilities and the land itself than on tools. Some few elements of Second Republic tech remain in the outlands of Pentateuch, long ago fallen into disuse, but as a whole the populace of Pentateuch rarely suffers for it.

and buildings used to administer a planet. Many fine manors can be found in this district, which are favored by nobles and distinguished visitors. Pentateuch's major barracks are also located in Gimel.

**Daleth:** Daleth is the home of the faithful. The Priors, a residence for the Eskatonics who run the basilica, is located next to Omega Plaza. The Naos — the central monastery and school for the Eskatonics — is also located in Daleth, in a quiet building behind high walls. The Orthodox do have a small community in Daleth, and a small chapel of Amaltheans runs Heliopolis' only hospital. A representative from Temple Avesti is always present in an Avestite chancery, constantly investigating Pentateuch for heresy or Antinomy. He is a very busy man.

Pentateuch's only spaceport is located on the outskirts of Heliopolis.

## Megiddo Desert

The continent called Megiddo is dominated by the Megiddo Desert — a land of red, rocky terrain and dry lake beds, and only minimal water supply. Many questioned Doramos' purpose behind this desert: "If the master terraformer was responsible for paradisaical Pentateuch, he must have napped during Megiddo." Even though it is one of the least welcoming places on Pentateuch, it still seems to draw hardy souls willing to brave the inhospitable terrain.

### Aztlan

Aztlan is a new community on Pentateuch, less than two years old, but already over 100 Ur-Obun live here, in an abandoned Second Republic town which they are busy redesigning according to some unknown city plan. The aliens are quiet as to their reasons for migrating to Pentateuch, but many people believe that the Ur-Obun have come to study the Weltgeist and the Sirocco.

### Mount Tabor

Mount Tabor is over 200 meters of igneous rock that ascends vertically above the wastes of Megiddo. When the

Ghost Wind hits Mount Tabor, it is particularly fierce. Mystics (and the curious) frequently make pilgrimages to the Holy Mount, some coming from across the Known Worlds. The Ur-Obun seem to have a particular fascination for it, and are often reported ascending Mount Tabor.

## Other Cities

Although Heliopolis is Pentateuch's greatest city, it is not the only city on the planet:

• **Agni** — If Pentateuch is the center of Heliopolis's arts and culture, Agni is the heart of its industry. Mellior wood, cantha-weed, and joloba-bean are typically shipped to Agni for processing, then go to Heliopolis for export. It lies near the largest noble estates on the planets, those owned by House Hawkwood, enlarged somewhat during the Dark Ages from their original grants.

The majority of Agni's visitors are merchants, business-minded nobles and locals replenishing supplies, seeking medical attention, etc.. Agni rarely draws visitors from off-world, although it has slowly developed a reputation as a haven for dissidents who find Agni civilized enough to satisfy their needs and remote enough to avoid attention.

Agni was also designed by Doramos, but it does not

follow the precision of Heliopolis's design. In fact, no pattern is discernible, which might justify his intended name for Agni: Chaos. Population: 35,000

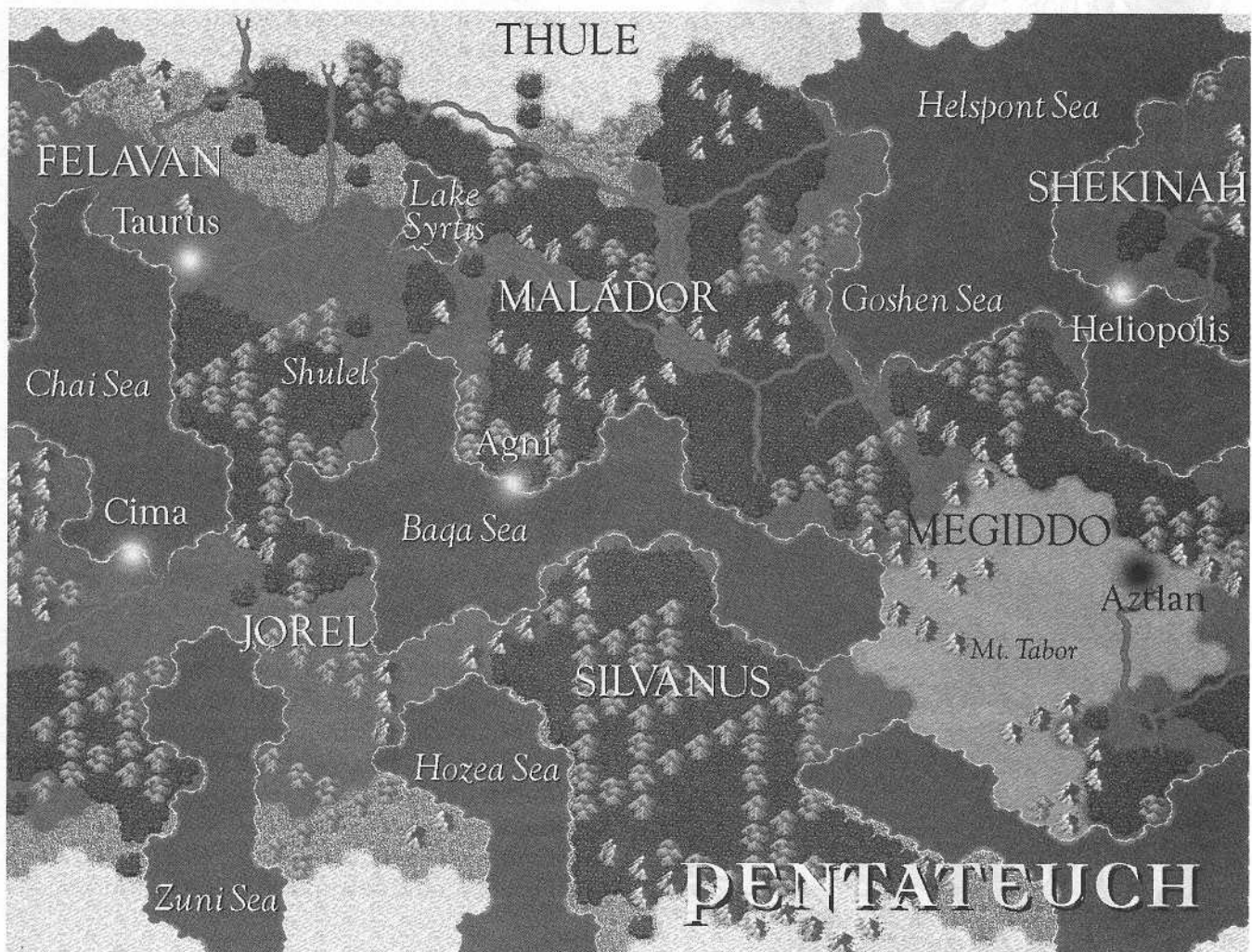
• **Taurus** — Located on the northern shores of the Chai Sea, Taurus was built some 50 years after Heliopolis. Doramos had originally chosen this site for Heliopolis but later abandoned it in favor of its present site. Much of Taurus was destroyed in a major earthquake in 3999. Nearby are the small Hazat estates. Population: 10,000

• **Cima** — Cima grew up around a small fishing village on the southern shores of the Chai Sea, and it became a favorite of vacationing nobles. It has even begun to slowly attract off-world attention as a relaxing seaside resort with a growing nightlife. Population: 3,000

A number of smaller towns dot the planet. The average population is 1,000 people, but some communities have as few as 100 residents.

## Denizens

Pentateuch is quite like Holy Terra in many ways, yet it is equally distinct. Much of Pentateuch's animal life is similar to that of Urth, with only a few exceptions. Researchers believe that deep within Pentateuch's forests and seas are creatures quite unlike anything on Urth.







## Draga

The draga-beast is a large, fast reptile originally imported from Xanthes (a world now lost) for Pentateuch. The draga can be a wild, difficult animal, but skilled trainers can tame them, and draga-beasts have proven quite useful for transport. In fact, the wranglers and gauchos of the great plains of Jorel and Felavan prefer draga-beasts, which require far less maintenance than horses. Likewise, the Ur-Obun of Aztlan rely almost exclusively on draga-beasts for navigating the Megiddo Desert (although they are not as large or adaptable as the Pherizas of Kish).

Draga-beasts have not completely replaced horses on Pentateuch, though they do run the risk of eating them into extinction: horseflesh is a favored draga treat, and a hungry draga around a horse is likely to attack and devour the animal. Draga riders know to reward their steeds with horse jerky, and often carry a little bit with them when they travel.

**Description:** The draga-beast is a large reptilian creature with birdlike hips, and can move about quite rapidly on two legs.

### Average Draga Beast

**Firebird Cost:** 500

**Body:** Strength 10, Dexterity 5, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 5, Tech 0

**Natural skills:** Dodge 5, Fight 1, Observe 1, Vigor 4

**Weapons:** Front talons (4 DMG, -1 goal and initiative),

Bite (5 DMG)

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

There are a number of variant stocks of draga-beast:

- *Chalas* are stronger than average, and most often used for cargo transport or carriages. (Strength 12, Dexterity 4, Endurance 9; Vigor 7; 750 firebirds)

- *Yumeno* are quite fast, though they are skittish and fickle. They are often used by scouts or for speedy travel. (Strength 8, Dexterity 7, Endurance 6; Dodge 6, Vigor 6; 625 firebirds)

- *Mikoru* have steady temperaments, and can be trained to act as warsteeds. (Strength 12, Endurance 9, Wits 4; Fight 3, Vigor 7; 2,000 firebirds)

## People

The people of Pentateuch have a well-deserved reputation for being stubborn and independent. The earliest settlers chose Pentateuch as an experiment, a means of living with less reliance on advanced technology and more reliance on self-sufficiency, and soon they developed a bond with the planet which even the Inquisition could not undo. Mystics, theurges, psychics and others whom the Church would hunt have all sought Pentateuch as a haven at one time or another. Even before there was an Eskatonic Order, most of the occult societies of the Second Republic could be found on Pentateuch.

## The Marabout

For some individuals, the Sirocco is a life-changing experience: it is profound, and personal, and utterly transforms the recipient. Among these individuals are the Marabout — men and women who, because of the Sirocco, have felt a true kinship with their world and all living creatures upon it, and have taken on the role of planetary stewards.

At first they were only peaceful guardians, but with the Orthodox occupation that changed, and they took on the role of guerrilla fighters. Now that peace has been restored, they seek to cure Pentateuch of the many ills inflicted upon it since the Orthodox occupation. Some Marabout work in tandem with the government, as advisors or scouts.

The Marabout care for the land, and for those who travel upon it. Some live sedentary lives (usually away from larger cities), but others roam the world, traveling as they feel called. They do not have an established community or organization, but occasionally meet to share experiences and observations. Leadership is nominal, and earned by respect. In order to be formally recognized as a Marabout, one must be sponsored by a senior representative; a potential Marabout is recognized by his commitment and conviction, and ultimately by his deeds.

The Marabout believe that the Sirocco is indeed a manifestation of the Holy Flame, and each person is ultimately touched differently by the World Fire (as they call it), as it mingles with the person's own indwelling Flame. Most Marabout have some psychic ability, which is often awakened or enhanced because of the World Fire. Some have theurgic powers, particularly those who were once priests. Elders may tutor newer Marabout in the use of their powers, but there is hardly an organized system of instruction.

The Orthodox tried sending spies to join the Marabout, but these impostors were discerned immediately.

## Jared Graymoore

Jared Graymoore has been a Marabout for only a few years, but is one of the most well-known Marabout on the planet.

Originally a member of Temple Avesti, he was notorious for hunting down heretics across Pentateuch in spite of the Pentateuch Concordat. His shuttle was caught and destroyed in a severe Sirocco, yet he survived. To this day he has shared the vision he experienced during that Sirocco only with his mentor — but it was powerful enough for him to abandon the tools and garments of Temple Avesti as he stumbled away from the burning wreckage of his ship, and vowed a new life for himself. Since then he has traveled the world, helping those in need and offering guidance where he can.

## Drama

Pentateuch can be a setting for a diverse selection of adventures, from planetary exploration to occult adventure.

**Sheshach:** The characters find the mysterious town of Sheshach, which first disappeared in 3711 and reappeared seven years later, its residents missing. It has since disappeared, appeared and reappeared in different places on the planet, but is present for three days at a time. Although anyone caught in the town when it disappears again never returns, explorers continually seek to learn the secrets of Sheshach and recover its Second Republic tech.

**The Lost Journals:** Word emerges of a hidden crypt deep beneath Pentateuch, which reportedly contains Doramos' secret journals. Everyone wants these journals: geomancers, artifact-hounds, mystics and Inquisitors (the last seeking to prove Doramos' Antinomy). Can the characters beat their competitors at finding these books?

**Dark Night of the Soul:** The characters are in an air yacht which crashes atop Mount Tabor, and must survive with few resources — then they're hit by the region's most dramatic Sirocco in years. This should be a well-planned episode, with each character receiving a significant vision.

## Rumors, Legends and other Curious Facts

Pentateuch is a world filled with rumors and unusual reports. Some notable rumors include:

- The Basilica's cellar-crypts may have secret entrances to catacombs and secret tunnels which link to the sewer system.

- Temple Avesti believes the Ur-Obun of Aztlan to be secret Antinomists.

- With the Emperor Wars over, the Orthodox might be eyeing Pentateuch once more and seek a reason to revoke the Pentateuch Concordat.

- Some of the stations which the Phavian Institute installed to monitor the Sirocco might still be found in remote places, and are operational.

- Geomancers believe Mount Tabor to be a primary font of ley energy, an actual conduit to the Holy Fire at the planet's core.

- Doramos placed terracite obelisks at points across Pentateuch: 5 meters tall and four-sided, with sigils carved along one side. These sigils are also found in his journals, and have not been translated.

Gamemasters should avoid making things obvious on Pentateuch, and should always try to wrap events in an air of esoteric mystery: the best mysteries are those which even the gamemaster hasn't yet solved.



# Rimpoche: Lost World

by Ross Isaacs

*Avan sat dejectedly in his cabin thinking about the turn of events that led to his exile. The scandal he created with his diatribe that night, the company he kept and a hundred other, smaller actions, brought him to this place. He should not have spoken so loudly at his mother's party, but wine had loosened his tongue, and that knight had irked him. The al-Malik had to be especially careful because of the suspicions of the Avestites. He could have brought the Inquisition down on them all. Word of his actions reached the ears of Baron Armond al-Malik, patron of Avan's branch of the family. It was his order that sent Avan to some backwater on the other side of the known galaxy; his personal seal adorned the bottom of the order.*

*By the feel of real gravity and the bustle along the passageway, Avan could tell that the ship had landed. It would be good to get out of this airless, windowless cabin. It was ironic that he would look forward to setting foot on the world of his exile. Dejectedly, he picked up the few cases he was allowed to bring with him, and started for the airlock. He was permitted no servants. Not even his body servant, Tamar. Another indignity.*

*Avan made his way down the corridor, turned left to the airlock. Some fool thanked him for traveling with them.*

*What he saw when he exited the ship made Avan drop his valises on the hard packed earth. It towered overhead in the faint light of a tiny red sun. A Gargoyle. One he had never seen before in the picture books or magic lantern shows. A new Gargoyle.*

*A gaunt man approached Avan. His dress and cybernetic implants marked him as an Engineer. The man welcomed Avan to "the operation," directed him to quarters where the other al-Malik stayed, and said something about a briefing later on. But Avan was only half listening. He was staring up at the ancient, beautiful image that stared back at him.*

*Perhaps this wasn't a punishment after all...*

At the height of the Second Republic, the jumproads spanned hundreds, perhaps thousands, of worlds. Then came the Fall, when man's grasp exceeded his reach and the Republic crumbled under its own weight. Many worlds disappeared, their coordinates lost in the ensuing confusion or as inhabitants sealed their gates from the encroaching chaos. Many people, notably the Charioteers, now search for the jumpkeys to these lost worlds. Opening new lines of communication and transport, leading to fabulous wealth or fantastic tech, these keys are more valuable than gold. They represent opportunity and adventure. Among those in the know, these secret jumproutes are called the Night Roads.

But with opportunity comes danger. The Night Roads must be kept secret by those who travel them, for they can radically alter the balance of power. A new road from Chernobog to Istakhr or Shaprut, and the Symbiot menace can bypass the garrison at Stigmata. A new road between Cadavus and Aylon means the Decados could move forces more easily against the al-Malik. Every noble house and merchant guild would love to find a lost colony filled with exotic technology, and the Church would love to cleanse such evil places.

One of these forbidden roads ends at a small, unobtrusive planet not marked on any star map. Its thin atmosphere, cold temperature and lack of water makes Rimpoche an inhospitable place. Rimpoche, however, is home to a potent Ur artifact. Originally discovered in 3994, the planet is also a cache of Second Republic high-tech wonders. Lost during the Fall, it was recently rediscovered by a Charioteer. Now, several people with Third Republic sympathies cooperate to force Rimpoche to yield up its secrets. How long their cooperation can last, and how long they can keep their find a secret, is anyone's guess.



# History

The history of Rimpoche can be divided into three distinct periods. Ur ruins identify the oldest period, and originally attracted explorers here. After a long period of obscurity, Second Republic scientists arrived and left their mark. Lost in the chaos of the Fall, the planet has now been rediscovered, opening a new chapter in its history.

## Prehistory

Of the first visitors to Rimpoche, the Anunnaki, nothing can be said. No one knows why they came to this planet, what they did here, or why they built the Gargoyle. Even the planet's original name, if it had one, is lost to time. Archaeologists of the Second Republic believed the beings known as the Gatekeepers originally inhabited the planet. Some suggested this was a military outpost. Others believed the Ur erected the Gargoyle as part of some unfathomable plan. That the settlement came to a cataclysmic end, however, is clear. The ruins tell of terrible planetary bombardment, perhaps by the lesser Anunnaki, those known as the Marauders. The reason behind their animosity, and the planet's destruction, remains a mystery.

## The Second Republic

During the Second Republic, explorers relentlessly searched for new planets to colonize. The pressure to find more land and more precious resources drove them to search farther and expand faster. Towards the end of the Second Republic, in 3994, Rimpoche first appeared in human records. Scanning the planet using sophisticated technology, a scouting party located an abundance of useful metals. They named the planet Cueball because of its desolate landscape, marked it for future mining, and moved on.

When the initial group of miners arrived, they were astonished by what they found. More important than gold and platinum, iron and tin, they found a Gargoyle towering over the barren, rocky plain. Soon after they had arrived, the miners left Cueball, abandoning the mining operation. Claiming to be on some sort of quest, each one went his or her own way. One traveled to Icon to meditate at the feet of a Gargoyle there. Another traveled to De Moley to sit atop a crag and listen to the howling winds. The mining conglomerate had several of the miners followed and brought in for interrogation. Each told a similar story — of visions and a religious ecstasy similar to Sathraism.

Even to the technologically sophisticated Republicans, Ur artifacts remained a mystery. Although found on hundreds of worlds, they never failed to generate excitement and curiosity. To prevent a wave of pilgrims — armchair archaeologists, religious zealots, greedy opportunists and the like — the Gargoyle's existence was kept a closely guarded secret. Quietly, Second Republic scientists from many disciplines arrived to investigate the site.

Then came the Fall. The central computer crash and resulting riots brought the Second Republic to its knees. In the resulting upheaval, the scientists on Cueball found themselves abandoned. At first, ships arrived with news of the calamity. Then, as supply ships arrived less and less frequently, many fled Cueball while they still could. Eventually, only a small group of dedicated scientists remained. In the cold, rough terrain and insufficient terraforming, they could not last for long. Most died in an orgy of murder and ensuing cannibalism. The last survivor died of starvation, staring up at the enigmatic observer of it all — the Gargoyle.

Known to few in the first place, Cueball became one more lost planet among hundreds. Few jumpkeys existed, as access to Cueball was restricted, and those vanished during centuries of chaos and war following the Divestiture. What little information about Cueball was stored on computers the Church erased in their massive data purges. The few people who knew about the planet — bureaucrats, corporate officials, archaeologists and scientists — took its secret with them to the grave. Cueball passed into obscurity.

## Recent History

With the end of the Emperor Wars, the Charioteers have embarked on a huge movement to explore the galaxy. Special researchers scour badly damaged think machines looking for clues to lost jump coordinates. Others comb ruins, junkpiles and the black market for new jumpkeys. Several months after Alexius's coronation, one of these trail-blazing pilots, Diego Estrel, rediscovered Cueball. After months of research and dangerous work, he located the planet's jumpkey. Diego, nervous and excited, inserted it in its socket while making the jump from Grail, and found himself in a new, uncharted solar system.

Estrel, his scout ship lacking sophisticated sensors, explored the system. The outer planet, while terrestrial, lacked an atmosphere. The next planet, a gas giant, was likewise useless. Then, he arrived at Cueball. From high orbit, Estrel could see a pocket of life on an otherwise barren world and landed his ship at an ancient landing pad. From the flight deck, he could see the Gargoyle staring back at him. His determination had paid off.

Little is known about what happened next. According to his co-pilot, Mir Aldan, Estrel left the ship to get a closer look at the Gargoyle and returned a short time later. The Charioteers sealed the report of this first excursion, and nothing is known about Estrel's experiences. Diego himself has since disappeared. The truth, however, is more sinister.

After communing with the Gargoyle, Estrel set course for Obun. Throughout the trip, he said little, ate alone, and left his duties to Mir Aldan. Finally fed up by Estrel's strange behavior, Aldan asked the purpose of the trip. "To hear the water splash in the fountains of Pervari," Diego replied. Aldan seized control of the ship, locking Estrel in

his cabin, and returned to Leagueheim. There he turned over the key and Diego for psychological analysis. To this day, Diego sits in a cell on Leagueheim, awaiting further experiments and questions. Mir Aldan enjoys the fruits of the discovery.

The planet's current name comes from Diego Estrel, who claims "that's what the Gargoyle called it."

Rimpoche's discovery attracted attention at the highest levels of society. Amil Suk, a Charioteer consul and Aldan's superior, took charge of Estrel and the planet. To fully comprehend the sophisticated technology found there, the Charioteers would need help. Suk secretly approached Ermin Sobral of the Engineers and revealed Rimpoche's existence. Together they met with Baron Armand al-Malik, known for his eccentric fascination with the Ur. Together, they concocted a dangerous scheme.

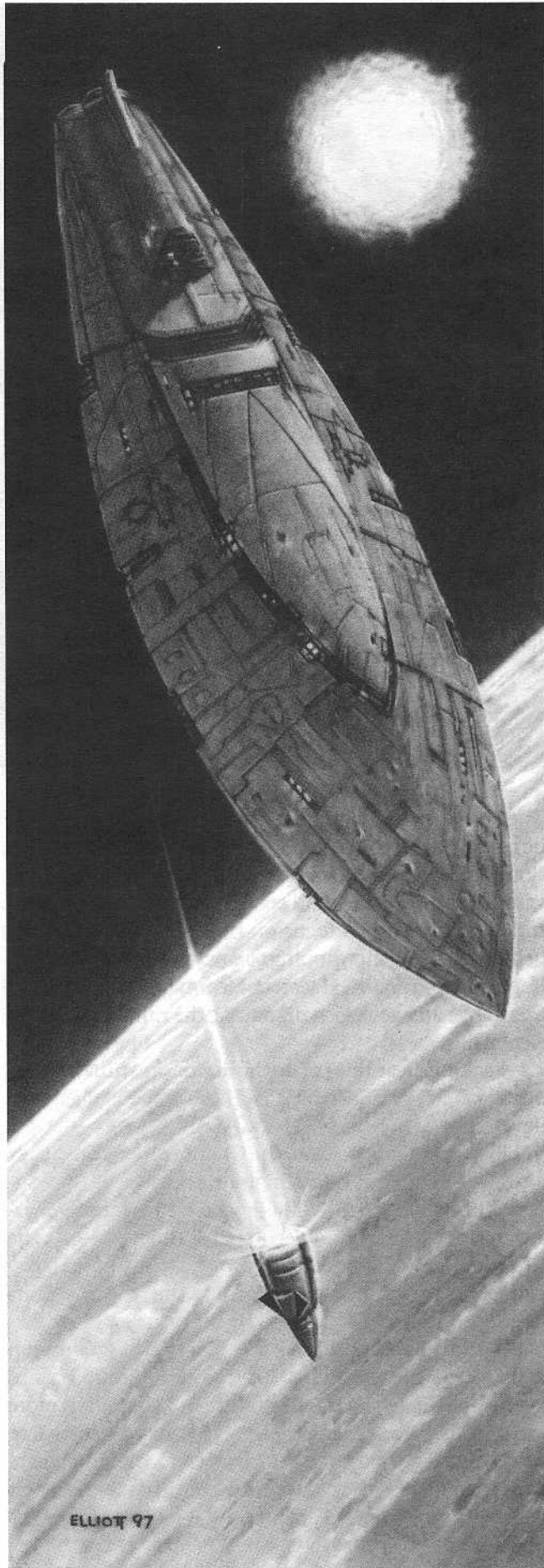
Combining their resources, the three conspired to explore the planet and use what they found to advance their republican ideals. Each gathered trusted associates from among the more progressive-minded and surreptitiously sent them to Rimpoche. They keep Rimpoche's existence a secret, to prevent rivalry with other noble houses or guilds, seizure by Emperor Alexius, and uncomfortable attention from the Inquisition.

## The Conspiracy

Although Emperor Alexius has let it be known that he will reward anyone who finds a lost world, the people involved with Rimpoche prefer to keep their discovery to themselves. They believe they can use the planet's technological treasures as a building block to a Third Republic. This is a conspiracy of individuals. Only those directly involved know about Rimpoche; the more people who know a secret, the more likely it will get out. Information about the planet is tightly kept — it does not appear on the database of any think machine, is not referred to by name in any correspondence and is not talked about openly. The conspirators have much to fear: The Scravers and certain noble houses would love to seize the planet for themselves; the Emperor would be none too pleased by efforts to displace him; and everyone fears the day the Avestites find out. Each also worries about discovery by rivals within their own organizations.

The al-Malik have the largest contingent — five minor nobles led by Armand al-Malik himself. The Charioteers sent four members, experts in archaeology and technology, led by Elena Padova. The smallest contingent, but the most important logistically, comes from the Supreme Order of Engineers — three technicians led by Crafter Nyne Renton. In general, those assigned to the planet are not told where or why they are going until they arrive. And once there, they can expect to remain for a long time. The few inhabitants have become, in a sense, prisoners of Rimpoche.

The researchers have been on the planet only a short time, and have yet to explore the Gargoyle or Ur ruins.



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Their primary interest, so far, has been the Second Republic ruins. They live in the bunkers left by the first expedition a millennia ago. Only two buildings have been excavated — the old command center and one of the dormitories. The Engineers focus on the think machines left behind on the planet, hoping to uncover priceless Second Republic technological secrets. Meanwhile, al-Malik and Charioteer archaeologists dig among the ruins for personal electronics.

Lacking clear lines of authority or organization, the operation on Rimpoche is chaotic. Each contingent believes they're in charge: The al-Malik because it is the nobility's rightful position; the Charioteers because they found the planet; and the Engineers because of their superior knowledge. The al-Malik search the ruins haphazardly, racing the Charioteers to find the best tech. The Charioteers and Engineers argue over what should be repaired and how to go about it. Meanwhile, the Engineers resent the constant intrusions by the other two groups.

Although meant to work together towards a common end, instead of sharing information, each group tries to keep some discoveries for itself. Armand al-Malik is more interested in accumulating his own cache of Ur artifacts. Nyne Renton holds back information for the Engineers. And Elena Padrova has her own concerns. So far, their benefactors back home don't know about the lack of cooperation. Who knows what will happen when, for ex-

ample, Armand al-Malik discovers the Engineers know more than he about portable terraformers, and the Charioteers walk off with vital jumprouse information...

## Description

### The System

The system sits at the end of a Night Road from Grail. The sun at the center of Rimpoche's solar system is a small, red star. Rimpoche is the third of five planets. The other bodies in the system — an asteroid belt, small gas giant, medium gas giant and large rockball — remain unexplored, though the asteroid belt and fifth planet possess rich mineral wealth. Otherwise unremarkable, the system would normally be passed over were it not for Rimpoche's archaeological wealth.

### The Planet

Rimpoche is a cold, rocky planet with only a trace atmosphere, most of its oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere being frozen at the polar caps. Beyond the terraforming bubble, the air is thin, requiring rebreathers, Null-Atmosphere survival suits or spacesuits. The landscape is primarily barren, with low hills, boulders and debris, crevices and deep ravines; geologically, the planet is very old. Its days are 21 Urth standard hours long, its year equal to 2.7 Urth years.

Lacking the sophistication and artistry of terraformers like Doramos or Tamerlain, Second Repub-



## A Dangerous Game

Rimpoche lies in a dangerous location, on a jump road from Grail. To get there requires travel either past Rampart or Pyre. Travel through Pyre runs the risk of the Avestites uncovering this Night Road. Travel through Rampart risks discovery by the Li Halan (and thus the Church and other noble houses). Pandemonium, a Decados holding, lies close by; should the Decados learn of Rimpoche, they can easily get to Grail. Grail itself presents problems, as the home to House Keddah, enemies of House al-Malik. Lastly, the Merchant League lacks a direct route to Rimpoche. They must travel from Leagueheim to Aragon, Byzantium Secundus, and Pyre (or by Midian, Apsai and Rampart), providing ample opportunity for discovery by the Imperial Eye, the Inquisition or the Li Halan.

lic explorers relied on a portable terraformer to create a biosphere (see *Things*, below). Like an oasis in the desert, the area surrounding the excavation sight is nearly Urth normal — a pond, a few trees, scrub, and breathable oxygen.

## Second Republic Ruins

During the Second Republic, the corporation that discovered the planet planned a major expedition. They constructed terracite bunkers to house laboratories, storage facilities and living quarters. Simple and functional, these blocky, one-story buildings made no concessions to comfort. The buildings are remarkably intact, though buried under a layer of silt. So far, the current explorers are greatly interested in this area. Here is where the terraforming machinery, vehicles, golems, think machines and weapons await unearthing. Rimpoche is a treasure trove of Second Republic devices.

## The Ur Ruins

Near the Second Republic ruins stand the much older, crumbling ruins of the Anunnaki. The focal point has been the Gargoyle, known as the Colossus of Rimpoche. It is a winged monster with the body of a lion and the head of a beautiful woman (human or Ur-Obun), measuring 21 meters in height and 74 meters in length. The face in particular commands the most attention — it is the enigmatic, graceful face common to Ur ruins. Those who have seen it say she looks as though she has the answers to the great mysteries of the universe.

The Colossus appears to be part of an elaborate complex whose purpose remains a mystery. It stands in a grand courtyard surrounded by four pylons, each covered in impressive murals and mysterious glyphs. The buildings show evidence of destruction — collapsed walls, rubble and craters — as though bombed from orbit. Surround-

ing the courtyard, the ruins radiate outward. No one knows how far they extend, for much remains buried. Like the pylons, the ruins are covered in disturbing murals which, if examined, might reveal some Anunnaki history. The scale of the complex is larger than most human monuments, as if it were built by giants.

## Denizens

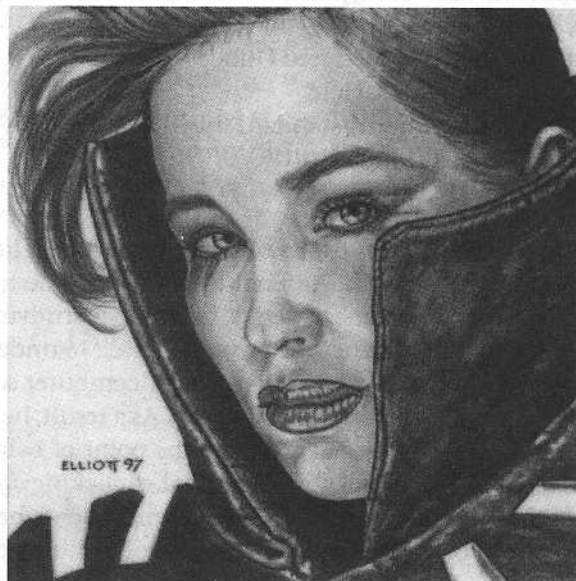
### Elena Padova

Originally born on Byzantium Secundus, the Padova family served House Torensen as serfs for generations. Elena's father served as major domo to their Galatea estate, but was killed in an assassination attempt on Duke Torensen's life by House Cameton. Gregor Padova jumped in front of the bullet meant for his master. In return for this sacrifice, his only child was granted status as a free-man. This earned her the enmity of the Cametons. Elena took the opportunity to see the universe and left noble service.

To escape the Scravers and the Cametons, the newly orphaned Elena joined the Imperial Eye. After a number of minor operations, she was assigned to infiltrate the Charioteers. Offering her services as an agent to the guild, she turned over Imperial Eye information about Janik, a lost Second Republic colony. Padova was accepted into the Charioteer ranks and quickly earned the trust of her superiors and comrades, acquiring a reputation for efficiency, cunning and loyalty.

Her years of operating under deep cover have finally paid off. Mir Aldan and Amil Suk chose her to head up the contingent to the planet. Now, she's uncovered a cache of Second Republic tech, a new Gargoyle and a conspiracy involving Charioteers, Engineers and al-Malik...

Secretly, she accumulates incriminating data for the Imperial Eye, which she stores on a think machine. Padova hopes to carry it personally to Byzantium Secundus when the time is right.





**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Charioteer Manager (Imperial Eye Agent)

**Quote:** "What do you mean you don't know where Renton is? It's your job to know! Find out or I'll have you busted! I'm sorry... now where were we?"

**Description:** Elena is a beautiful, petite woman in her early 30s. She has short brown hair, smoldering brown eyes and an olive complexion. Her smile could melt the heart of a Vau mandarin.

**Roleplaying:** Usually, Elena is outgoing and friendly, playing the role of the happy-go-lucky adventurer. Her years undercover, however, have taken their toll on her, and she's beginning to act oddly. She has become short-tempered, distant and absent-minded. Perhaps she feels conflicting allegiances...

**Entourage:** She keeps her distance from the other Charioteers as much as possible, only meeting them as duty requires. On Rimpoche, Padova is accompanied by four Charioteers trained in archaeology and Tech Redemption.

**Body:** Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 9, Perception 8, Tech 6

**Spirit:** Extrovert 7, Introvert 2, Passion 4, Calm 4, Faith 3, Ego 5, Human 3, Alien 1

**Natural Skills:** Charm 8, Dodge 4, Fight 3, Impress 7, Melee 4, Observe 6, Shoot 4, Sneak 5, Vigor 7

**Learned Skills:** Cryptography 4, Disguise 2, Drive Beastcraft 3, Drive Landcraft 2, Empathy 5, Gambling 2, Knavery 4, Lockpicking 4, Mech Redemption 4, Read Urthish 2, Search 5, Social (Acting) 8, Social (Leadership) 7, Stoic Body 5, Stoic Mind 4, Streetwise 5

**Blessings/Curses:** Beautiful (+2 Charm); Stoic (+2 Calm under pressure)/ Nosy (-2 Calm when seeing something new)

**Benefices/Afflictions:** Rank (5 pts, Imperial Eye Field Agent); Commission (7 pts, Charioteer Manager); Orphan; Vendetta (3 pts, House Cameton).

**Wyrd:** 7

**Equipment:** Mech tools, Journal think machine, Thieves' Keys, Whisper Pin

**Weapons:** Dirk, Med Autofeed Gun

**Martial Arts:** Fist, Kick, Hold

**Armor:** Chameleon suit, standard shield

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

## Nyne Renton

Nyne Renton has led a cloistered, uneventful life. Born on Leagueheim in the Engineer's Precinct, he has spent his entire life in the towers of technology studying one thing: think machines. He devoted himself to understanding the principles and languages of computer science to the exclusion of everything else. As a result, he is seriously deficient in social graces, to the point of being alien; he talks to himself in Turing, makes clicking and whirring noises and ignores people. Sometimes, when Renton feels comfortable, he talks about the Machine God



and man's subservience to technology.

One of the foremost experts on think machines, if anything were to happen to Renton it would be a serious blow to the Supreme Order. Normally, he sits in his own laboratory trying to figure out ancient operating systems and piecing together "positronic brains." Ermin Sobral, however, believes the computers on Rimpoche contain valuable information and sent Renton to the planet to coax them back to life. Master Hereditus remains unaware that his star programmer is off-world.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Engineer (Crafter)

**Quote:** "You cannot comprehend the power of technology, only the Engineers can. That's why we were called. Now get out of my way."

**Description:** Tall and gaunt, with hawklike features and vacant eyes. Nyne cares little about appearances. He often wears the same simple robes for days at a time.

**Roleplaying:** He often seems preoccupied and loses the thread of conversation; he's too busy thinking about computers. When he is paying attention, he is distant and cold. He can often be heard muttering to himself in some obscure computer language.

**Entourage:** Like the others, Nyne was not allowed to travel with his usual retinue. On Rimpoche, he is assisted by two junior Engineers who spend their time redeeming tech.

**Body:** Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Endurance 4

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 9

**Spirit:** Extrovert 2, Introvert 4, Passion 5, Calm 2, Faith 3, Ego 7, Human 1, Alien 6

**Natural Skills:** Charm 3, Dodge 5, Fight 4, Impress 6, Melee 3, Observe 7, Shoot 6, Sneak 3, Vigor 3

**Learned Skills:** Academia 7, Lore (computers) 9, Read Urthtech 4, Comp Redemption 8, High Tech Redemption 8, Science (Physics) 3, Science (Think Machines — Turing 8, Suprema 7, Gates 7), Think Machine 10

**Blessings/Curses:** Homely (-1 Charm); Innovative (+2 Tech when inventing something new)/Clueless (-2 Perception to notice social cues); Uncouth (-2 Extrovert at society functions)

**Benefices/Afflictions:** Cloistered; Commission (9 pts, Crafter)

**Wyrd:** 5

**Equipment:** High-tech tools, Library think machine

**Cybernetics:** Internal Think Machine (+2 Wits, Automatic, Concealed, Organic, Tech Level 8, Expert Tech)

**Weapons:** Lt pistol, palm laser

**Armor:** Assault shield (concealable), synthsilk clothing (2 + 2d)

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

## Baron Armand al-Malik

Born on Istakhr, the Baron Armand al-Malik grew up among the glittering pleasure palaces and wealthy academies there. His parents sent him to the finest boarding schools on the planet, where he had a progressive education. But while other nobles learned fencing, etiquette and music, he studied ancient history. His father insisted on parading him on the social circuit during the holidays, where he learned a little bit about courtly life, but Armand was more the scholarly type, preferring his books to parties.

Although he inherited his father's estate when still a young man, Armand spends little time there. He is fascinated with ancient ruins and archaeology, and spends a great deal of his time off-world. While other al-Malik nobles covet Second Republic tech, Armand is fascinated by the Ur. He reads about them in obscure books, talks with the Ur-Obun and visits as many sites associated with the Anunnaki as he can. Others at court think him a boor.

Because of his curiosity about the Ur, when Armand learned about Rimpoche, he decided to go. Not much of a team player, however, he ventures out into the Ur ruins alone to make his own discoveries, busily assembling a

personal collection of Ur glyph charcoal rubbings and possible soul shards to take back to Istakhr. Armand contributes little to the overall operation. The other al-Malik leave him be and concentrate on the Second Republic ruins. So far, Duke Hakim is unaware that the Charioteers and Engineers have cut Armand out of the loop.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** al-Malik Baron/archaeologist

**Quote:** "As you can see by the glyphs on the right, the Ur were polytheists with a strong inclination towards animal-headed gods. This clearly indicates... [blah, blah, blah]."

**Description:** A short, slightly pudgy man of about forty years. He is bald and has a mustache which he keeps neatly waxed. He wears expensive, though practical clothing, even when digging in the field.

**Roleplaying:** Armand is much more interested in collecting archaeological treasures for himself than sticking with the program. He likes to talk about what he's discovered, sharing whatever half-baked theories he comes up with. Questioning his activities or suggesting he's lax makes him convulsive.

**Entourage:** Like many nobles, Armand is normally accompanied by sycophants and hangers-on. On Rimpoche, however, he is not allowed his usual entourage.

**Body:** Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 9, Tech 5

**Spirit:** Extrovert 4, Introvert 4, Passion 3, Calm 4, Faith 3, Ego 5, Human 4, Alien 6

**Natural skills:** Charm 3, Dodge 4, Fight 4, Impress 7, Melee 6, Observe 8, Shoot 5, Sneak 4, Vigor 5

**Learned skills:** Art (poetry) 5, Art (Ur) 6, Bureaucracy 7, Debate 4, Etiquette 3, Inquiry 6, Lore (Jumproads) 4, Lore (Ur Glyphs) 5, Lore (Xeno) 4, Ride 2, Read (Urthish) 6, Science (Archaeology) 7, Search 4, Speak (Istakhr) 4, Speak (Criticism) 3, Speak Ur-Obun 3, Think Machine 2

**Blessings:** Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new), Suspicious (+2 to Perception when rivals are about), Compass (+2 Wits when figuring out direction or location)

**Curses:** Bluster (-2 Extrovert when recounting deeds), Short (-1 Vitality, base run: 8 meters)

**Benefices:** Baron, Wealthy, Well-Traveled (3 pts)

**Afflictions:** Dark Secret (2 pts; supports Third Republic)

**Wyrd:** 4

**Equipment:** Journal think machine

**Weapons:** Wireblade, autofeed derringer, laser pistol

**Armor:** Standard shield, synthsilk garments (2 + 2d)

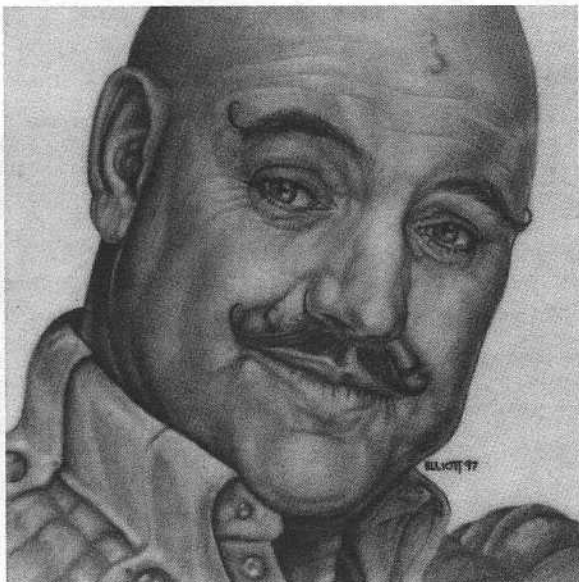
**Vitality:** -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

## Fauna

On its own, Rimpoche could not sustain life; it lacks the plant life necessary to support an atmosphere. Two creatures, however, can be found here, living in the biodome created by the portable terraformer.

## Chitterlings

Named because of the unnerving chittering sound





they make, these rodents are found nowhere else in the Known Worlds. It is believed that they once lived in an underground cave network, drinking what little water they could find. When the terraformers created a livable environment, the chitterlings moved above ground.

**Quote:** "Ugh! Those things give me the creeps."

**Description:** A small, hairless rodent with blind, vestigial eyes and long, sharp fangs.

**Body:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Endurance 2

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 3, Tech 0

**Natural skills:** Dodge 3, Fight 3, Sneak 6

**Weapons:** Painful bite (3 DMG). Individually, these small creatures are not dangerous. They cannot see to fight, guiding themselves instead through use of their keen smell and hearing. However, attacking in a swarm, they can quickly reduce a man to bones.

**Vitality:** -3/-1/0/0

### Escorpia Bugs

Brought here accidentally a millennia ago by the original explorers to this planet, Escorpia bugs originate from Vorox. Over the centuries these insects adapted to the rocky terrain of Rimpoche. They've quickly become a nuisance to excavation. They burrow into the soil and sleep to conserve their energy; how long they can hibernate remains unknown. Typically, an escorpia bug attacks a chitterling and nests inside the carcass, awaiting its next meal.

**Quote:** "Get back! Get back! Don't touch it. AIIII!"

**Description:** Body like a scorpion, with eight legs, but lacking the two pincers and tail. Long, powerful mandibles latch on to its prey, while two long fangs inject poison into the victim.

**Body:** Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Endurance 3

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 5, Tech 0

**Natural skills:** Dodge 6, Fight 5, Sneak 8

**Weapons:** Stinging bite (2 DMG). If damage penetrates armor, fangs inject a neurotoxin causing burning pain. The victim must roll Endurance + Stoic Body or develop a fever. Left untreated, the victim could eventually die. Luckily, an antivenom exists and is relatively easy to acquire (the expedition has a store of it). The danger lies in becoming infected while alone and far from help; this means certain death.

**Armor:** 1

**Vitality:** -3/-1/0

## Things

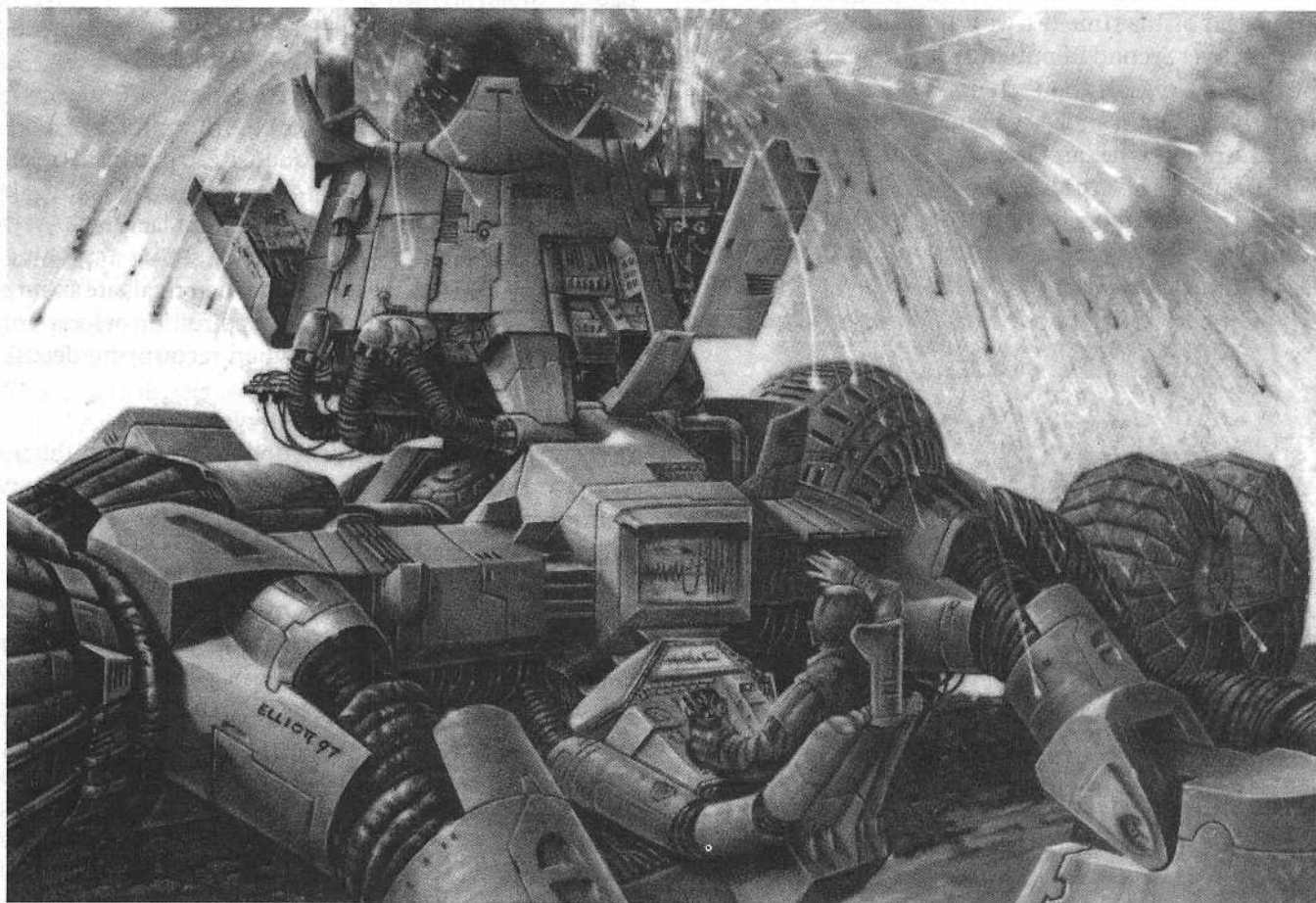
Who knows what technological wonders are hidden on Rimpoche. The devices listed below are simply examples:

### Portable Terraformer

**Tech Level:** 8

**Firebird cost:** Priceless

**Benefice cost:** N/A



By the time mining interests came to Cueball, the stability of the Second Republic was in decline. With the death of masters such as Doramos and William Tamerlain, terraforming saw few new innovations. Most of the successive world architects could not even understand the secret scribbles of the previous masters. With the loss of such genius, altering an entire planet's ecosystem became a risky prospect. Scientists at the end of the Second Republic instead relied on stop-gap measures based on older achievements.

The Portable Terraformer is one example of this bastardization. Originally designed by Doramos, he quickly rejected it as an inferior design. But to those living on the cusp of the Second Republic, Doramos's design was extraordinary. It allowed for the terraforming of small pockets of land, like creating an oasis in a desert. Thus, if a planet could not be altered to suit humanity's needs, an area could be set up immediately surrounding some useful feature, such as a mining operation. Use of the Portable Terraformer became widespread.

Much simpler than terraforming of old, it draws on the principles used by Doramos and his school. The quality of terraforming is inferior — it produces only small bodies of water, a few trees, and breathable atmosphere. The Portable Terraformer is approximately the size of a cargo container and draws power from a variety of sources, the most common being a small fusion generator. A modified, integral planetary shield serves the same purpose as a planet's magnetic field and ozone layer (i.e., holding in atmosphere and shielding harmful radiation). These devices are notoriously quirky, requiring near constant maintenance; failure of a major component might affect water circulation or oxygen levels. Several, in use on various moons, have been allowed to fail and the settlements they protected abandoned.

## The Colossus of Rimpoche

**Category:** Gargoyle

**Tech Level:** 10

**Firebird cost:** NOT FOR SALE!

**Benefice cost:** N/A

Long and sleek, like a lion crouched to pounce, the Colossus of Rimpoche is 74 meters long and 21 meters high. Overall, it combines the head of a human woman, with a lion's body and an eagle's wings, resembling the Sphinx on Urth (said to be an ancient Ur Gargoyle in its own right). Formed out of an unknown white stone not found on Rimpoche, it has an almost frictionless surface. The face seems to stare down on those below with an expression of kindness, wisdom and mystery. Some say she can see into a person's soul. Approaching the Colossus, pilgrims are overcome with a sense of familiarity. Some describe the sensation as eerie, while others find it oddly comforting.

The Anunnaki known as the Gatekeepers purposely left the Colossus of Rimpoche behind for other races to find. The purpose behind the Gargoyle is to advance the

## The Visions

The gamemaster can use the visions granted by the Colossus to advance her own plots. The Colossus might send characters on a quest for another Gargoyle, provide a new solution to an old mystery, or set their feet on the path to greatness. But the Colossus is not a blunt object to force players in the "right direction." The visions are dreamlike, filled with allegory and allusion. Don't tell them "go to Vrill-ya and speak to the one-eyed Vau." Make the players work for it; visions often require interpretation. Whether or not these visions should be taken literally is up to the individual. Some samples:

- You stand on the deck of a Vau ship. Outside, you see a blue-green planet. A Vau mandarin offers you tea and a feather. You take the feather and the Vau smiles.

- You find yourself sitting, meditating, on a high precipice overlooking a wind-swept desert. Before you are items associated with your life. A Hesychast appears and challenges you to throw one off. A raven swoops down and drops a crystal shard.

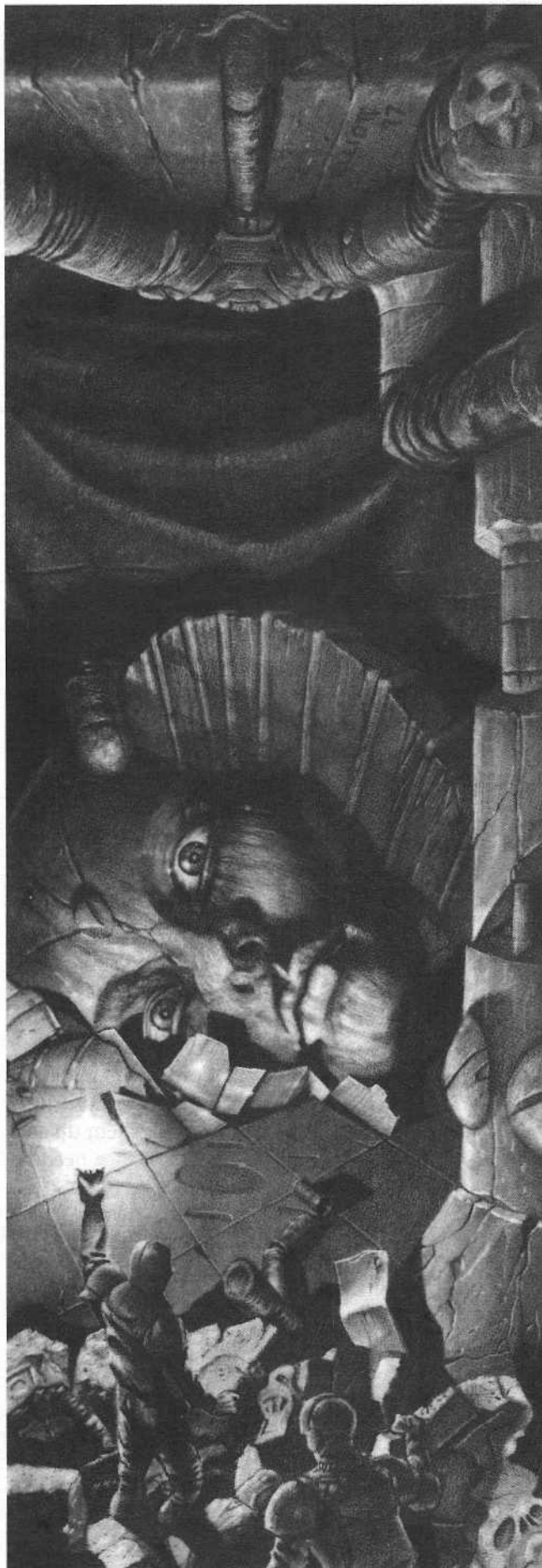
- You are standing on a barge on a vast ocean. An Avestite stands before you, a black bird on his shoulder. The black bird says something disturbing, and you jump into the ocean.

development of sentient life, and the nature of its powers are related to that goal. The Colossus of Rimpoche has a power level of 9, meaning Urge and Hubris effects of 9 or less are negated in its presence. A psychic using Wyrd Sight or Second Sight will see that it sits at the center of a web of energy connecting to distant planets and converging at the Gargoyle's heart. On a critical roll, these lines appear to radiate to the nearest jumpgate and other Ur Gargoyles.

The Gargoyle has the equivalent of the following powers: Subtle Sight, Bonding, Shadows Gone By, Shadows to Come, Oracle, MindSpeech and Sympaticus. These powers are listed so gamemasters can look them up and know what the Colossus is capable of. No dice need be rolled.

The Colossus first reads the target's aura. Then, using a mixture of Shadows to Come, Shadows Gone By and Oracle it communicates its desires through a mystical vision. The visions direct the individual on a quest of personal enlightenment. People see themselves reading Ur glyphs on Nowhere, speaking with a Vau, or listening to the Whistling Caverns on Pyre. The visions leave the person with a feeling of overwhelming joy and oneness with the universe, similar to Sathraist visions. Like Sathraists, those who touch the Colossus want to do so again and again. Each time, however, the vision remains the same and the rapture decreases, until the feeling is gone altogether. After the first visit, the Gargoyle attempts to Bond





with the target. Using Sympaticus, the Colossus knows what the target is up to anywhere in the universe. (In fact, lines of energy radiate out from it to the people to which it has bonded.) The Colossus lacks intelligence as we conceive it, and does not "talk." Questioning it would do no good.

No one knows what will happen if a vision is fulfilled, though presumably the Colossus provides another, more difficult quest. Meant as a McGuffin to radically alter characters, the gamemaster should decide the Gargoyle's long-term effects. By following these mystical visions, the characters might end up understanding a fundamental truth of the universe (who were the Anunnaki? Why are the suns fading?) or become deitylike beings with incredible powers. The adventures the Colossus sends the characters on should be dangerous and outlandish.

## Drama

The themes associated with this lost world are exploration, cloak-and-dagger and a quest for personal enlightenment. Some characters might simply enjoy climbing around ancient ruins, trying to unlock the puzzle of the Anunnaki. Others might like the inherent danger of conspiracy, as they try to either uncover Rimpoche's existence

or claim it for themselves. Finally, some might want to find out what the Anunnaki had in mind when they left the Colossus and follow their vision to its end.

**The Explorers:** The characters are all members of the affiliated factions — Charioteer, Engineer or al-Malik. Each has been sent to Rimpoche as part of the research team. Jobs can range from exploring underground ruins to searching for Second Republic tech. The Ur ruins have yet to be explored. Who knows what someone might find down there — Soul Shards, Philosopher's Stones, or something new and unique. The walls of the ruins are covered in Ur glyphs and murals; deciphering these might lead to sanity blasting revelations about the Anunnaki, Vau or humanity. This kind of drama involves exploration and natural hazards, and should eventually lead back to the Gargoyle.

**Infiltration:** The characters are members of an intelligence gathering group, such as the Imperial Eye or Decados Jakovians. Their goal is to find out what's going on at Rimpoche. They might overhear a secret conversation, or intercept a damning transmission; a ship on its way to the planet might be stopped and searched. Someone is eventually going to uncover the conspiracy. Once they know about the existence of a new jumproad and solar

system, what will the players do with it? Sell it to the highest bidder? Report back to their spymasters? Or travel to Rimpoche themselves...?

**The Accidental Tourist:** The characters find a jumpkey that leads to Rimpoche. Once they arrive, they cannot leave. If they stay, they become part of the conspiracy. And if they escape, they will be hunted down by those factions involved. If the Avestites or Scravers find out they characters have visited the planet, they can expect a visit from them, too.

**Quest for Fire:** The characters interact with the Colossus and have a vision. This can either be individual, or everyone can share the same experience. (The latter would keep the group together.) The impetus to follow the vision is strong, and only by following it can they discover what is at the end of the line. The gamemaster should devise strange, unusual tasks for the group, such as kissing the feet of the Gargoyle on Nowhere, dropping a pebble in a pond on Pyre, or getting Salandra Decados to weep. While on their quest, the characters are followed by agents of the Imperial Eye, Avestites, or Jakovians as well as Charioteers, Engineers and al-Malik.



# Kurga: Valley of the Chervins

by Jackie Cassada

*"Circle those mountains one more time," Manuel de Aragon instructed his pilot as he peered out the Hazat flitter's viewing panel at the landscape below. "Keep an eye on the ground instrumentation and let me know of the slightest fluctuation in readings."*

*The small fusion powered vehicle began a slow arcing path around the designated area.*

*At first, Manuel could see only an endless range of mountains, dotted here and there by tiny valleys. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of something moving below.*

*"Bring her lower," he ordered. "What do the sensors say?"*

*Estevan de Aragon, Manuel's younger brother and the flitter's pilot, glanced at the blank scanner panel. "I've got nothing. It's clear for leagues," he replied.*

*"I know I saw something, just before we banked right. I thought I'd found our chervins," Manuel said. He knew that if he could find the place these beasts were being trained as war-mounts, the Hazat could cut off their sale to the Kurgan raiders at its source. "Are you sure the scanner's working? Check it again, and take us lower."*

*Estevan nodded his agreement and brought the flitter as low as he dared, expertly threading a path just above the tops of the mountains. Manuel kept his eyes trained for a herd of the goat-like animals, but the patch of heavy forest and scrubby underbrush prevented him from seeing anything.*

*"They're gone!" Manuel exclaimed.*

*"If they were ever there at all," Estevan added placidly.*

*"No, they were there. I know I saw something. You're sure nothing showed on the scanner screen?" Manuel asked.*

*Estevan turned toward his brother. "The scanner is working perfectly. Nothing can just disappear. Your eyes deceived you, that's all."*

*Estevan circled the valley twice more before Manuel finally shook his head wearily. Disappointment registered in his voice as he settled back into his seat. "Take us home."*

Beyond the Vera Cruz jumpgate lies a battleground where three factions play out a fractious and tedious game of attrition. The planet called Hira by its conquerors, Kurga by its Hazat invaders and "home" by the natives offers both dangers and opportunities for those who come seeking glory or freedom from loyalty to Empire and Church.

Within the last five years, the Hazat forces based at Fort Omala have observed a curious phenomenon that has them worried. The Kurgans, already experts at small-scale guerrilla operations, have begun to send mounted warriors to harass small groups of Hazat soldiers. The "steeds" are goatlike creatures called chervins, native to one region of the planet and until now classed only as wild herd animals, suitable only for food and milk (under desperate circumstances). The chervins are superb mountain travelers and their sure-footedness allows their riders to maneuver across terrain normally impassable to standard mounts. With this addition to the Kurgan tactical arsenal, the barbarian forces now have the ability to strike and disappear into the remotest wildernesses.

The Hazat leaders would dearly love to discover who is responsible for supplying the Kurgans with these war-beasts and put an end to it. Alternatively, they would settle for acquiring some of these mounts themselves, thus putting them on an equal footing with their foe.

## History

For half a millennium, the Lost World of Kurga has proven a thorn in the side of the civilized peoples of the Known Worlds. The Kurga Caliphate claims this planet, which they call Hira, as their own, although many natives who inhabit it hold a different opinion. House Hazat, whose world of Vera Cruz lies nearest Kurga (via jumpgate), has borne the brunt of the struggle against the Kurgans'



frequent invasions and have launched their own military efforts against this Lost World, seeking to add it to their own holdings.

Despite their efforts, the Hazat incursion into Kurga has won them only the spacedock of Fort Omala and the lands immediately surrounding it. The rest of the vast planet has yet to be penetrated by the forces of the Known Worlds. Even the warriors of the Kurga Caliphate do not know the extent of the planet they claim for their glorious Caliph.

The secluded region known as the Valley of Chervins to a few select inhabitants of Kurga represents only one of the world's many secrets. Its history survives only in the legends of the planet's inhabitants, but its future may lie in the hands of strangers.

Those ancient tales claim that a fortress of unknown origins lies in the mountains to the south of Omala, protected by the forces of nature from any who would trespass. Within that fortress dwell powerful guardians, charged with the defense of the valley and its secrets. The truth of the Valley of Chervins is both more and less than the legend.

During the early centuries of the Diaspora, members of a multicultural scientific expedition discovered and colonized the planet now known as Kurga. Equipped with highly sophisticated and, in some cases, experimental technology, the colonists set about terraforming the surface of the planet to their specifications. For nearly a century, all went well, and numerous settlements spread across the surface of the planet.

One such colony based itself in a small valley south of the expedition's original landing site — near the current location of Fort Omala. Surrounded on all sides by high mountains, this ideal spot afforded the enclave both security and distinct boundaries within which the colonists could conduct their secret experiments in climatic control and protective field generation. They erected a massive fortress above the valley, carving the edifice out of the mountainside and placing their array of instruments in a sterile chamber hollowed out beneath the fortress, in the depths of the mountain. The shields generated by these complex devices provided a physical deterrent to discovery, camouflaging the valley from sightings by air as well as land.

A series of disasters resulted in the early severing of ties between the planet and the rest of Human Space, and the colonists found themselves left to their own devices long before they were ready for self-sufficiency. As a result, the settlements fragmented, becoming isolated from one another and, in some cases, warring on each other in a desperate attempt to secure control of the now irreplaceable (and thus precious) technological equipment scattered about the planet.

Over several centuries, the once highly evolved culture of the planet degenerated. Over the generations, high-tech devices began to break down. The lack of contact

with other planets left the colonists without the means to repair them. Eventually, many colonists were forced to abandon their settlements, banding together for survival in large, nomadic communities.

Competition over the remaining functional technology led to warfare between once cooperative communities. The colonists of the hidden valley attempted to remain aloof from the conflicts that arose all around them, relying on their "chameleon" field to prevent intruders from attempting to seize the valley. Unfortunately, their protections had no effect on the native fauna, and the seasonal migration of the goatlike chervins who entered the valley each spring proved to be the undoing of the colony.

A raiding party, hunting the chervins for meat, followed a small herd of the creatures into the valley and discovered the settlement. The valley's inhabitants were no match for the raiders, who plundered the colony's stores of food and supplies. The survivors of the raid were forced to leave their home, since the raiders also desired to increase the population of their tribe.

For centuries the fortress sat vacant, exposed to the vagaries of wind and weather. Left undiscovered in its underground chamber, the field generation device continued to function, protecting an empty valley. The descendants of the fortress' original inhabitants preserved the knowledge of the valley's location, passing it down from generation to generation in the form of stories, which eventually became legends and, at last, unsubstantiated rumors.

By the time of the first Kurgan invasion, only a few people still retained vague memories of a secret valley. One of these, a clan leader named Coblach Nafar, succeeded in deciphering a cryptic verse he had learned from his grandmother. Following the directions disguised as doggerel, he discovered both the valley and the fortress. There Coblach Nafar and his family made their home, farming the valley during the fertile months and living off their crops during the sparse, dry winters. At first, traffic between the valley's inhabitants and the world outside the hidden enclave consisted of regular trips to native settlements, where the varied and sometimes rare herbs grown in the valley brought good prices in the local marketplaces.

Then the Hazat arrived to make war on the Kurgan "barbarians." Remembering ancient tales of how their ancestral home once fell to invaders, the members of the Nafar family disputed among themselves as to whether or not they should remain in the valley. One branch of the Nafar clan, led by Ashon Nafar, favored complete withdrawal from the invaders' sight.

While the rest of his clan settled in the nearby village of Arada, Ashon and his family remained in the valley, isolating themselves from the growing conflict. Within their occluded valley, the descendants of Ashon Nafar continued to prosper; through careful husbanding of their fields, they were able to ensure enough food to last them during the dry time. Discreet trips outside the valley provided

them with wives and husbands from the native population as well as from their now distant kin, thus protecting them from the dangers of inbreeding.

Eventually, the members of the clan noticed a curious phenomenon which seemed to affect outsiders who married into the family. For some unexplained reason, these individuals demonstrated no desire to set foot outside the confines of the valley. At first, the Nafars attributed this effect to the idyllic nature of life within the mountain enclave. Later, however, experimentation proved that it was physically impossible for anyone not born into the Nafar clan to leave. Gradually, the Nafar family began to believe that their valley was protected by a guardian spirit.

## The Present

Within the last 10 years, a change has come to the valley in the person of Shihab Ubadah, a Kurgan deserter who has joined the Nafar clan. Shihab's unintentional defection from the armies of the Caliphate came about when he was badly wounded in the Battle of Fort Omala. Separated from his fellow soldiers and crazed by pain, he dragged himself into the wilderness, thinking that he would meet his death. Instead, he was discovered by two members of the Nafar clan, who were secretly observing the battle. Taking pity on the injured and now unconscious Kurgan, they strapped him to the back of their pack-chervin and brought him to the valley.

When Shihab awoke, he found himself lying on a pallet in strange surroundings. A young woman with dusky skin and lustrous black hair was tending to him. For many days, Shihab drifted in and out of consciousness, aware of only the pain in his mangled leg and the tender ministrations of his nurse. Finally, his fever abated and Shihab began to make sense of what had happened to him. His initial horrified reaction upon discovering that his benefactors had not been able to save his lower right leg gradually subsided as he realized that he was lucky to have survived his grievous wounds.

Little by little, Shihab's physical and psychic wounds healed, and as he grew stronger, so too did his affection for his nurse, Themah. He began to learn the language of the family who had taken him in and gradually learned what had happened to him after he lost consciousness during the battle, now nearly two months past. Shihab realized that his fellow soldiers probably believed him dead or, worse, a deserter, and that he could not return to the Kurgan army. Moreover, the loss of his right leg, below the knee, would render him unfit for active duty.

In fact, the once devoted warrior of the Caliphate found it difficult to focus his attention on the thought of attempting to return to his former life. The simple life of his hosts and the pastoral beauty of the mountain-wrapped valley worked an eerie sort of enchantment upon him and he embraced a new life as a member of the Nafar family. After a suitable period of courtship, Shihab



declared his intent to marry Themah. Both she and her father accepted the Kurgan's proposal. A year after their marriage, Themah bore Shihab a son, Tarik, followed the next year by a daughter, Hayfa.

It was Shihab, himself an accomplished rider, who saw the potential in the chervins that, every summer, came down from the mountains. While watching Themah and her brothers race their favorite chervins from one end of the valley to the other, Shihab conceived of the idea of training the beasts to respond to the complex commands of war mounts. The mock battles staged between young male chervins also gave him the idea that these creatures might be taught to serve as chargers as well.

Since that time, Shihab has devoted himself to the training of the chervins, both as war-steeds and as attack beasts. Once a year, just before the snows seal off the valley, the sons of Nafar deliver the trained chervins to the marketplace of Arada, a sizable village at the base of the mountains, 75 kilometers south of Fort Omala and inside Kurgan controlled territory. Here the beasts are sold to Kurgan quartermasters, who are quick to realize the advantage the chervins represent. Shihab has never experienced any desire to accompany his brothers-in-law outside the valley; for him, it is enough to serve the Caliphate indirectly. The Valley of Chervins has become his home.

## Description

### The Approach to the Valley

Southward from the spacedock at Omala, the terrain of Kurga grows mountainous, forming an almost continuous range with peaks ranging nearly 2,000 meters or more. Although wide river valleys allow for travel through much of the land, there are a few places where only the narrowest of passes provide minimal access through the mountain peaks. During the winter, these ranges receive as much as 2 meters of snow and standard travel is impossible. Only creatures such as the chervin enjoy any success in maneuvering quickly and safely through the treacherous passes and along the uneven, rocky ground.

### The Valley of Chervins

South of Fort Omala lies a valley nestled in this mountainous region, all but inaccessible except by footpath or astride the hardy chervins native to the region (airships cannot see the valley, thanks to its special protection). A hidden pass leads through the mountains into the valley, where a winding river flows from east to west across the land, disappearing into a crevice on the far side of the valley from which it makes an underground pathway to the sea.

Half the year, the Kawthar River dwindles to a trickle of muddy, barely potable water in a wide cracked riverbed. The land around it shrivels to a near desert broken only by sparse scrub and gnarled, stunted trees. With the melting of the snows from the surrounding mountains,

however, the river floods and becomes a mighty torrent of icy water that overflows its bed. Almost overnight the beleaguered valley transforms into a lush and fertile paradise.

Overlooking the valley, like a silent, crumbling sentinel, a ruined fortress juts out from a rock shelf 300 meters above the valley floor. On either side of the shelf, narrow winding stairs cut into the rockface allow access to the fortress.

During the "wet" months, the chervins who have wintered in the mountains, make their way to the gentler climate of the valley. The valley floor is relatively flat, providing ample pasturage for the chervins. Here, under the watchful eyes of the valley's inhabitants, these hardy beasts graze and breed.

### Flora and Fauna of the Valley

Because of its two distinct "seasons," the Valley of Chervins possesses a considerable diversity of plant and animal life. The Nafar clan has learned over the years to avail themselves of the valley's largesse, making good use of the resources available during both the wet and dry months.

Several types of edible plants, including tubers, berries, ground nuts and wild grain spring up in abundance during the wet season. Reeds and grasses supply material for weaving mats and baskets, while many flowering plants provide colorful dyes for staining the dried reeds and chervin wool. The small trees that grow within the valley produce either sweet nuts, which can be ground into meal or else boiled and eaten whole, and a pitted olivelike fruit which can be pressed for oil, eaten raw or prepared in a variety of ways.

Spice plants and medicinal herbs abound, many of them growing in only one particular spot in the valley, such as along the edge or in shady spots. Mushrooms dot the valley floor after the summer rains and form a substantial part of the Nafar clan's diet.

In the winter, or dry season, the river bed yields up a rich clay used for shaping pots and other vessels. Stones of various types, found in the river bottom, can be collected for shaping into tools and utensils or else crushed for use as cleansing powder or abrasives. Mosses and lichens, many of which are edible, cling to the stunted trees throughout the winter.

The valley also supports many kinds of small animals, including rabbitlike creatures known as hallahs, whose meat imparts a pungent flavor to stews and soups. Avian creatures make their homes in the valley during both seasons and provide another source of meat and, occasionally, eggs. Several species of fish dwell in the river, as well as a few snakes and amphibians.

During the winter, many of the valley's animals migrate to more hospitable climes and other creatures, who have remained dormant during the warm wet months, emerge. Colorful tracha lizards take over the river bottom, making their homes amid the exposed stones. Their meat



adds variety to the sometimes dull winter diet of the Nafar family, while their skins are useful for belts and chervin harnesses.

The forested mountainsides also provide useful resources in the form of sap for syrup or adhesives and deadwood for woodworking. Additionally, the Nafar family sometimes goes hunting in the lower reaches of the forest.

## The Fortress of Nafar

Carved from the mountainside and extending deep within the mountain's heart, the fortress now occupied by the family of Zuberi Nafar seems at first almost indistinguishable from the rockface itself. Closer examination will detect the remnants of spires and cupolas that have succumbed to the weather in the centuries since their construction. A massive stone slab, divided in the middle, forms the entrance to the front of the fortress.

Inside, a small entry-room gives way to a large central chamber, which extends back into the mountain. Elaborately carved stone stairways lead to several smaller upstairs rooms, while a passage at the rear of the central chamber provides access to a number of rooms which serve as larders and storage places for grain and cheeses. Many of the smaller chambers, both upstairs and downstairs, are currently vacant, due to the departure of most of the clan some time ago. A rough-hewn stone stairway leads to a complex maze of rooms (many of them unexplored) beneath the main level of the fortress. The stairway also connects to a passage that exits at the base of the mountain through a stone door that only opens from the inside.

One of the underground chambers houses the still-functional field generators which belonged to the original settlers of the valley. A genetic-lock (which any Nafar can open) is set into the stone wall and controls a hidden door that accesses the equipment room. None of the Nafar family have ever seen a gen-lock nor do they frequent this part of the fortress — claiming that, as it is the “home of the valley's guardian spirit,” bad luck will descend on any who intrude upon the spirit's domain. Shihab might recognize the palm lock for what it is, but his handicap would make it difficult for him to traverse the undressed stone stairs (even if he could be convinced to do so).

Within the crumbling fortress dwells the extended family of Zuberi Nafar, natives of the planet which they call Mirazir. Zuberi and his family hope that one day, when the war between the Hazat and the Kurgans has played itself out, the entire clan will be able to return to the valley.

## Life Within the Fortress

Voluntary isolation from the conflicts of the world outside the valley has its price, and the Nafar clan spends most of its time engaging in some form of work to guarantee their survival and relative comfort. All members of







Zuberi's family have learned a variety of skills, since they have only each other to rely on for most of life's necessities as well as for entertainments and recreation.

## Daily Life

Food gathering and preparation take up the majority of time during the summer months, including drying and preserving berries, herbs, mushrooms and other plants, pressing some of the berries and treefruit for juices, fermented drinks and oils, and gathering and grinding the wild wheat and nuts into flour for bread and meal.

Chores, though not strictly divided according to gender, tend to fall to those members of the family best suited for them. Thus, Themah sees to gathering and preparing herbs and other plants, assisted occasionally by her youngest brother Essien and her nieces and nephews. Noesa and her daughters-in-law tend to the milking of the chervin, while everyone takes a hand in churning the milk into butter or siphoning off the milkfat for cheeses.

Training the chervin in complicated battle maneuvers occupies most of Shihab's time during the summer. His brothers-in-law assist him in this task. In addition, Shihab has taught himself to fashion saddles and harnesses for controlling his chargers.

Everyone in the family collects water from the river during the summer, storing it in large barrels against the winter months. The trickle of water that remains in the river bed during the dry season must be boiled and

strained before it is drinkable, and Zuberi and his family prefer to avoid using it whenever possible.

During the evenings, the Nafar family gathers in the central chamber where they continue to work at various tasks, such as spinning and carding wool, shaping clay pots, woodcarving, sewing and basketweaving. To occupy their minds while their hands are busy, members of the family take turns telling stories. Themah is perhaps the most accomplished raconteur and delights in relating native folk tales as well as Kurgan legends learned from Shihab.

In general, the Nafar follow the practices of most primitive cultures: they rise with the sun and retire for the evening not long after full dark.

## Beliefs and Customs

Due to their separation from the society outside the valley, the Nafar clan practices no formal religion, although they do worship a deity known as the Maker of All, a version of the Pancreator. In addition, they venerate the Spirit of the Valley, which they claim dwells within the heart of the mountain. For lack of a priest, Zuberi and Noesa themselves pronounced words of blessing at the nuptial ceremonies of their children.

Shihab has endeavored to convert his adopted family to Kurgan religious beliefs. So far, he has yet to convince any of them to pray to the Kurgan Caliph. He has managed to institute prayer times at morning, noon and night and frequently relates parables from the Kurgan version

of the Omega Gospels when he takes his turn at storytelling. He is also teaching the Nafar clan to read and write Kurgan as well as speak it, using Kurgan history and stories of the Prophet and the deified Sultan to illustrate his lessons. The Nafar family speak their native Mirazaran language, a dialect of Urthish (only about one word out of five can be understood by Urthish speakers).

Although they have few visitors, the Nafar place a great deal of emphasis on the custom of hospitality. Anyone arriving in the valley and coming upon their fortress would be considered a welcome guest, so long as they did not cause any harm.

Themah's psychic talents are seen by her family as gifts from the Maker of All. Shihab worries about his wife's strange powers, fearing that she will become tainted by them, but so far he has said nothing, preferring to ignore them as much as possible.

The Nafar family holds many customs which may seem odd to Known Worlders. Some of these customs come from their native traditions, while Shihab has introduced a few Kurgan idiosyncrasies as well. (The gamemaster should feel free to elaborate on both native and Kurgan customs in addition to using the ones described below.)

Many practices revolve around preparing and eating food. For example, meat is always thoroughly cooked, and two kinds of meat are never combined. Only the right hand is used for eating food.

Total nudity is frowned upon as immodest, except between couples in private; men and women bathe separately. On the other hand, sexuality is considered a natural bodily function and is often discussed frankly, even in the presence of younger members of the family.

Characters who find themselves trapped in the valley by the effects of the Ambient Field Generator (see below) will have to adapt to the customs and lifestyle of the Nafar family until they discover the source of their entrapment and decipher the codes which will deactivate the neural damper field.

## The Nafar Clan

The family of Zuberi Nafar consists of 20 individuals: Zuberi and his wife Noesa; their four sons, Osei (the oldest and family heir), Manu, Mensah and Essien; their daughter Themah; Osei's wife Abena; Manu's wife Efia; Shihab Ubadah, Themah's husband; and ten children ranging in age from three to 14 years.

Although only Shihab possesses any real weaponry skills, his brothers-in-law are all adept at hand-to-hand fighting and can be deadly with knives. In addition, Zuberi's sons are all skilled archers, an ability which serves them well in bringing down birds and other game animals.



### Zuberi Nafar, Lord of the Valley of Chervins

Zuberi is the patriarch of the branch of the Nafar clan that inhabits the Valley of Chervins. Like his father before him, he has no desire to become seriously embroiled in the Kurga/Hazat conflict, preferring to dwell with his wife, children and grandchildren in the peaceful valley. He is rightly concerned about his son-in-law Shihab's scheme for training and selling chervins, since he fears that this enterprise will only result in an end to his family's idyll. His fears are well-founded.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Chief of the Nafar clan

**Quote:** "Welcome to my humble abode. All who come in peace will find hospitality. Please, your weapons are not necessary here. Leave them in the antechamber and we will keep them safe until your departure."

**Description:** A tall, imposing man in his mid-50s, Zuberi Nafar possesses the dusky skin and straight, wiry black hair common to the local population of the region. Only his pale green eyes hint of a trace of mixed blood (his grandmother was an outlander sold as a slave). He most often wears loose homespun trousers under a brilliantly striped kaftan. His many braids, decorated with clay beads and colored ribbons, attest to his standing as head of the clan.

**Body:** Strength 8, Dexterity 10, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 1

**Spirit:** Extrovert 5, Introvert 3, Passion 4, Calm 3, Faith 4, Ego 4, Human 5, Alien 1

**Natural skills:** Charm 4, Fight 2, Impress 4, Melee 1, Vigor 6

**Learned skills:** Empathy 6, Folklore 5, Regional Lore 7, Read Kurgan 1, Speak Kurgan 2, Speak Mirazaran 3, Survival 5, Tracking 7, Woodworking 5

**Blessings/Curses:** Gracious (+2 Extrovert to guests)  
**Benefices:** Family Ties  
**Wyrd:** 4  
**Equipment:** Home-made woodworking tools  
**Weapons:** Dagger  
**Vitality:** -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

### Shihab Ubadah, Master of the Herds

Born on one of the other worlds of the Kurga Caliphate, Shihab entered the Caliph's army with dreams of achieving honor and glory. He trained as a member of the cavalry and was shipped to Kurga to stop the Hazat incursion. His aspirations crumbled when he fell wounded at the Battle of Fort Omala. His rescue by the Nafar clan resulted in his apparent defection from the Kurgan army, but he seeks to assuage his guilt by continuing to serve the Caliph through providing the Kurgan forces with trained chervin battle-mounts. Despite the loss of his lower right leg, he still possesses the ability to ride, controlling his chervin with knees and reins. Shihab would like nothing better than to bring his new family into the Kurgan fold and, perhaps, redeem himself in the eyes of his Caliph and his countrymen.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Former Kurgan cavalry officer, now herdmaster of the Nafar clan

**Quote:** "In my own way, I still serve the Caliphate. Do not question my loyalty again."

**Description:** Short and stocky, with olive skin and slightly slanted eyes, Shihab wears his long, dark-brown hair in a single loose braid wound with leather thongs. A luxurious mustache and pointed beard frame his mouth and jaw. He has discarded his Kurgan battle armor and clothing for the kaftan and trousers of his adopted clan, although he still wears his army belt (which contains his personal energy shield). He is missing his right leg below the knee and walks with the assistance of a crutch.

**Body:** Strength 8, Dexterity 6, Endurance 8



**Mind:** Wits 6, Perception 8, Tech 3  
**Spirit:** Extrovert 6, Introvert 3, Passion 4, Calm 5, Faith 6, Ego 4, Human 6, Alien 2  
**Natural skills:** Charm 3, Dodge 4, Fight 3, Melee 4, Shoot 3, Vigor 3  
**Learned skills:** Beast Lore 3, Leatherworker 1, Read Kurgan 3, Read Urthish 2, Ride 7, Speak Kurgan 3, Speak Mirazaran 2, Speak Urthish 2  
**Blessings/Curses:** Gracious (+2 Extrovert to guests)/Haughty (-2 Extrovert around serfs)  
**Wyrd:** 5  
**Equipment:** Studded leather armor  
**Weapons:** Rapier  
**Fencing Actions:** Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike  
**Vitality:** -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

### Themah ut Nafar Ubadah-an, Far-seeing Healer

The only daughter of Zuberi and Noesa, Themah has grown up both cherished and overworked. Her mother taught her the necessary womanly skills, while she learned many other activities from her brothers — such as riding and climbing. Her sisters-in-law consider some of her actions unseemly, but Themah ignores their criticism. She has learned herbal medicine from her mother and is an accomplished folk healer, in addition to her considerable psychic gifts which add to her intuition regarding treating injuries and illnesses. Themah struggles to remain calm and serene despite her sensitivity to the feelings and emotions of others. Occasionally, she fails.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Healer of the Nafar clan

**Quote:** "Hold still while I clean your wound. I know the poultice stings a little, but you must be brave. I will help you bear the pain."

**Description:** Slender as the graceful reeds that line the banks of the Kawthar during the height of the summer, Themah seems unaware of her beauty. Her dusky skin, long black hair and dark, sultry eyes need no adornment to enhance their natural allure. She dresses in simple robes and a long veil when performing her duties within the household; when she occasionally rides her favorite chervin, she dons trousers and kaftan like her male kinfolk.

**Body:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Endurance 8

**Mind:** Wits 8, Perception 6, Tech 1

**Spirit:** Extrovert 3, Introvert 6, Passion 3, Calm 5, Faith 5, Ego 5, Human 6, Alien 1

**Natural skills:** Charm 4, Dodge 2, Melee 1, Observe 2, Vigor 4

**Learned skills:** Beast Lore 2, Dance 2, Empathy 4, Folklore 3, Herbalism 7, Pottery 3, Singing 2, Storytelling 3, Read Kurgan 1, Remedy 6, Ride 4, Speak Kurgan 2, Speak Mirazaran 3, Survival 3, Weaving 4,

**Blessings/Curses:** Beautiful (+2 Charm)

**Benefices:** Family Ties

**Occult:** Psi 7





**Powers:** Omen (Shadows Gone By, Shadows to Come), Psyche (Intuit, Emote), Sixth Sense (Sensitivity, Darksense, SubtleSight, Premonition, FarSight, FarSound)

**Wyrd:** 6

**Equipment:** Healing herbs and primitive physick's tools

**Weapons:** Dagger

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

## Chervin

These hardy goatlike mountain beasts dwell in the mountains to the south of Fort Omala. They are easily domesticated (after a fashion) by the natives and make excellent pack animals and mounts. Most chervins are relatively good-natured, but occasionally one will possess an aggressive temperament (one in 20 is a "biter"). Male chervin are also prone to butting, particularly if they are trained to do so on command. In addition to their usefulness as beasts of burden and riding animals, chervin meat is tasty (if a little strong) and they are excellent sources of both milk and cheese. Their coats can also provide a thick wool, ideal for making winter garments or weaving into rugs and blankets.

**Quote:** "Do not turn your back on one of these creatures; if he does not like you, you will become the butt of a very painful encounter."

**Description:** Somewhat larger than goats (about the size of small horses), these creatures possess cloven hooves that enable them to navigate the tricky mountainous terrain. Males of the species sport a pair of horns on their forehead.

**Body:** Strength 11, Dexterity 13, Endurance 10

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 2

**Natural skills:** Fight 3, Vigor 9

**Weapons:** Horns. When sharpened, these natural weapons cause 3 DMG from goring. If tipped with metal caps, they cause 4 DMG. Roll Dexterity + Fight.

**Armor:** Leather hide

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

# Ambient Field Generator

**Tech Level:** 8

**Firebird Cost:** N/A

**Benefice Cost:** N/A

Based on information gleaned from an Ur artifact discovered by the early settlers of Kurga, this artifact dates from the early Diaspora, before the rise of the Second Republic. It consists of a large cube made of a dull greenish-gray metal (composition unknown). A number of touch-sensitive control panels are set into the front of the cube where they surround an opaque display panel. At regular intervals, a string of numbers will scroll across the display. A low hum comes from the generator. The Ambient Field Generator is responsible for the strange effects which have kept the Valley of Chervins from detection by both Kurgan and Hazat invaders.

The device's chameleon field creates a powerful distortion of organic and inorganic sensors. It does not actually change the landscape, but it sends misleading signals to the optic nerves of most intelligent creatures. In the same fashion, it confuses even the most sophisticated sensor technology. Hazat flitters have occasionally flown directly over the valley without realizing that anything of interest lay below them.

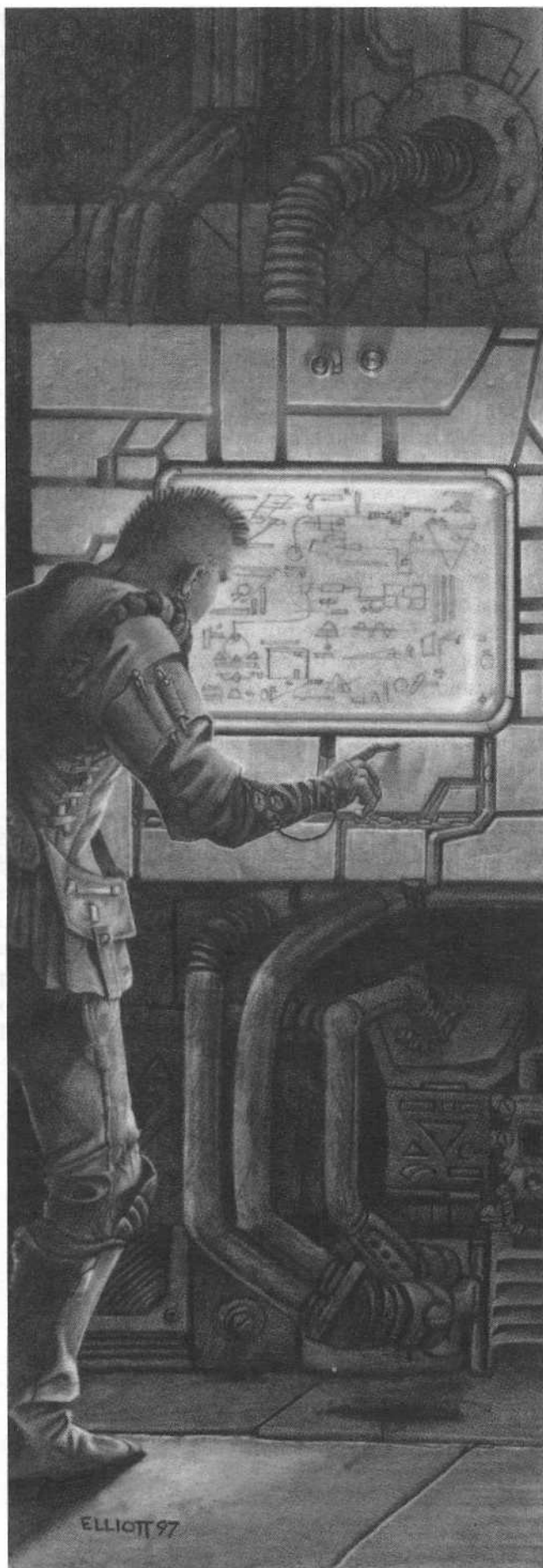
The climatic control field once regulated the weather patterns of the valley. It no longer functions.

The most problematic effect of the generator comes from its neural stimulation field. Still in its experimental stages when the valley's original colony was destroyed, it has deviated from its initial purpose — the enhancement of the memory and logic capabilities vital to scientific research. The genetic codes and neural patterns of the valley's first settlers were encrypted into its programming in order to allow the field to recognize and stimulate the brains of the individuals engaged in research.

Originally, the control panels regulated the strength and effects of the various force fields created by the generator. Over the centuries, however, lack of maintenance has caused the calibration sensors to behave erratically. Only the chameleon field still operates at peak efficiency.

Unfortunately for outsiders, the neural stimulation field now acts as a neural damper, redirecting and misleading the minds of anyone whose patterns are not stored in its memory banks. Because the Nafar family is descended from some of the valley's original settlers, they are immune to the effects of both chameleon and neural fields. Psychic powers are likewise affected by the neural field. The effects of this field fluctuate wildly; thus it is possible that characters trapped in the valley may occasionally remember their original purpose in coming there.





## Drama

The following story hooks may serve to introduce a group of characters to the Nafar family and the Valley of Chervins. The real "adventure" will ensue once the characters find themselves trapped in the valley. This is obviously not a place for hack-and-slash adventures, but it can provide a forced retreat from the world, letting characters slow down for a while and come to understand the rhythms of life among a pastoral people. It's a good place to introduce emotional dramas: Perhaps a character falls in love with one of the Nafars and wishes to stay in the valley, even after discovering the nature of the field generator — until the world intrudes again, and his rivals, enemies or duties draw him back into the conflict-ridden Known Worlds.

- **Discovery:** The secret of the valley's existence is not as well kept as the Nafars might like. A rumormonger in Fort Omala leaks information to the party of a hidden valley to the south, high in the mountains, which contains an ancient fortress filled with rare and valuable technological devices. His only real advice to interested parties is to "follow the chervins when the snows melt. They will lead you to the valley."

- **Stranded:** The characters' make a forced landing in the mountains south of Fort Omala. While attempting to find their way to some semblance of civilization, they catch sight of a small herd of chervins on their way to their summer quarters. If the characters follow the beasts (perhaps hoping to kill one of them for food), they will stumble upon the hidden valley. How they deal with their discovery may determine the future of the Nafar clan.

- **Pursuit and Refuge:** The characters (either Hazat troops, Kurgan warriors or Muster mercenaries) find themselves outnumbered and harried by their enemies. Driven into the wilderness, they stumble across the entry to the Valley of Chervins. Will they take advantage of this potential refuge and the hospitality of the Nafar family? Or will they bring the valley into the war by using the fortress as a base of operations?

- **The Hazat Search:** Members of the Hazat army approach the characters, requesting their assistance in discovering who is supplying the Kurgan infidels with trained war-chervins. They have information which indicates that someone in the village of Arada is responsible. If the characters are mercenaries or are on Kurga for their own reasons, the Hazat will offer to reward their success; if, however, any characters belong to House Hazat, the "request" will actually become an order.

## Solving the Mystery of the Valley

Extricating themselves from the Valley of Chervins will require some tricky maneuvers on the part of characters trapped by the chameleon and neural fields and should provide a departure from combat-intensive or intrigue-laden adventures. Interaction with the Nafar family will provide the characters with some clues that may eventually lead to their discovery of the underground portion of the fortress. Themah's stories should include references to the guardian spirit who lives inside the mountain as well as hints about the family's ancient origins. (The gamemaster should adapt the information given in the history section as necessary.) Exploration of the fortress is possible once the characters have an idea that there is something to be found. Taking advantage of the lucid periods to write down their discoveries will help characters keep their minds on their objective: to leave the valley.

Once they have discovered the room which contains the Ambient Field Generator, the characters will have to figure out how to disable the force fields that hold them captive. Deciphering the mechanisms that keep the force fields engaged requires 18 victory points on a sustained Tech + High Tech Redemption roll. (The gamemaster may substitute some other appropriate roll if no one in the party possesses the High Tech Redemption Skill. The object of the scenario is to enable the characters to eventually find their way out of the valley, not trap them there forever.)

Actually disabling the generator requires a simple flick of a switch. Unfortunately, once it is powered down, the Ambient Field Generator cannot not be reactivated, and the valley's protections will disappear, leaving it — and the Nafar family — vulnerable to detection.

Characters who wish to leave without destroying the Nafar clan's defenses may discover that the family is immune to the effects and ask their assistance in leaving the valley. Such characters will have to convince the family that their promises not to reveal what they have learned can be trusted. Any character tied to the Hazat may find this a thorny dilemma — how can he protect this peaceful family, yet gain chervins for his own cause or cut off their supply to the Kurgans? Dealing with the repercussions of their actions will add another dimension to the story.

At the gamemaster's option, it is possible for the char-

## Lost in the Fog: Advice to the Gamemaster

The Ambient Field Generator's effects come into play automatically as soon as the characters enter the valley. No roll is required nor is any Psi defense successful against it. Most characters will not even notice that anything has happened to them when they first discover the valley, although psychics and theurges may experience a slight tingling sensation or detect a brief shimmer in the air around them.

The neural damper makes it impossible for characters to leave the valley. If they attempt to do so, the gamemaster should allow them to begin their journey and, after describing their first steps away from the valley's perimeter, inform them that they find themselves back at their point of origin with no memories of the intervening time. In the same fashion, any character who attempts to focus on her original purpose in coming to the valley (discovering the supplier of trained chervins, pursuing a rumor concerning a lost artifact, etc.) will find her attention distracted by some trivial event or phenomenon and will be unable to remember what had seemed so important to her before she spotted the bird in flight or noticed the nest of baby hallahs in the bushes.

Fluctuations in the various fields will, however, allow characters occasional chances to realize that "something" is happening to them. The gamemaster should simply describe these lucid periods as they occur and not require rolls for a character to gain brief insights which will allow them to begin their search for the source of their mental confusion.

acters to add their own DNA data to the generator's computer, making them, like the Nafars, immune to the adverse affects. However, this would require at least 9 victory points on a sustained Wits + Science (Genetics) roll — in addition to the 9 victory points required on a successive Tech + Think Machine roll just to enter the data. Once such a task has been achieved, the characters can come and go from the valley as they like. Will they betray the Nafars? Smart characters will realize the opportunity to create a safe haven for themselves in the valley, a place they can always hide in case of trouble and a place of companionship with friends (or family?) among the Nafars.



# Bannockburn: Symbiot Isle

by Nicky Rea

Megaria checked her weapons, making certain she could quickly reach any of them at need, then signaled for Durok, her first mate, to cast off from shore.

Durok rowed steadily, eyes searching the mist-shrouded shore of the rocky isle that rose from the center of the mountain lake. Somewhere on that isle lay an old fortress with a cache of Second Republic artifacts. He had not fully trusted the low-life who had sold Megaria the map she now scanned so intently. He hadn't sensed that the map was phony, however, merely that its seller probably wasn't the true owner. Just as well, he thought, otherwise we'd have had a much harder time bargaining the price down. Of course, few people cared to test the wrath of the Muster, either, and this island technically belonged to them.

Slipping between drifting pockets of mist, they neared the island. Durok felt a strange dread settle over him as they neared the rocky shore. Like a warning prickle at the back of his neck, the uneasy feeling made him jumpy. He scanned the misty waters for any sign of trouble, but his eyes returned again and again to the vague outline of a towering ruin in the center of the isle. He could barely make it out through the fog which wreathed it, but he somehow knew this was the cause of his disquiet.

"There," Megaria pointed and laid aside the map, "there's a break in the rocks. We land there." Durok obligingly turned their small craft toward the spot where strangely twisted creepers overlaid part of the rocky shore, reaching green tendrils down into the water. The boat slid among them and scraped gently to a stop. Megaria stepped ashore, turning to catch the rope Durok threw her to tie off the boat. As he too stepped ashore, the creepers writhed once, then snapped upward to entangle their legs. Megaria dropped the rope and reached for her flux sword. Freed from her control, the boat drifted off into the mist.

Durok screamed as acidic spittle burned into his eyes, sprayed upward from the slimed horror now taking shape before him, rising from the too-green tendrils and assuming a manlike form.

"Symbiots!" He screamed. "Meg, run!"

He tried to thrust backward toward the water and escape, but found himself moving so slowly, he knew he'd never make it. Risking a glance at Megaria, he saw that she stood frozen, flux sword held uselessly at her side, unable to respond at all. Meeting the monstrous gaze of the malevolent creature before him he waited for slashing, rending death. Then, almost unmanned by horror, he heard it speak a single word — "Welcome!"

\*\*\*

The small boat drifted to shore, oars and map inside it. A curious, monkeylike creature hopped in and reached for the drawing, which he studied intently for a moment. Tucking the map under his arm, the Gannok headed for a Muster ship he knew. Stowing himself and his prize away, he dreamed of the jokes he could now pull with his new toy.

## Introduction

A small advance group of Symbiots have managed to break through the Stigmata Garrison blockade and land on Bannockburn. Here, they have settled in an abandoned ruin that once served as a supply depot during the Second Republic. Located on an island in a lake, the isolated spot serves as a perfect site to plant Symbiot seeds and begin the conversion of the local flora and fauna. Once the island is fully under their control, the Symbiots plan to gradually spread out, seeding the planet and eventually infesting members of the Muster. The Muster goes everywhere. With the people and resources of the Muster under their dominion, the Symbiots could threaten the Known Worlds before most people become aware that such a threat even existed.

A Symbiot mastermind named Xandra (smarter and more powerful than the shock troops under her com-



mand) controls the operation, keeping the others from marauding throughout the countryside and giving away their presence. She hopes that quiet infiltration can succeed where outright battle cannot. Thus far, few intruders have stumbled across the secret base; those who have are either dead or have converted to a more Symbiotic point of view.

The characters have undoubtedly heard horror stories of the Symbiots and should be either frantic to get off the island or all too willing to wipe out this threat to humanity. This may be far easier if they have psychics or theurgists among them, or the strange emanations from the Ur obelisk that dominates the center of the island may occupy such characters' attention, making them less effective in battle.

Destroying the Symbiots to save Chainers has a certain irony that can be played up and enhanced by having the characters narrowly escape (or fall prey to) enslavement by the Muster sometime before they encounter the Symbiots. League characters, on the other hand, have every reason to prevent their Muster brethren from becoming infested and spreading Symbiot possession throughout the Worlds.

## History

Long before humans discovered the jumpgates and spread outward among the stars, the Anunnaki traveled throughout the planets of the Known Worlds. On the planet that would eventually be dubbed Bannockburn, the Ur built many monolithic structures — for what purpose, none now know. One such monolith, a towering structure with oddly formed angles and a central carved stone door, was erected on a rocky promontory which jutted out over more low-lying lands in a mountain valley. During the Second Republic, scientists theorized (based on observations at the site) that this particular structure was built as a psi amplifier.

With the disappearance of the Anunnaki, the monolith (like many others of its kind) became home to a tribe of Gannok, the small, monkeylike creatures native to Bannockburn. Their clever fingers and prehensile tails sought out the strange carvings etched into the monolith, providing them with handholds and allowing them to scramble around and atop it. Many Gannok claimed one angle or another as a home, but none could manage to open the central door.

Over time, the land altered shape and a nearby mountain stream that fed through the valley found its progress partially blocked as rock and earth tumbled together and narrowed the stream's exit from the vale. Eventually, a half-moon shaped lake formed in the lower area beneath the promontory. When earthquakes tore loose the end of the rocky neck, waters swirled in and filled up the area, turning it into a full, deep lake with a central island. The Gannok inhabitants, realizing they'd be stranded, deserted their monolith homes and moved elsewhere. Despite con-

stant probing and fiddling with the carvings, the curious Gannok never succeeded in finding an opening into the structure.

Humans arrived on Bannockburn. They eventually discovered the enigmatic tower and catalogued it as an Ur construction. While humans also proved unequal to the task of opening the monolith, they did recognize its potential value. If the carvings upon it could be deciphered, vital clues to the Anunnaki's nature and purposes might be revealed. Further, humans might gain insight into some of the secrets of the Ur's superior technology.

Originally, the Second Republic scientists studying Ur artifacts set up a small encampment at the base of the monolith. They named their small camp "MacAnee" in honor of the chief scientist involved with the project. Gradually, as they began to make a tiny amount of progress in their deciphering of the carved symbols, more permanent structures were built, their camp became a village and the lake acquired a name — Loch Anee.

The monolith's effect on humans with psychic potential proved another area of great interest to Second Republic scientists. Whenever psychics came near the structure, they invariably felt uneasy. Though it seemed to enhance their potential, the tower created a sense of dread and menace to those with psychic talent. Eventually, those who were exposed too long lost all inhibitions, reacting with towering rage to the slightest irritation or breaking down in crying jags over the merest obstacle. Such people were removed from the area once its effect on them was known. Many, however, never recovered their equilibrium.

Conflicts with their neighbors, who desired whatever treasures might lie inside the monolith, led to the building of a fort designed to safeguard the Ur structure and those studying it. A stone fortress was hastily constructed, with the monolith incorporated as the central tower of the fortification that was erected around it. Fresh water was available from the lake, as well as fish and game birds. A small garden was planted and an underground cache created to hold food, needed supplies and weaponry.

Then came the Fall.

Though the area was too remote to make a good trade center, it was briefly used as a hunting lodge and a summer home by a family of minor nobles. Those members of the family who possessed psychic awareness either stayed away or fell prey to the monolith's power. One young man, driven to frenzy by the Ur structure, slaughtered most of his family as they lay asleep, essentially killing off his family line.

MacAnee Fortress gained a reputation for being haunted; no one wanted it, though rumors circulated concerning the treasures that might be found within. Several maps (few of them genuine) to the place were drawn and sold in markets and bazaars on a dozen different worlds. Many people believed these maps to be frauds and never bothered to investigate. The few who believed there might

be something worthwhile rarely had the funds or leisure to mount an expedition to Bannockburn. Besides, the planet was very close to Symbiot space.

Pirates, unafraid of what they couldn't see, moved in and used the structure as a base for a number of years. Though they too sought some way to open the monolith, they were unsuccessful. Chased out when the Muster claimed the planet as their headquarters, the pirates vacated the structure and it remained abandoned for decades. Earth tremors in the area crumbled much of the fortress, making it all but uninhabitable.

The Muster briefly looked over the fortress, noting its presence and decayed condition. No one bothered going inside the tumbled ruin and the structure was promptly forgotten. In a hidden underground room the supply cache still waits for anyone who understands the code used to conceal and lock the door.

Xandra arrived, parading as a slave on a Muster vessel ferrying supplies to Stigmata and nearby planets. Once on the planet, she felt the emanations from the nearby Ur monolith and made her way to the isle. Finding it perfect for her needs, she released her Symbiot shock troops from their seeds — sprouting them whole in a day. They dug out as much of the fortress as they could and made it into their headquarters for the takeover of Bannockburn. Xandra has been converting the local flora into Vral Creepers — non-intelligent but aggressive plants that en-wrap the unwary upon mental command from her. More

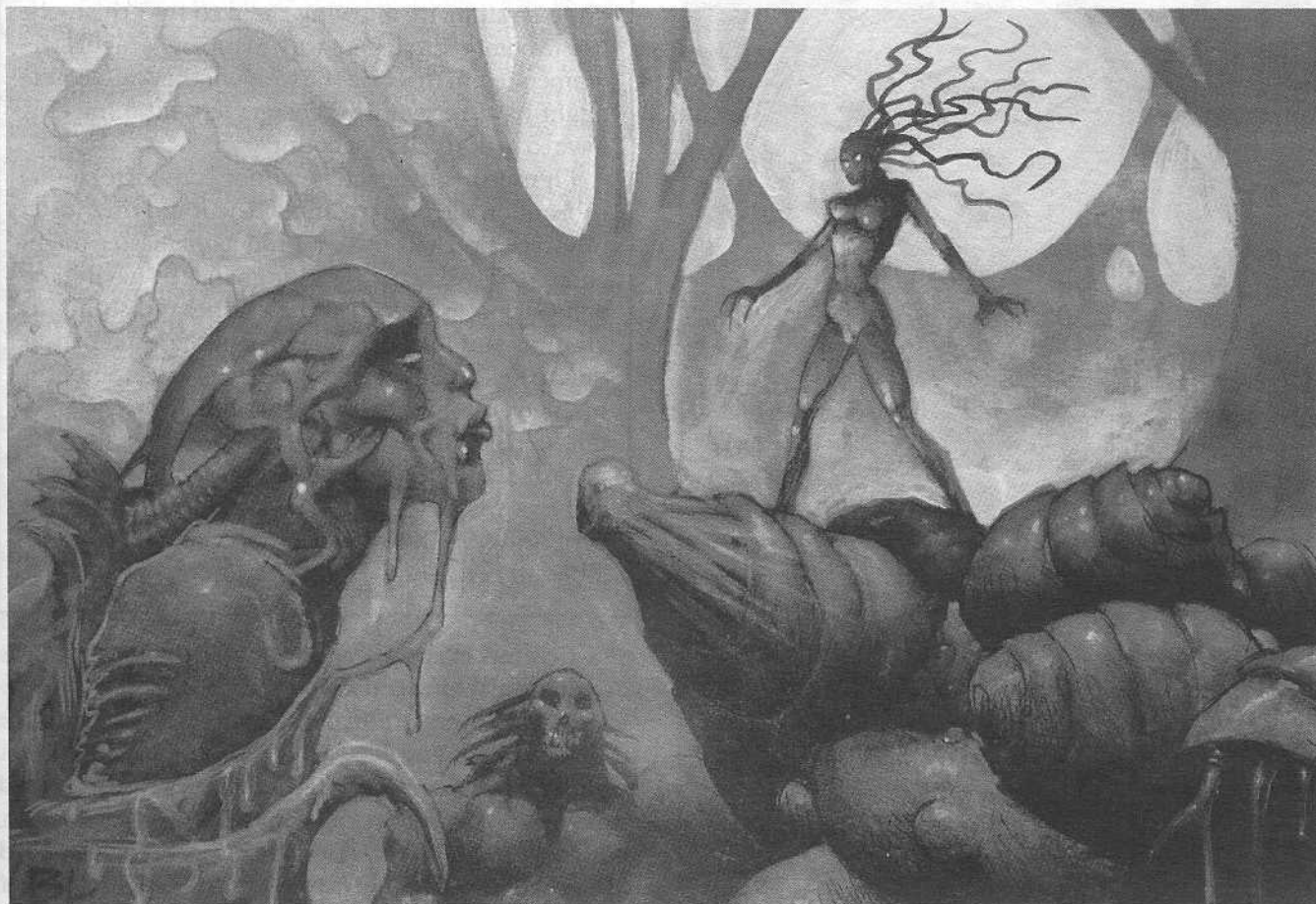
frightening, she has also changed some of the larger fish in Loch Anee into Ichthiotes (predators under Symbiot control), ensuring herself of water guardians.

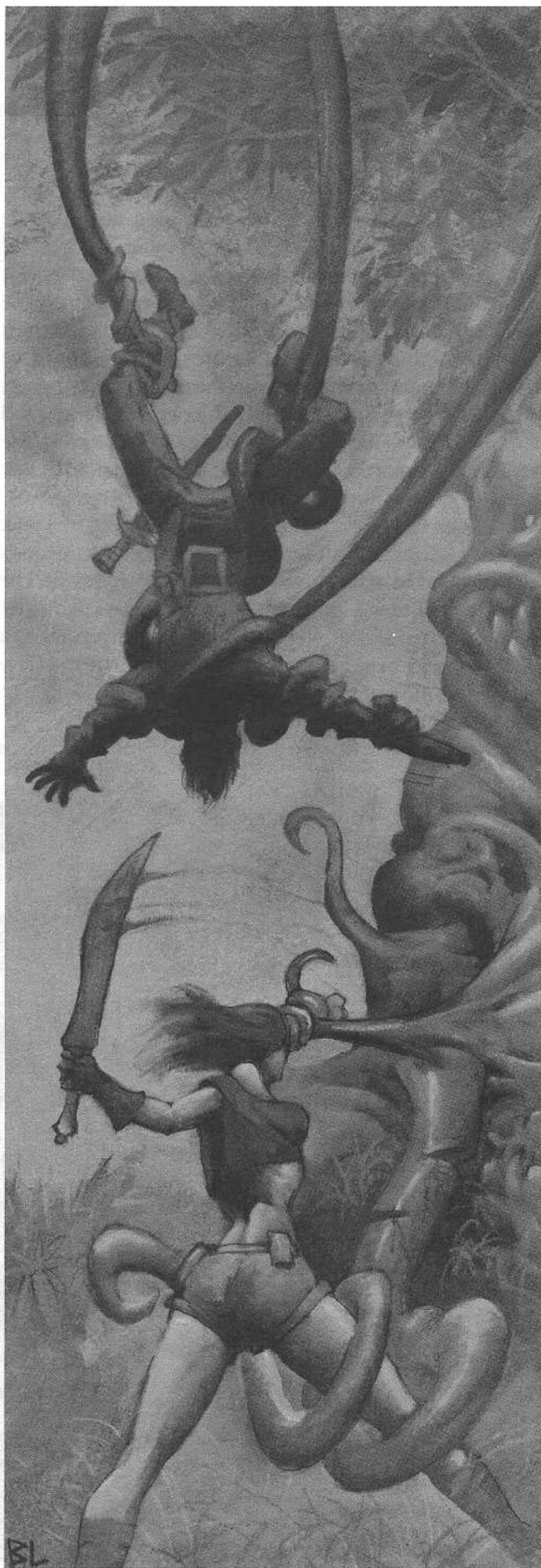
## The Island

Bannockburn's northern temperate forests consist of dozens of types of hardwoods interspersed with great expanses of evergreens. Covering a large part of the continent known as Caerleigh, these vast woodlands grow over valleys and several mountain ranges, including the great gray Baulyrrie chain that forms a semi-circle from the northwest through the middle continent and then northeast. Many rivers and streams have their source among the peaks of the great mountains, with clear pools and tarns interspersed along their length. Imported and native animals flourish in these highlands, sharing the area with the monkeylike Gannok, who often make their homes among Anunnaki ruins that dot the terrain.

Though Bannockburn was subjected to some amount of terraforming, much of the planet proved enough like Urth that only minor changes were made. The area which is now a mountain lake known as Loch Anee received no terraforming at all. While some Urth plant and animal species have gradually intermixed with local flora and fauna, most of the vegetation and creatures found in the highlands are native to the planet.

Symbiot Isle is known as MacAnee Island on all maps





## Notes on Encounters

The descriptions given below do not include any references to the denizens to be found on the island. Xandra is having serious doubts about her role in spreading Symbiot infestation. While she believes in her mission to protect the Lifeweb, she is disgusted by the mindlessness evinced by her shock troops. Badly in need of real companionship, she tried possessing Megaria and Durok, but they have proved as incapable of original thought as her other troops. Now she wonders if forced conversion is actually a good thing. Because she needs reassurance that she's doing the right thing and since she craves companionship, she has ordered her troops to hide in the trees and foliage outside the fortress so she will have time to interact with the characters in her human form first. The Symbiots feel more comfortable among the greenery than within the ruined chambers of the fortress anyway, though they are drawn to the monolith.

Gamemasters are encouraged to place the troops wherever they will be most effective when they do attack. Vral Creepers can always be called into play if the characters are having too easy a time, and the Ichthiotes should keep characters effectively penned on the island once any raft, boat or flitter they have is sabotaged.

If the characters arrive on the island with little or no equipment, allowing them to find the cache before bombarding them with Symbiots is highly recommended. In that case, the weapons they can acquire might have very limited charges left, meaning they have to make each shot count.

If captured characters cannot convince Xandra to abandon her plans to "infest" them and the Muster or escape on their own, a kind gamemaster might choose to give them a fighting chance by having several Gannok sneak into their tribe's old stomping grounds and use their clever hands and prehensile tails to help the characters free themselves. Since the monkeyguys love pranks, what better joke than to outwit the Symbiots?

An interesting sidenote: Gannoks are immune to Symbiot possession and takeover, though no one — even Xandra — knows why. Even Gannoks don't realize this and the other races have yet to notice it.

and accounts of the place. It is a rocky island only a little over two miles long and a mile wide, once part of an overhang, but now surrounded by the blue waters of the lake that rose around it. The island hosts a number of trees, shrubs, creepers, grasses and reeds. Some few vegetables and tubers can be found in the area that was once a garden, but they are now wild, mostly taken over by weeds and native growth. This greenery covers only a thin layer of



soil which in turn tops the granite-hard rock that forms the core of the island. Rocky shore rises up from the lake, with breaks in only two places that allow watercraft to land easily (these are also the only convenient points for a flitter or shuttle to land — anything larger than a Runt will find no clear spot on the island). The island slopes gradually upward toward the center for only a few paces before leveling off. A serious flood would inundate the ruins of the old fortress, but leave the monolith standing needlelike, poised in the center of the lake.

## MacAnee Fortress

(Refer to the Gamemaster Map on p.57)

Placed almost in the center of the isle lies the fortress and its central tower, the crazily shaped Anunnaki structure. All that is left of the fortress itself are a few rooms (some partly collapsed), a stairway that leads below ground to an odd bricklike wall, and the monolith itself.

**Area A:** The main entryway into the fortress rooms is through an old laboratory. Not much remains within except for the shelving, which was used by the pirates to hold booty. Searching among debris that has blown into one corner reveals a long knife-shaped wooden shard. At need, it can be used like a dagger, though impacting with any armor more sturdy than leather will break it. A doorway (the door has long since vanished) leads into the next room (Area B).

**Area B:** This area was once the sleeping quarters of one of the scientists. It was used by the noble's wife as a solarium and later claimed by the pirate captain as his private quarters. Under a partially collapsed ceiling are the remains of a bed. The synthlinens on it have withstood the test of time. An archway, partially blocked by a large stone, leads into a central courtyard.

**Area C:** A rounded, squat empty tower, this portion of the fortress was once a guard tower of sorts. Leading downward from the room is a staircase that descends beneath the ground for twenty-two feet. Carved into granite, the stairs end in a tiny cell only ten feet wide by eight feet long. Around all sides of the cell are walls made of stone blocks that resemble bricks. The blocks are of several different colors — pale green, tan, yellow, salmon, blue and wine red. Each block has a runelike symbol carved into it. (See the *Opening the Door* sidebar.)

**Area D:** Apparently a food preparation area at one time, this room contains a stone table under which is a pile of debris from which something shiny protrudes (a fork, if anyone investigates), a long-unused sink, and several shelves that hold broken pottery and utensils. An archway leads into the central courtyard. Carved into the underside of the table is the code to open the door to the cache. (See the *Opening the Door* sidebar for the correct code.)

**The Cache:** Opening off from the underground cell, this surprisingly cold storage room once held foodstuffs, water, supplies and weapons. A few usable items remain

## Opening the Door

Pressing the stones (in the correct order) whose symbols correspond to the locking code originally used by the Second Republic technicians opens the concealed door. When the blocks are pressed in the correct order, they briefly glow (allowing clever players to work out the solution even without access to a map). Those runes appear in order on the Players' Map, allowing the characters to unlock the door (which slides up) and enter the cache. If the characters have no map, they can discover the code scratched into the underside of a table in area D, where no one else ever bothered to look. The correct order of the runes is circle (tan), triangle (wine), oblong (green), square (yellow), wave form (salmon), hand (blue) and circle (tan) again.

on the otherwise bare shelves (see *Equipment*, below).

**The Monolith:** While surrounded by the fortress, the monolith was never actually made a part of it, instead occupying a central courtyard. What is left of the rooms form a semicircle around the tower, but don't actually connect with it. Two archways provide easy access to the monolith.

The monolith itself is a six-sided tower with many odd angles. Some of the angles form ledges and cavelike openings, where the remains of Gannok habitation can still be found. Though seemingly constructed of an opaque substance, the strange angles give the tower an effect similar to a prism, sometimes reflecting rainbow colors onto the ground below. Some people have compared the shapes to faceting on a gemstone, but it would have to be a jewel with weird symbols and runes etched into all its surfaces.

The area that appears to be a single stone door is not in fact, any such thing. It once functioned as a communications view screen (though characters have no way to discover that). There is no door into the monolith. While it is hollow inside (as has been detected, which is why people keep trying to open the thing), it was never meant to be opened. Making it hollow simply made it less weighty.

## Denizens of the Isle

Any of the following may be found on (or near) the island. If there are fewer players or they are working without adequate weapons and armor, reduce the number of foes they must face.

### Xandra, Symbiot Mastermind/ Breeder

Xandra is a Breeder Symbiot, capable of planting Symbiot spores in others. Once a highly religious minor noblewoman, she was converted into a Symbiot when that shapeshifting race overran her home planet of Daishan.



## Monolith Notes

The monolith makes psychic characters nervous unless they have an affinity for the Lifeweb — one of the reasons the Symbiots were attracted to it. It seems like a natural well of Lifeweb energy to them. Over the years, the attempts to enter the structure have weakened it somewhat, making the emanations from it stronger, but less stable, than they once were.

After an hour near the monolith, psychics and theurgists gain two points of Psi and Theurgy respectively (without any corresponding loss of Urge or Hubris). In fact, each hour after the first, such characters gain an additional point of Urge or Hubris unless they make a Calm + Stoic Mind roll. Once this begins, whenever the character uses any psychic power or theurgy rite, despite the results actually attained, it is treated as if she fumbled the roll.

Though the power or rite takes effect normally, the psychic's Dark Twin awakens and begins performing its demented actions, while the theurgist must contend with whatever level of Hubris she has incurred. Wyrd points spent when near the structure are instantly replenished, which may cause some power hungry characters to want to remain in the vicinity. Once away from the monolith, these extra levels of power, Urge and Hubris are lost again — unless the character insists on remaining in the area for a month or more, which makes them permanent.

Fused with an alien plant species from Chernobog, she accepted the transformation rather than dying. To her surprise, she retained her mental faculties. Once converted, Xandra also expected to lose much of her religious indoctrination as well. That hasn't happened.

Still somewhat suspicious of technology that is too sophisticated and still retaining much of her moral outlook on the sanctity of life, she has a great need for someone to talk with. She feels her connection to the Lifeweb (especially when she is near the monolith), though she is not certain what effect her actions have on it as yet. Because of her confusion, she questions both the morality and the necessity of her orders to forcibly convert other humans. She is doing as ordered, but truly persuasive arguments from characters about the immorality and injustice of forced conversion and possession could sway her to their point of view — provided they cause no harm to the Lifeweb (wantonly hacking down plants or slaying animals for the fun of it).

Xandra had hoped that converting Megaria and Durok would provide her with intelligent peers with whom she could debate and express her doubts; they didn't survive the transition as well as she, however, emerging as near-brainless as her other troops. She therefore views the characters' arrival as an opportunity sent by the

Lifeweb (or maybe the Pancreator). Desperate to communicate with other intelligent beings, she will greet them while in her human form, claiming to be exploring the ruins for the pleasure of the expedition and to see firsthand an Ur artifact. As long as she can keep up the ruse, she wants to talk with and become part of their group, to discover what they think of Symbiots and elicit their views on the Lifeweb. While she may claim she has merely heard about these things, smart characters could realize her true nature as she becomes more overt in her questioning (trying to find justification for what she's doing).

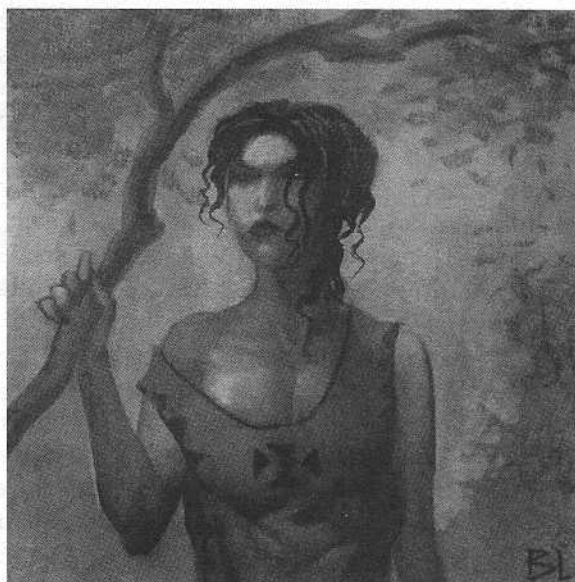
If her cover is blown or she loses patience with the characters, she will order her troops to attack — to capture, if possible. Xandra will give captured characters a chance to convert, trying to convince them to join of their own accord. She will only try to kill them if they cannot be convinced or forced to convert or if they seem likely to escape and warn the Muster.

Xandra has two forms, her human shape and her "motherform." In her motherform, Xandra looks like a woman made of plant matter, with green creepers dangling from her body. Her hair is reminiscent to Medusa's, with writhing tentacles of plant matter that move and undulate. She can blend in with plants, mentally command vegetation and animals she has seeded with spores and spit an acidic liquid which causes paralysis. Her woody vines provide her with armoring and great strength.

Using her ability to implant Symbiot spores to change the flora and fauna of the island, Xandra has blended the plants with Voral seeds (Strangleplant) from one of the worlds in Symbiot space, making them into Vral Creepers. Further, she used predatory spores from a species much like sharks to make Ichthiotes out of a few of the fish in the loch. These, as well as her shock troops, instantly obey her commands.

**Race:** Symbiot

**Quote:** "Once you feel the Lifeweb, your struggles will cease and you will join us in our crusade. (At least, I hope so...)"



**Description:** In her human form, Xandra appears as an attractive female with very dark hair and eyes. Her hair is long and curly (somewhat like tangled creepers). She is most likely to appear to the characters in this form. She can assume her motherform at will. Her human traits are given below, along with those of her motherform (in parentheses).

**Body:** Strength 6 (8), Dexterity 7 (9), Endurance 7 (8)

**Mind:** Wits 6, Perception 8, Tech 3

**Spirit:** Extrovert 8, Introvert 1, Passion 8, Calm 2, Faith 2, Ego 7, Human 2, Alien 8

**Natural Skills:** Dodge 6, Fight 8, Impress 8, Melee 5, Observe 6, Sneak 7, Vigor 8

**Learned Skills:** Empathy 2, Leadership 6, Shoot 6, Speak Urthish 4, Tracking 4

**Affliction:** Symbiots cannot defend against or contest mental occult powers

**Powers:** Shapeshift to motherform; spit paralytic venom (see Weapons); mentally command the Vral Creepers and Ichthiotes

**Wyrd:** 8

**Weapons:** Hail Element Gun (Dx + Shoot, DMG 7, RNG 20/30, Shots 10, Rate 1): For every victory modifier rolled, an additional, adjacent target is also hit; on a critical failure, freakish environmental effects occur. Shaped somewhat like a sea shell with organic spikes, the element gun is a living weapon. Twenty-four hours after its 10 shot capacity is used, it regrows or regains its ammunition.

Paralytic Spittle (Dx + Fight, 0 DMG, RNG 5/10): Xandra's spittle causes no damage, but feels as though it burns on contact. It must touch actual skin to be effective, as it cannot penetrate armor. Once it touches skin, the spittle paralyzes the voluntary muscles throughout the person's body, effectively paralyzing her without interfering with her breathing and other necessary functions. Paralysis lasts for five turns, allowing Xandra to have her troops capture prisoners. Any character who knows the Stoic Body skill may roll that skill + Endurance to avoid the effects.)

**Armor:** 5 + 5d

**Vitality:** -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0 (0)

## Symbiot Shock Troops (4)

Two of these Symbiots were formed from human converts (Megaria and Durok) taken over by Symbiot parasites. The other two seem more plantlike. All lack real intelligence. They live for battle. If the shock troops encounter the characters when Xandra is not with them, they will attack, believing this is what she wants. Should she arrive on the scene after battle has begun, the shock troops must roll Calm to cease battle. If they fail, she must intimidate them into submission using her Impress skill.

**Race:** Symbiot

**Quote:** "Rarrg! Kill!"

**Description:** In human form, though they all appear as non-remarkable specimens, two seem almost sexless and more plantlike than the other two. Of the other two, one



is clearly male, the other female. They might have been mercenary soldiers. These were Megaria and Durok. These two often stop whatever they are doing and stand silently as if awaiting orders (their possession isn't complete as yet, making them somewhat confused and less effective). Traits given in parentheses are for the two older Symbiots, who are more powerful.

**Body:** Strength 6 (8), Dexterity 7 (9), Endurance 7 (8)

**Mind:** Wits 4, Perception 8, Tech 3 (1)

**Spirit:** Extrovert 8, Introvert 1, Passion 9, Calm 1, Faith 0, Ego 7, Human 3 (1), Alien 7 (9)

**Natural skills:** Dodge 5, Fight 7 (8), Impress 7, Melee 3, Sneak 7, Vigor 7 (8)

**Learned skills:** Speak Urthish 3 (2)

**Affliction:** Symbiots cannot defend against or contest mental occult powers

**Powers:** Symbiot shapeshifting to motherform (see below for weapons).

**Wyrd:** None

**Weapons:** Spines (Dx + Fight, 4 DMG, RNG 5/10, anyone attempting to grapple with them suffers damage. Also, spines can be fired like a porcupine's up to three times at targets within range, causing the same damage. Once three shots have been taken, no more loose spines are available for 24 hours.).

The Symbiot that was Megaria has incorporated her fluxsword into her new form, changing it into a bioweapon. It now functions as part of her body and she fights with it using her Fight skill rather than Melee. The flux power of the sword has mostly been lost, meaning that although it causes normal damage for a fluxsword, only on a roll of 1 or 2 does its damage leak through energy shields.

One of the plantlike Symbiots has a biosword that is not a part of its body. That sword functions like a broadsword (Dx + Melee, DMG 6).

**Armor:** Spines 3 + 3d

**Vitality:** -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0 (0)



## Vral Creepers

These creepers, tendrils, grasses and plants have been seeded with Voral (Strangleplant) spores, making them susceptible to mental commands from Xandra. They have no true intelligence, but have achieved a sort of sentience. They can be controlled to slap (doing a small amount of damage), entwine people, or writhe about and make a particular area slippery or trip creatures. Once commanded to attack or cause difficulties, all plants within an area of approximately ten meters respond. They will continue their activities for the duration of a span unless commanded to stop.

**Race:** Vral Creepers

**Description:** Vines, creepers, stalks, bushes, grasses, reeds and other plants that may seem a little too green and healthy looking.

**Body:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Endurance 1-3 (depending on type)

**Mind:** Wits 1, Perception 1, Tech 0

**Natural skills:** Dodge 2, Fight 5

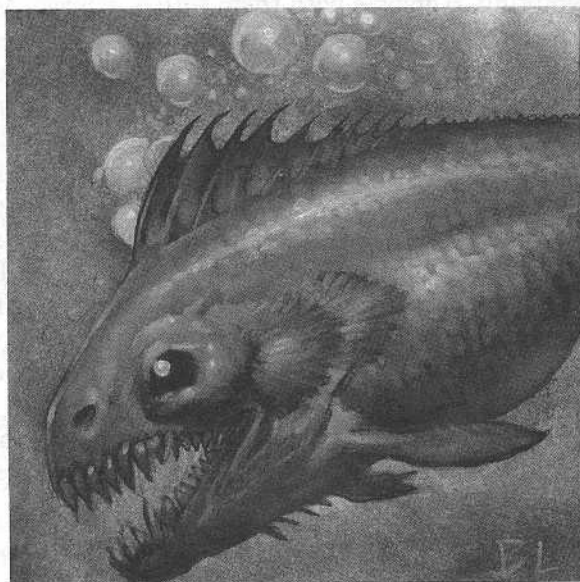
**Weapons:** Natural weaponry (branches, etc., DMG 2)

**Vitality:** -3/-1/0/0

## Ichthiotes (4)

Ichthiotes are large fish (similar to gar or pike) that have been implanted with Symbiot spores. Just as the Vral Creepers have grown more healthy in response to their change, Ichthiotes have grown larger and stronger due to their connection with the Lifeweb. Meat eaters by nature, Ichthiotes have sharp teeth and spiny fins capable of slicing into leathers and skin.

They are slightly more intelligent than Vral Creepers and tend to work together when commanded to attack. Ichthiotes will withhold attacks if commanded to simply surround and harry prey, but cannot actually capture anyone. Their natures are those of predators, however; once they've actually struck at a target, little can restrain them from continuing the attack.



**Race:** Ichthiotes

**Description:** Ichthiotes are very large fish (reaching one to two meters long), with sharp, spiny fins and sharp, serrated teeth. Their scales are glittering silver.

**Body:** Strength 5, Dexterity 9, Endurance 6

**Mind:** Wits 2, Perception 2, Tech 0

**Spirit:** Passion 8, Calm 2

**Natural skills:** Dodge 6, Fight 6, Intimidate 4, Sneak 7, Vigor 7

**Weapons:** Teeth (Dx + Fight, DMG 3); Spiny Fins (Dx + Fight, DMG 2)

**Armor:** 3 (tough scales)

**Vitality:** -6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0

## Equipment

The following equipment can be found in various places throughout the fortress. The items inside the underground cache may only be acquired if the characters figure out the code and open the door. Though several Second Republic items are included in the cache, if the gamemaster does not want these items in the hands of player characters, she may remove any or all of them (i.e. the rumored treasure hoard was just that — a rumor) or may allow the characters to acquire the fabulous array, then surround the characters with crack Muster troops as they leave the island. The Muster will not hesitate to commandeer the weapons for their ongoing battles against Symbiots and Vuldrok raiders. Should the characters be unwilling to part with their booty, conscription by the Muster (through sheer numbers, if necessary) might occur.

Further, many of these weapons will attract the Church's unwanted attention to those who openly display them, making their use limited at best in more civilized areas. Some planets may not even allow such weapons on their soil (if their own troops aren't armed with them, that is). Confiscation by powerful nobles is an option too. Finally, unscrupulous persons may seek to relieve the characters of the spiritual burden caused by the ownership of such high tech items.

**Synthlinens:** (One set is found on the bed in Area B, two more sets can be found on a shelf in the cache room). These have withstood the test of time, remaining clean and strong. With a good deal of pulling, this material can be taken off the bed. It is very fine stuff and could be made into a lovely gown or fashionable suit. Though it can be cut and shaped, it resists tearing and staining. Currently colored white, it can be dyed by someone who knows the type of dye it will take (a League artisan). Tech level: 6, Firebird cost: 4, Benefice cost: 0.

**Biosword:** This weapon can be taken from one of the two plantlike Symbiot shock troopers once it has been defeated. A living weapon, the biosword is similar to a broadsword in size, weight and damage. On the plus side, the sword is not metal and doesn't show up on detection devices. Should its new owner be willing to accept it as



part of her body, the sword will meld into her body and can be drawn forth at need. The sword manages to communicate this to whoever claims it.

Of course, this causes the person to gain 1 point of Alien and lose 1 level of Human. Further, the Symbiot seed within it gradually takes over the character's bodily processes; within a couple of years, the character will have changed enough to be classified a Symbiot. If a character gains this weapon but does not incorporate it into her body, it functions normally for about a month before decaying into a useless mass of goop (as it no longer connects with a Symbiot lifeform). Tech level: 1, Firebird cost: 1000, Benefice cost: 1.

## The Cache

All items listed below can be found in the cache room. They need not be fully charged; it has been a very long time since they were used, after all. (Although, if needed, there can be a cache of preserved fusion cels.)

**Neural Disrupter:** This small palm gun fires a nearly invisible stream of energy which destroys nerve cells in the target's brain. If the damage exceeds the target's Endurance (or Psi whichever is higher), the target falls unconscious. If the damage exceeds Vitality, the target dies. Psychic cans defend against such attacks with a contested roll of Psi + Stoic Mind.

This odd artifact was tested against the monolith by

the original Second Republic expedition, to see if it would have any effect; it had none. Unlike the other equipment, this gun is in disrepair. Its fusion cel is leaking; firing the weapon will corrode its innards enough to make it irreparable. It thus has only one shot available before it breaks for good — its user had better make the shot count. (Dx+Shoot, +1 goal, DMG 15, RNG 10/20, Shots 1, SIZ S) TL 8, Firebird cost: 100 (it's broken).

**Kelvin Corp. Model 29 Laser Pistol:** Operates just like a modern Known Worlds laser pistol (such as a Martech), but it is of superior, Second Republic manufacture (Quality +3). TL 6, Firebird cost: 1000.

**Blast Pellets (2):** These ball-bearing sized mini-grenades explode upon impact, affecting anyone within a one meter radius. As a plasma pellet, its damage can leak through energy shields on a damage roll of 1-5. (Dx + Throwing, DMG 3, RNG 5/10) TL 6, Firebird cost: 10 each.

**Taffy Gun:** A rifle and backpack combination that fires a foamy glue. Targets hit must make a contested Strength + Vigor roll against the foam's potency (standard is 8 successes) to move. Moving only makes the glue worse, however (+1 to potency). Remaining still allows the foam to slide off at a rate of 3 points of potency per turn. Once all potency is lost, the foam has dissolved. The foam lasts 30 turns before dissolving (on those foolish enough to keep moving). These are favorites among Chainers. (Dx + Shoot, +1 goal, DMG 0, RNG 5/10, Shots 5, Rate 1). TL 7,



Firebird cost: 150.

**Frictionless Gel:** Created as a frictionless oil, this substance was also marketed as a toy. If applied to a surface and allowed to dry for an hour, that surface becomes frictionless. Though the slickness helps reduce kinetic damage, it can cause slippery falls as well. Against energy weapons its protection is only 3d. It can be smeared over any type armor; modifiers are cumulative. There is enough here to cover one man-sized person or object. Imagine the fun Gannoks could have with this! (Defense: 9d, Dex: -2). TL 7, Firebird cost: 500.

**Energy Shield:** “Dueling” type. This shield is exactly as described in the **Fading Suns** rulebook, except it only has 5 hits remaining in its cel. (Protection 5/10, Hits 5 [usually 15]). TL 6, Firebird cost: 800, Benefice cost: 7.

**NanoTech MedPak:** As described on pp.195-196 of the **Fading Suns** rulebook.

The gamemaster should feel free to add any other weird equipment or needed supplies.

## Drama

The following are hooks for getting characters to the island. Once there, they can explore, encounter the denizens, try to create a safe camp for themselves or discover the entrance to the Second Republic supply cache. These ideas, combined with the information given above, merely set the scene. From here, it is up to the gamemaster to combine the elements into the story she desires to tell.

If none of these beginnings meet the needs of your ongoing story, feel free to jettison them and use whatever seems more appropriate — or use these ideas to generate other adventures elsewhere. Whichever method is used to lure the characters to the island, they should not be attacked (as were the characters in the opening story) before they get the chance to explore the ruins.

**Buried Treasure:** The characters acquire the map (and story that goes with it) of the Second Republic supply depot. They could win it during a bet, hear of and buy the map from a trusted source or a shady character in a back alley, receive it as part of a bequest from a dead relative or stumble across it in another treasure hoard. However they acquire it, the map clearly indicates that a Second Republic fortress lies on an island in a particular lake among the

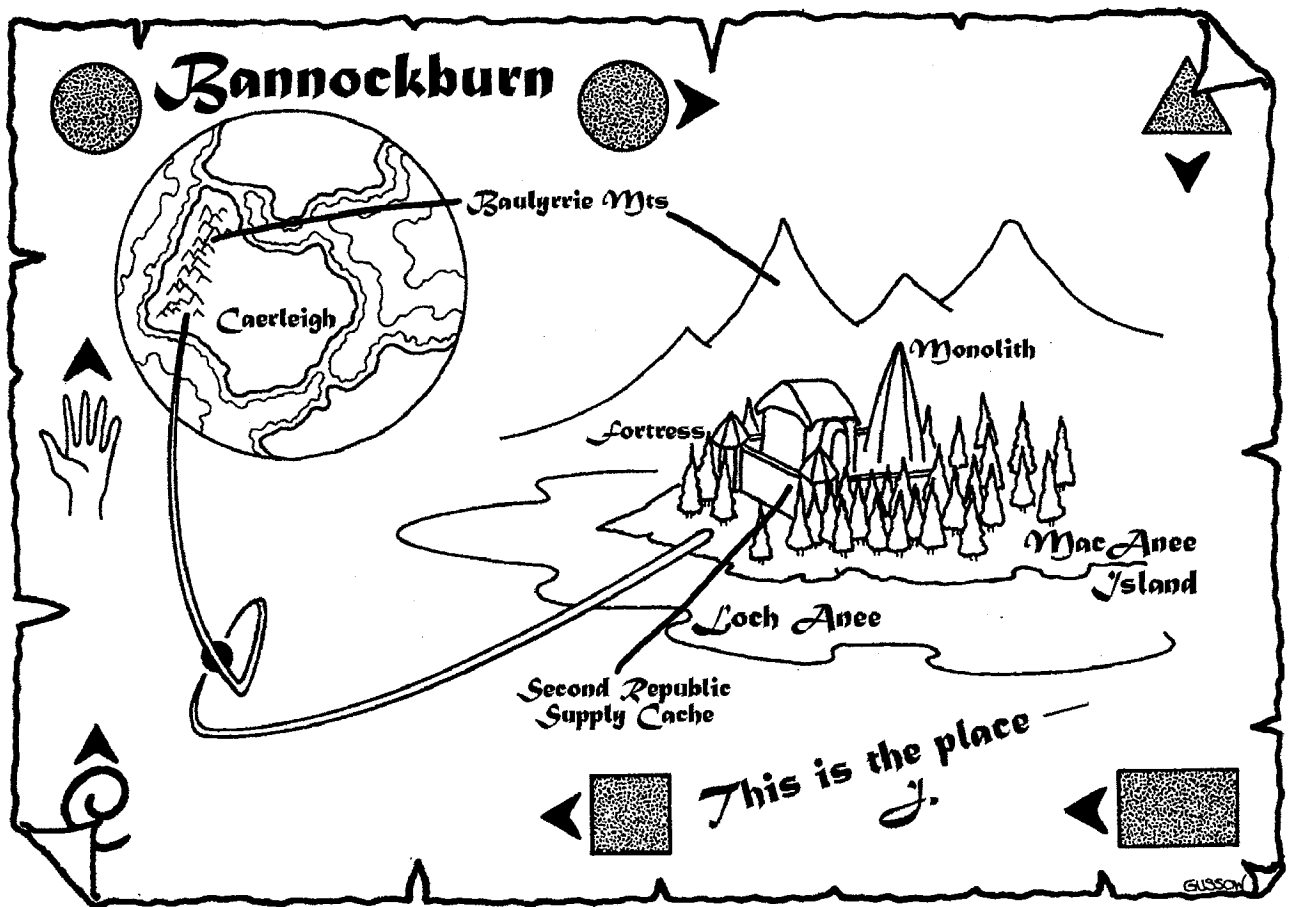
highlands of Bannockburn.

**The Rescue:** The characters go to Bannockburn to rescue a friend captured by the Muster. While scouting around trying to locate her, they hear that their friend escaped. Coincidentally, the place she was being held is in the area near the Symbiots' island. Dodging Muster patrols, they find her tracks. After following them for a short while, they discover fresh tracks that lead down to the water's edge, indicating that she obviously swam to the island.

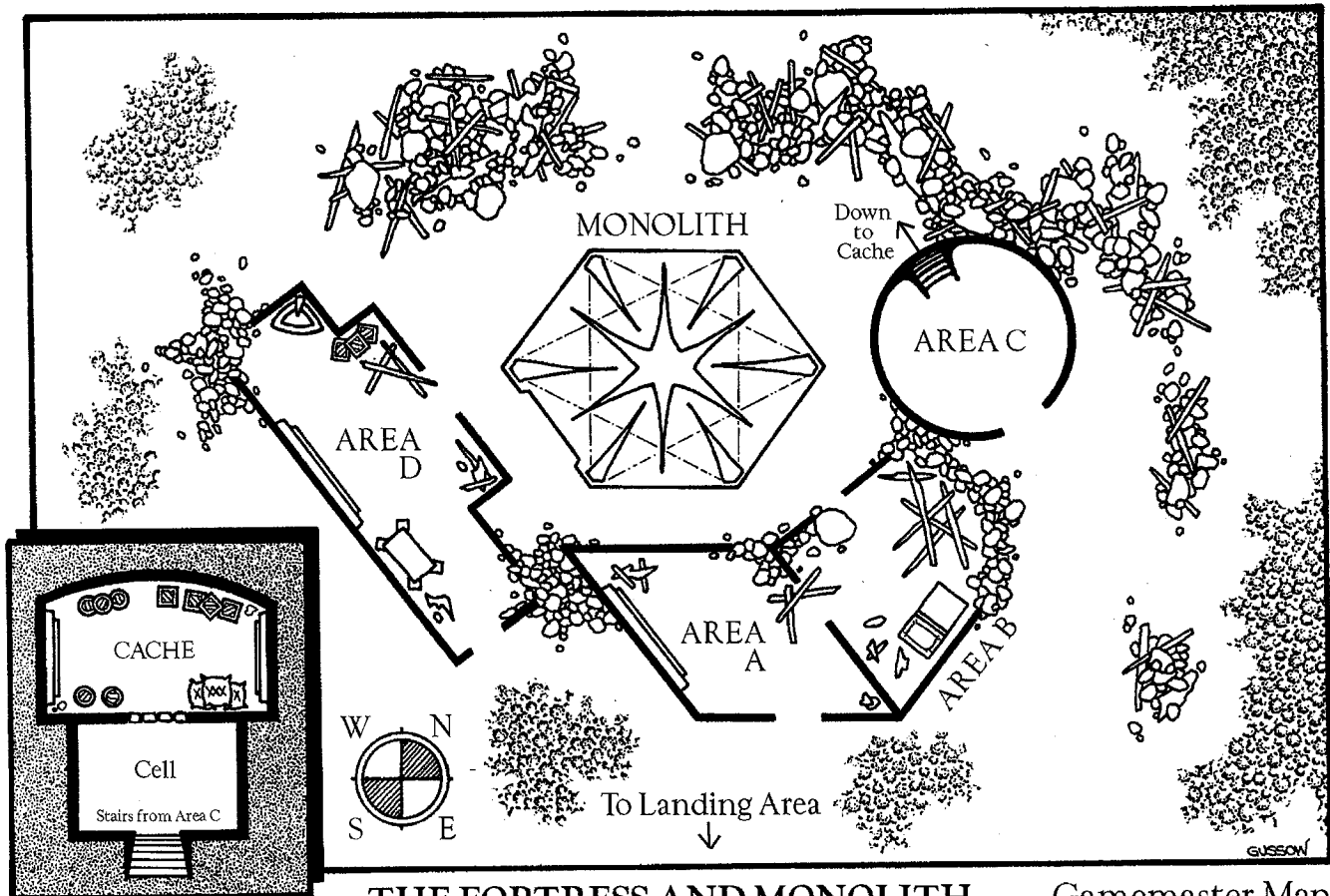
**Escape!** The characters have been captured by Chainers and brought to Bannockburn for training. Their group is slated to be shipped out immediately when they find a chance to escape. Taking only the few weapons they could quickly acquire, and with trackers on their trail, they find a boat on the shore and see the isle out in the mist. If they can hide on the island, the Muster may give up for the moment, since they need to get their other slaves processed.

**The Hunting Party:** Certain nobles have bought the right to hold a hunt in the area. They seek the prized red Gerlinhart, found only in the highland forests of Bannockburn. The characters may either be the nobles or have been hired to assist in the hunt (as beaters, trackers, bodyguards, or whatever). Just as the hunt becomes exciting, the quarry takes off and swims to the island. The noble who organized the hunt (who is either paying the characters or who they cannot afford to offend) insists on following it!

**The Gannok Wedding:** As a joke, a Gannok starship engineer the characters know invites them to his wedding — to be held at a traditional Gannok celebration site, an old fortress on a lake isle on Bannockburn. He has tipped off several friends that a grand prank is in the making and they are ready to assist. Though the Gannok doesn't know about the Symbiots, he plans to plant some “Ur artifacts” (constructed by him from scraps, of course) among the ruins of the fortress for his companions to find. He anticipates their excitement, frenzied acquisition of the “artifacts” and eventual embarrassment and anger as they realize they've been duped (he actually knows humans pretty well).

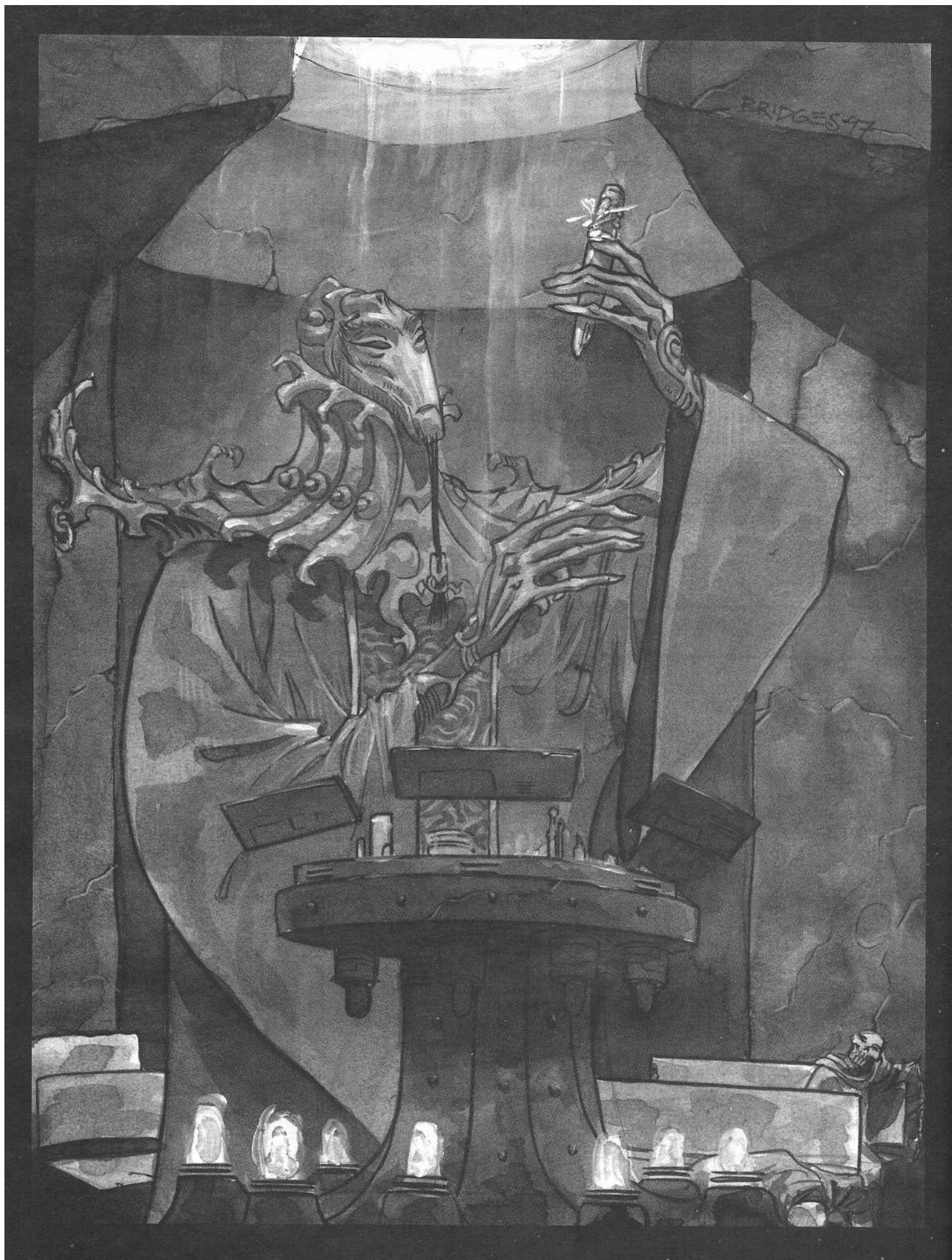


Players Map



THE FORTRESS AND MONOLITH

Gamemaster Map



# Manitou: The Haunted Chapel

by Bill Bridges

Ebler raised his lantern and gazed in awe at the sleek craft before him. He could not make out its entire length in the dim light, but knew it was big enough for his needs. It was not every day that a starship could be found just waiting for someone to discover and claim it.

Then he remembered: he had just killed that interfering Charioteer, Lucas. The fool had dared to attack him with his psychic powers. It was enough that Ebler was forced to work with such a heresy magnet as a psychic, but to be mentally assaulted by one after trying to make friends with him for the last month — it was self-defense, pure and simple. Ebler was no cold murderer. He did what he had to. But Lucas was the pilot in his group, and Ebler had no idea how to get the ship out of its cave without a pilot.

He felt weird as he thought about Lucas. Especially when he tried to explain to himself the bit about self-defense. It made him real tired to think it. He sighed and leaned against the stairway — and then jumped to attention. He peered into the cavern, shining his light toward the far wall.

What the hell was that thing he had seen? Something had moved over there. Something not human. He began to slowly back up the winding stairs. Once he was out of sight of the cavern, he turned to run the rest of the way — then stopped.

Standing in the middle of the corridor was a creature out of nightmare. A huge lizard dog with tusks longer than his arm moved toward him, step by step. Ebler screamed and then quieted as he felt the will drain out of him, followed by a deep pain all over. He couldn't understand what was going on until he saw the creature's mouth, chewing and chewing the empty air in front of it. And then he knew. The thing was eating him from a distance. The thing was eating him telekinetically.

With that realization, Ebler collapsed, too tired to stand any longer. The lantern shattered against the floor and bounced down the stairs, throwing manic shadows everywhere, lighting up the creature's hungry eyes as it bent over the dying crypt-defiler...

On a lonely promontory in the badlands of Manitou is a chapel. This jumpgate-shaped building, gilded with artificial gargoyles, was once a thriving Sathraist monastery. Built by a wealthy noble who was an open Sathraist, it also served as a fortress to defend its worshippers from intolerant enemies. Once the target of a peasant uprising, it now protects many secrets.

Abandoned since before the rise of the Second Republic, its surroundings were claimed by the Vau in a diplomatic treaty in 3555. It is said that no human has lived here in centuries, and those who claim to have snuck into it searching for treasure or lore return with fear in their souls, stammering a tale of a horrible spectre which haunts its halls, hungry for souls.

The chapel now has three major secrets waiting to be discovered: a fragment of the fabled and heretical Stellar Apocryphon; a starship with a disabled Sathra Effect Damper; and the psychic ghost of an elder race seeking to once again incarnate itself into the material world.

## Manitou: Planet of Heretics

Manitou was one of humanity's least populated outposts during the Diaspora. Very few colonists chose to live so far from bustling civilization, especially on a world claimed by the mysterious and threatening Vau. During the strained relationship between the Vau Hegemony and the Known Worlds following the death of the Prophet, Manitou was declared "spiritually and materially unsafe" by the Church. Most of its human colonists packed up and left, its people afraid for their lives. Only the eccentric and the faithless stayed behind, still hoping to better



understand the enigmatic Vau.

When the Second Republic made treaty with the Vau, ceding jumpgate information in return for land on certain worlds along the Hegemony border, colonists once again arrived, ready to build communities meant to greatly impress the Vau. After the Fall of the Second Republic and the rise of the Church, the people of Manitou grew intolerant of their alien neighbors. Missionaries led them to suspect Vau conspiracies behind many events, such as the loss of certain worlds during the fighting for the spoils of the Republic. Some fanatic humans eventually tried to break into Vau installations and destroy the technology they found there. All were caught and executed. The Vau governor issued an edict: the Inquisition was no longer allowed into the Manitou system.

The result was that, while the Church lost a world, persecuted humans gained a safe haven from religious oppression... as did dangerous criminals best left to the Inquisition's justice.

Manitou is a complex planet. The Vau control more than half the world, and they only occasionally allow humans to enter these territories. A local merchants guild which has strong ties to the League and Emperor Alexius (who occasionally sends envoys to the Vau at Manitou) governs the rest of the planet. Unlike most worlds, psychic covens and pagan religions operate openly here. Open temples and coven houses can be found in most cities, and closed houses can be found all over the human territories of the planet.

This has led to occult-oriented crimes (psychic blackmail and coercion, telekinetic theft, etc.), and a resultant occult police force contracted by the governing guild. While these forces are undermanned and undertrained, they have proved an effective deterrent simply by their existence. Nonetheless, conflicts between the differing occult factions on the planet often lead to minor skirmishes.

The Church is certainly not absent from Manitou, but its coercive power is greatly curtailed. Missionaries still travel the planet, trying to bring wayward sheep back into the fold. The Eskatonic Order has a cathedral here, and its priests study the planet and its people with intense interest.

## History of the Chapel

When many of the early Manitou colonists left the world for fear of the Vau, the remaining colonists banded together. One of their most popular leaders was Baron Morihei Hashiman Li Halan, an avowed Sathraist who feared neither the Vau or the Church. He initiated many of the planet's remaining nobles and upperclass freemen into his outlaw religion. In 2860, he commissioned a monastery to be built to house these converts in times of persecution. Five years later, practically as soon as the last stone was laid, it proved its worth toward its intended use. Roused into fury over the ritual murder of a young girl,

the populace blamed Baron Morihei and his Sathraists. The baron withdrew to his new chapel with his closest followers and shut out the mob.

Since most of Manitou's high technology was in the hands of the nobility, the crowd could do little against the well-protected baron. His food stores were enough to ensure that he could not be starved out, and his hidden yacht ensured him an escape route should the chapel's doors fail. Eventually, after nearly a month in which the rabble tried to pry its way into the chapel, they gave up and went home. No sign of the baron was ever seen or heard again.

Years later, one of the villagers who had led the rioting mob returned to the chapel and found the door unlocked. Warily entering with gun drawn, he searched the empty hall for signs of the noble and his sect. In the upstairs bunkroom, he found most of their bodies, now decomposed skeletons. They had all died in bed with no sign of violence. The baron's body was nowhere to be found. Assuming that the lord had poisoned his followers and later escaped, the villager returned to tell his tale.

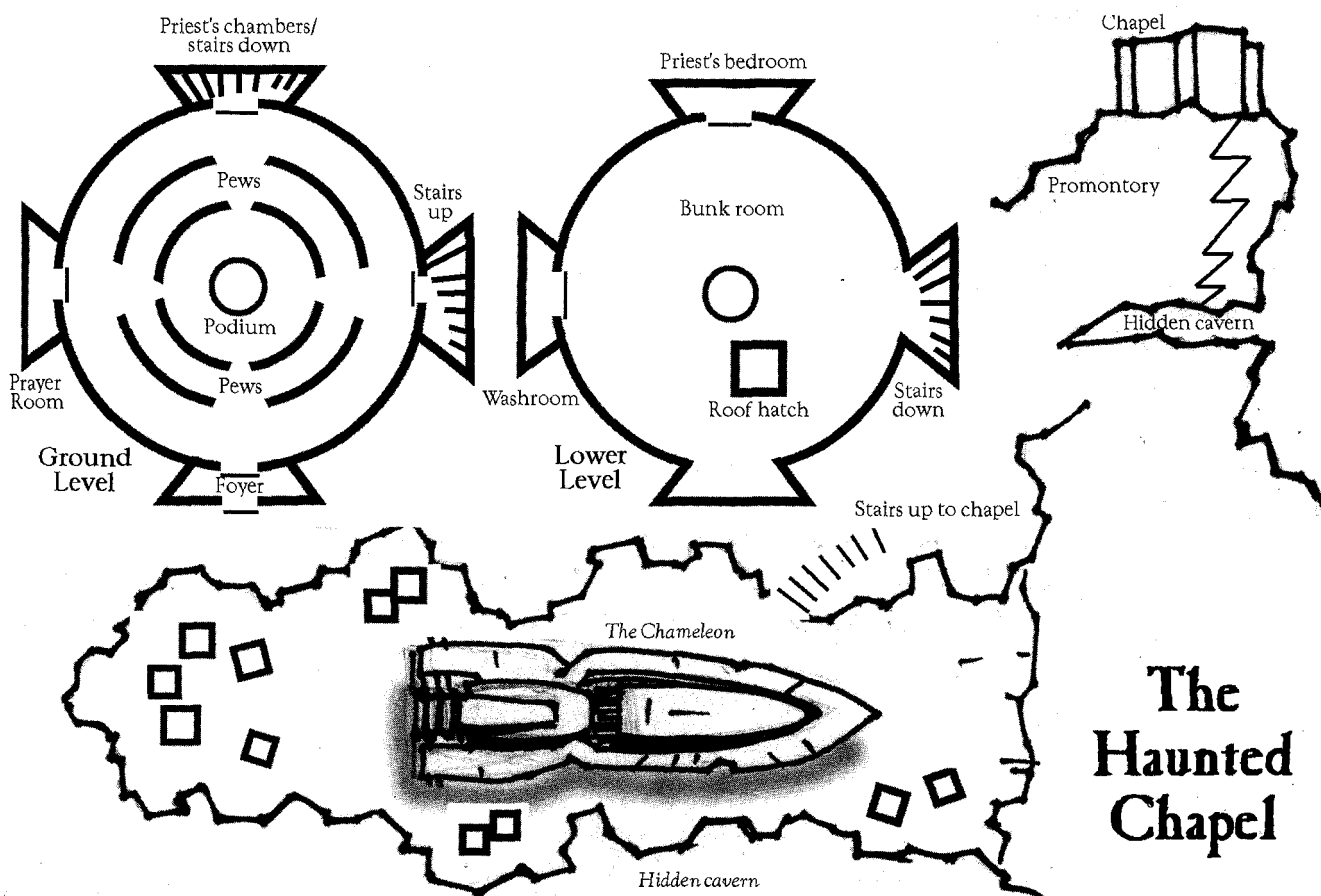
Soon, opportunists from all over came to the chapel seeking the riches rumored to be buried within. Many of them never came back, their bodies left strewn about the floors for the next treasure seekers to discover. Finally, a band of thieves came in the night only to return to the city the next dawn, crying in fear and begging the Church's mercy for their souls. They all spoke of a demon which lived in the chapel, sucking the souls of any who entered the place. The form they described was horrible: a shuffling, scaled beast with long tusks and baleful eyes, shimmering in the air as if it were not wholly real.

The chapel was declared haunted by the priests. Before anyone could investigate further, the Second Republic representatives, unaware of the legends, ceded the chapel lands to the Vau in return for new colony territory. The chapel was no longer within reach, and its secrets were lost to humanity.

Over the centuries, a few bold thieves have tried to sneak into the place, only to disappear or return screaming about the demon. The Vau captured a few and executed them as an example for any who disobeyed the trespass laws. No one has yet returned to tell the fate of the baron himself, for his remains have yet to be found or identified.

## Message from the Vau

Shervas Fluma-Quento, an eccentric low-order Vau mandarin, took an interest in the chapel as soon as he arrived on the world, in exile from his parents' home. A long-time devotee of ancient lore, he believes, as do most Vau mandarins, in an elder prophecy. This oracle, delivered ages ago to the Vau by a prophetlike figure of their own, tells of a "War of the Heavens" which will one day threaten not only the Vau but the entire universe. This omen is known to most Vau, but further details of the prophecy are



known only to the mandarins, who guide the Hegemony according to the omen's dictates.

Shervas believes that the mandarins do not know what they are doing, that they have lost their way in mystic contemplation. Against orders, he began to act on his own to ward off the coming cosmic war — a high heresy to countermand the Grand Mandarin.

Towards this end, he has placed a fragment of the fabled Stellar Apocryphon in the chapel, intending it to be a clue for certain Known Worlders so that they will begin their own preparations for the war. He has chosen the Favyana psychic coven to be the bearers of this lore to their people, but he cannot give it to them in person, lest he be implicated in the crime. He instead employs local agents to alert the Favyana. However, Shervas is painfully unaware of underworld realities and his chosen accomplices are not the most discreet; they do indeed alert the intended party, but then sell the information to the highest bidders. Soon, the Favyana, the Invisible Path, and a Hesychast monk (and perhaps the player characters) descend on the monastery to find the fabled fragment.

Meanwhile, Shervas is arrested by the Vau authorities and charged with writing forbidden poetry, an embarrassing hobby of his. He is sent back to his parents' for punishment and confinement. No longer able to oversee his plans, Shervas shrugs. They are nowhere nearly as important as his political and cultural career; just a game, really.

With Shervas out of the picture, there is no one to

rein in the coming conflict. The Vau authorities ignore the monastery; only Shervas was interested in it. On one night out of the coming week (in which the info on the fragment is leaked), the Vau will hold an important ceremony consecrating Manitou's new year (by the Vau calendar). All guards will be called to the governor's palace. Thus, only on this night (so the parties believe) will it be safe to reach the monastery. While all the invading parties will fear Vau intervention, it will not come (unless extreme activity occurs: big bombs go off, etc.).

Shervas left the chapel unlocked so the Favyana could get in easily — but so can anyone else.

## The Chapel

The chapel sits on top of a promontory in the dry badlands 30 kilometers from the human city and starport of Byblos (originally built to accommodate Second Republic diplomats to the Vau). Stairs lead up the winding path to the main door of the chapel, set in the center of one of the jumpgate "wings." Ominous and sublime gargoyles loom above and on all sides of the roof.

Just inside the door is a small receiving room, with shelves and racks for coats or travel equipment. From here, another door leads into the rotunda (the jumpgate circle). Four large columns extend upwards to the high ceiling, and doors at each wing lead to other rooms: The one farthest from the front entrance leads to the priest's office

(with hidden stairs leading to the hanger below); the door on the right leads upstairs to the bunkroom; the door on the left opens onto a private prayer room.

In the center of the chapel is a circular dais where the exhortations were delivered. The exhortator is meant to walk in a circle, turning in all directions to face his audience, who sit in pews radiating out from the dais. The dais has a data terminal from which the sermon of the day can be read. Its think machine is somewhat corroded and no longer holds the Sathraists files. It may not properly play all the files loaded into it (see *The Forbidden Fragment*, below).

Skeletal remains litter the floor, the bodies of previous chapel invaders. There is little of value, although a diligent person could collect a total of 10 firebirds by searching all the bodies. In addition, a variety of semi-rusted slug guns and swords can be found.

The entire chapel is dark, for there are no windows and the fusion lamps are completely drained. Characters will have to provide their own light sources to see by.

## Upstairs

The whole top floor is dominated by the bunkroom, where all the residents (save the baron) lived. Twenty bunks are spread throughout the room, each with a chest full of personal belongings (most long since decayed). A few data crystals can be found, but these contain only partial journals detailing the vapid lives of their noble authors. Skeletons lie on some of the beds, their clothing moldy and flimsy.

The wing to the right of the stairs leads to the baron's private room. A small fortune in precious metals and gems is stashed away in a wall safe (about 700 firebirds worth). A hidden trapdoor leads to the priest's office below.

The wing directly across from the stairs leads to the washroom, where another skeleton can be found in a filthy bathtub.

A trap door in the ceiling leads to the roof. This is locked from the inside, and is sealed airtight. The roof has little of interest except for burned out running lights placed to aid incoming shuttles (the roof is large enough to land a Runt upon).

## Down Below

The priest's office holds a desk and small library of data crystals (most of which were pilfered long ago). The remaining crystals contain some early Church lore, including gospels later adapted as canon. They are worth a total of 100 firebirds to a scholarly priest interested in early versions of the gospels.

Underneath the large desk is a trapdoor leading to the cavern below. It is very well concealed; only intense scrutiny will reveal it (12 victory points on a sustained Perception + Search roll).

Rough hewn stairs lead from the trapdoor to the starship hanger below. Like the rest of the chapel, the half-kilometer long passage is completely dark. The stairs en-

## The Chameleon (Yacht)

**Grade:** Lander

**Builder:** Unknown

**Tech Level:** 5

**Length:** 30 meters

**Width:** 10 meters

**Crew:** 1 (pilot)

**Passengers:** 10

**Cargo (Internal):** 10 metric tons

**Cargo (External):** None

**Speed:** 10% lightspeed (8 days to jumpgate)

**Jumps:** 2

**Supplies:** 2 months

**Sensors:** Radar 5, Laser Radar 5, Infrared 5

**Weaponry:** Lht Laser, Med Laser

**Maneuvering:** -1

**Armor:** 1 + 1d

**Shield:** Vambrace (5)

**Vitality:** -10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0

**Cost:** 70 Benefice (Disabled Sathra Drive, Haunted) / 100,000 firebirds

**Description:** The Chameleon was in fine shape when it was last used, but that was centuries ago. Its systems still work (with some minor malfunctions), but completely lack juice. The small fusion generator along the wall is also out of energy, and even if it could be kickstarted, it is not nearly large enough to fuel a starship. (At the gamemaster's option, the craft could have enough fuel to barely reach the local starport for refueling.)

The most remarkable thing about the vessel — and something which is not obvious without a complete check of the engines (9 victory points on a Perception + High Tech Redemption roll) — is that its Sathra Effect Damper is disabled, allowing the Sathra Effect to take hold of its pilot and navigator during a jump (see *Byzantium Secundus* or the forthcoming *Dark Between the Stars* for more info on the Sathra Effect.)

**History:** The Chameleon is an example of a common noble yacht from the middle Diaspora era. Yacht designs were greatly improved during the Second Republic, but this craft is nonetheless of quite good craftsmanship by Dark Ages standards.

**Common Modifications:** None (this model has been long out-of-use)

ter onto a large cavern carved from sheer rock, 60 meters long and 30 wide. The closed hanger doors are to the left of the stairs, cleverly concealed to resemble the surrounding cliff face.

A starship rests in the center of the hanger, its nose pointed at the doors. This is the *Chameleon*, the chapel lord's personal vessel, a small diplomatic yacht. Baron

Morihei's bodily remains can be found in the cockpit of the vessel, no apparent cause of death obvious.

The hanger walls are stacked with maintenance equipment and supply storage bins (some refrigerated for long storage, but their foods now quite bad).

**Gamemaster Warning:** Should it not be in the best interests of the gamemaster's epic for the player characters to find a free yacht, the *Chameleon* should be disabled and unrepairable, requiring expensive labor, during which time it is highly possible that the Church may get wind of the craft and come to re-enable the damper. If this is the gamemaster's preferred condition, perhaps a cache of high-tech items can be found on board to give its finders some reward for their diligence.

## Factions

### The Favyana

This well-intentioned psychic coven is represented by a band of three, led by the conscientious Flavio Delestat. The other two (Drina and Leshan) are low-level psychics, mere beginners really. They are apprenticed to Flavio and thus follow him on all his missions. The Favyana will wish to work together with the other parties in the chapel, to share the fragmented lore.

#### Flavio Delestat

Born on Manitou to a wealthy merchant family, Flavio has suffered less persecution for his gifts than most psychics. Fellow Favyana members believe he is naive and too optimistic because of it, and for this reason rarely send him on missions for the coven. However, he happened to be at the Favyana coven house when news of the Stellar Apocryphon fragment was offered for sale by a black-market merchant known as a Vautech dealer. Telling no one, he ponied up the money himself (leaving him broke) and immediately set out toward the chapel, intent on discovering important secrets.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Freeman

**Quote:** "This lore is too valuable to hoard. We must share it among ourselves. Surely there is profit enough for us all?"

**Description:** Tall and thin, Flavio suffers from a poor complexion, with a face pockmarked by adolescent scars. He barely notices, however, knowing that his psychic gifts more than make up for physical shortcomings. He wears colorful, loose fitting shirts and pants of local manufacture.

**Roleplaying:** Flavio tries to get along with everyone, knowing that he can force them to behave with his powers at anytime (or so he believes). He has been taught by the Favyana to beware his dark side, and thus tries to control his behavior to maintain a calm exterior, even when he becomes impatient or frustrated. The ghost will use this against him.



**Entourage:** His two young apprentices, Drina and Leshan, are from freeman families on Manitou. He has agreed to train them in their powers in return for a stipend from their families. He is training them slowly, lest the stipend run out too soon. They can each be considered to have Psi 1 with Sixth Sense Sensitivity power, but no Urge as yet.

**Body:** Strength 3, Dexterity 7, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 8, Tech 3

**Spirit:** Extrovert 5, Introvert 2, Passion 2, Calm 4, Faith 2, Ego 4, Human 3, Alien 1

**Natural Skills:** Charm 7, Observe 6

**Learned Skills:** Academia 2, Drive Landcraft 3, Empathy 5, Etiquette 5, Focus 8, Inquiry 4, Lore (psychic powers) 6, Read Urthish 3, Remedy 4, Speak Urthish 5, Stoic Mind 6, Think Machine 2

**Blessings/Curses:** Imperturbable (2 pts: +2 Calm when insulted)/ Vain (+1 pt: -1 Per when being flattered)

**Occult:** Psi 7, Urge 4

**Powers:** Psyche (Intuit, Emote, MindSight, MindSpeech, Heart's Command, HeadShackle, BrainBlast), Sixth Sense (Sensitivity, Darksense, Subtle Sight)

**Wyrd:** 11

**Equipment:** Four-man, electric-powered landcraft with provisions for three days (parked outside chapel)

**Weapons:** Lt Revolver, knife

**Armor:** Standard shield

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

### The Invisible Path

This underground coven is represented by a brutal psychic who wants to bully her way to the fragment, and damn anyone who gets in her way. Once she knows of the ghost, she will try to feed the others to it, hoping to avoid such a fate herself. But this will lead to its incarnation, and thus her own doom.





## Jyx Greeneyes

Jyx's upbringing as a peasant in the worst hovel of Malignatius surely has a lot to do with her attitude problem. By the time she hit adolescence, she had already been raped too many times to count. Besides blood, puberty brought new powers she barely understood. She escaped her dismal world only by offering her body to a visiting Charioteer. He stole her away from her planet and Decados rule. Once the pilot's ship arrived on Manitou, she killed him, took his things, and set off to find someone who could teach her about the strange powers she had discovered with womanhood.

She first found her way to the Favyana, and they taught her the rudiments of her Soma ability. But she was dissatisfied with the rate of study and the ethics lessons they tried to indoctrinate her with. Someone noticed her annoyance and approached her with an offer: join the Invisible Path and rise to power. The coven asked in return only that she share whatever power she gained with the coven hierarchy. She agreed and embarked on a much more rigorous — and dangerous — secret training regimen under the infamous psychic, Sir Ferroc Lan, one of Manitou's minor house lords.

After Ferroc's death in a serf uprising (secretly instigated by Jyx), she went her own way. Acting as a freelance psychic, she hires out for any unsavory job on Manitou (she is afraid to leave the planet for fear of the Inquisition). She paid for the information about the fragment and the chapel, and has come in her skimmer (hidden in a cave near the chapel) to take her rightful due. She is not interested in sharing.

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Escaped Serf

**Quote:** "I don't give a damn what you want. I'll kill each and every one of you if I have to."

**Description:** Jyx is a short (4'5") woman in her mid-20s. She is not concerned in the slightest with fashion and pre-

fers dark clothes and leathers.

**Roleplaying:** Not a team player, Jyx will resent anyone trying to strike a deal with her. Of course, she'll play along until the usefulness of the charade is over. She has a temper which can unnerve others but will give the ghost little entry into her psyche.

**Entourage:** She travels alone. Always.

**Note:** Jyx will use her Soma powers before entering the chapel; the traits in parentheses represent these heightened abilities. She used up all the spiritual energy in her Wyrd Tabernacle to fuel these powers.

**Body:** Strength 7 (13), Dexterity 8 (13), Endurance 7 (10)

**Mind:** Wits 5, Perception 6, Tech 4

**Spirit:** Extrovert 3, Introvert 1, Passion 8, Calm 1, Faith 0, Ego 6, Human 3, Alien 1

**Natural skills:** Dodge 5, Fight 5, Impress 8, Melee 5, Observe 5, Shoot 7, Sneak 5, Vigor 7

**Learned skills:** Drive Aircraft 4, Drive Landcraft 3, Focus 7, Knavery 7, Lockpicking 3, Remedy 3, Mech Redemption 3, Search 6, Stoic Mind 8, Streetwise 9, Think Machine 1

**Blessings/Curses:** Bold (2 pts: +2 Passion acting when others hesitate)/ Callous (+2 pts: -2 Passion when asked for aid)

**Occult:** Psi 6, Urge 1

**Powers:** Soma (Toughening, Strengthening, Quickening, Hardening, Sizing, Masking)

**Wyrd:** 8

**Equipment:** Wyrd Tabernacle (holds up to 5 Wyrd points, but is now empty)

**Weapons:** Blaster pistol, dirk

**Armor:** Hardening power: 3 + 5d against conventional attacks, 1 + 5d against energy attacks

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

## The Hermit

A member of the local Hesychast monastery (run by Sermonites) has caught wind of the existence of a fragment of the Stellar Apocryphon. He did not pay for the information, but saw it and the chapel in a nightmare.



## Philamon the Orator

This local eccentric has read a different fragment of the Stellar Apocryphon. It whetted his appetite for more and he now seeks all fragments. He does not mind sharing the information (he's got a photographic memory and will remember it once he's seen it). He will not share with psychic covens members, however, for he believes that they are sinful.

His nightmare concerning the book disturbs him: He saw a copy of the book, but a beast had its paw upon the pages, and he could not turn them for its weight. He did not see the whole beast, just its clawed and scaled paw. He is unsure what this means, but his hunger for the lore is too much to keep him away from Vau territory. He walks to the monastery, a journey of two days for him, after which he will be tired and cranky (which the ghost will try to use against him).

**Race:** Human

**Rank/Class:** Hesychast Deacon

**Quote:** "Fools! Heed my vision or we are all doomed!"

**Description:** A tanned and weather-beaten man of 60, Philamon is nonetheless is excellent shape. His ascetic lifestyle has only nourished his 5'9" body.

**Roleplaying:** Philamon has long been out of the social circuit and may have trouble adjusting to others at first. He is not used to being interrupted when he speaks, and will get snappish if it occurs.

**Entourage:** Philamon has come alone. If he does not return to the monastery within the week, fellow monks may come looking for him.

**Body:** Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Endurance 9

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 4, Tech 3

**Spirit:** Extrovert 2, Introvert 6, Passion 2, Calm 6, Faith 7, Ego 2, Human 3, Alien 1

**Natural skills:** Charm 4, Impress 7, Observe 7, Vigor 8

**Learned skills:** Academia 6, Focus 7, Lore (Stellar Apocryphon) 2, Physick 4, Read Urthish 6, Read Latin 3, Remedy 5, Search 3, Social (Oratory 8), Stoic Body 5, Stoic Mind 8, Think Machine 1

**Occult:** Theurgy 4

**Powers:** Laying on of Hands, Consecration, Light, Faithful Heart

**Wyrd:** 9

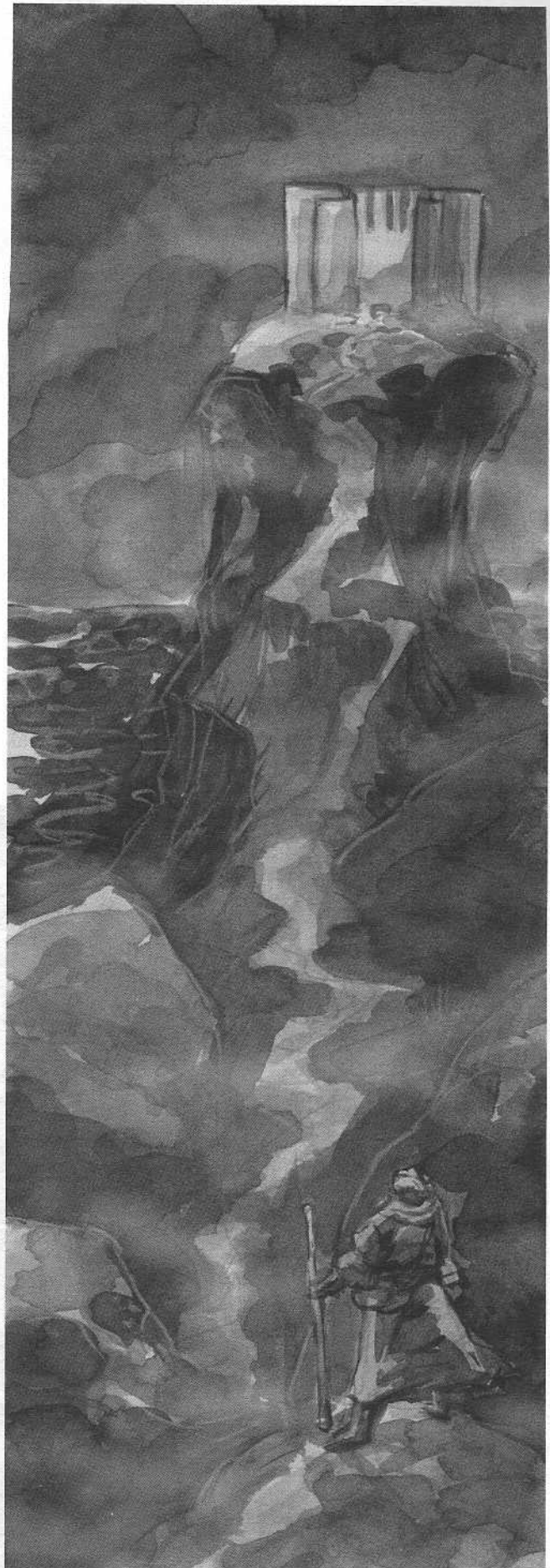
**Equipment:** Backpack with sparse provisions for four days

**Weapons:** Walking staff (+1 Init, 4 DMG)

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

## The Forbidden Fragment

From the time of the Prophet until the Church cemented its power after the Fall, there were many different sects and movements following the new religious credo of the Prophet. Many of these died out during the Second Republic as more and more people turned from



religion to materialism, but others were declared heretical by the orthodoxy, and disbanded or driven underground.

Many of these sects collected their own writings on the Prophet's gospels and the sayings of the disciples. Famed philosophers and mystics contributed their own writings, many of which were later adopted as orthodox canon, their authors sometimes declared to be saints. Other works, however, were banned. One of the most famous of these works is the Stellar Apocryphon, a collection of religious documents from the post-Prophet and pre-Fall era.

Also called the "The Secret Book of the Stars," or "Forgotten Scriptures of the Prophet, His Disciples, divers Saints, Mystics and Aliens, Delivered to the Stars," its editor is said to be one Duras Barbelo. The first known copy was published and distributed widely just before the period of Divestiture began. Declared heretical by the Church even then, it was one of the first books to be proscribed after the Fall — anyone caught with even a fragment of the book suffered a branding with the Dark Sign.

It is rumored that Barbelo was a member of a hermetic society which went underground after the Fall. Some Avestites claim to have traced links from this society to the later resurgent Eskatonic Order, but their argument has never been proven. One thing is certain: the book is heavily sought by occultists of all stripes, holy or infernal. Even the Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar are said to seek copies,

for it claims esoteric knowledge of their religions.

The Church's purge successfully destroyed most copies of the book, whether printed or electronic. Over the centuries, diligent seekers have recovered portions of its data or sections of printed editions (there is rumored to be an edition written in Ukari script). Such fragments are legendary and rumor of one's existence is enough to summon the Inquisition.

The fragment left by the Vau is a data crystal inside the podium think machine (it requires a TL5+ computer that can read Suprema; the podium computer can read it, but it may not display all the info). It is a reconstructed file which has lost much of its original data. However, it is still a goldmine by occult standards. Basically, the gamemaster should feel free to place any information in the fragment that will lead to a plot of his choosing.

Information specific to the situation at hand includes the following (which requires 6 victory points on a sustained Tech + Think Machine roll to access):

The fragment speaks of "mental shades" or "plasmic concepts" of "ancient lineage" lingering in the "psychic plenum, which the Vau call Otherspace." These entities have a tremendous urge to incarnate themselves into matter, lest they eventually fade from even conceptual existence. They must devour the psychic energies of living beings to achieve their task; the more energy they devour, the greater substance they attain, until a physical body is formed for them, freeing them from the prison of





“idea space.”

Such an entity is subtle, acting at first only through the medium of living beings’ behaviors, warping their actions to its own ends, setting the trap whereby it can drain its victims and feed its embryonic body. The fragment is unclear on just what kinds of behavior are necessary to allow it access to vital energy, but it does provide some clues for fending off such a being: The target of its assault must be prepared to answer the questions the spectre raises in his soul with no hesitation or deception to himself. Correct answer is not as important as the willingness to peer unafraid into the dark recesses; inability to face such a challenge in the slightest will give the being access to the soul.

This is all the information the fragment provides concerning the ghost which haunts the chapel.

## The Ghost

This entity is the psychic remains of an alien sentient whose race is long extinct. This psychic shade haunts the strange corridors of a psychic space or dimension known to the Vau as Otherspace, a realm of concepts and ideas. The Vau believe that no race or culture’s psychic evolution can proceed without direct acquaintance with this realm.

As described in the fragment from the Stellar Apocryphon, this entity’s greatest goal is to incarnate itself into the material world, but not through possession of bodies — it needs to create its own body, fueled by the psychic energy — or Wyrld — of living beings. To this end, it will maneuver its victims into opening their psyches to it so that it may feed. A vulnerable psyche is one which practices self-deception, repression of emotions or the breaking of cultural taboos — similar actions to those described in the Gaining Urge chart on p. 140 of the **Fading Suns** rulebook.

The ghost tried once before to incarnate by sucking the souls of the Sathraists huddled in the besieged chapel. It was originally attracted to the baron by his direct psychic connection to Otherspace during the Sathra Effect, and began to stalk him, waiting for its chance. The tense, cabin-fever days of the chapel siege provided the perfect opportunity. Following a Sathraist rite which inadvertently allowed it psychic congress with the chapel defenders, it began to stoke the fires of the Sathraists’ worst emotions. Had the siege ended earlier, its task would perhaps have ended in failure, but the captive audience could not escape its psychic ministrations. Over the course of days and weeks, it slowly drained all of their souls.

But even with this energy, it only achieved a half-existence, now bound enough to the material world to be trapped in the vicinity of the chapel. It must now wait for the arrival of new victims to fuel its final descent into matter.

## Powers

**Barring portals:** Long association with the chapel allows the ghost to affect parts of it telekinetically. It has learned how to bar portals (doors and windows) so they may not be opened by any force — only destroying the physical doors will open the portals. However, all doors leading outside are reinforced to defend against a siege — consider them to have 15 armor and 15 Vitality. The ghost will allow doors to open and admit new “guests,” but will swiftly close them before anyone can exit.

**Soul Eating:** The ghost can drain the Wyrld of non-psychics who are repressing emotions. Over the course of the drama, the gamemaster should enforce Remaining Calm rolls (p. 94 in the **Fading Suns** rulebook); when a character SUCCEEDS in such a roll, the ghost will begin draining the character’s Wyrld, one point per turn. Once all Wyrld points are gone, the character will begin losing Vitality. Once Vitality is gone, the character is dead. The ghost needs a total of 30 Wyrld points and/or Vitality levels to achieve its goal: incarnation (see below).

This soul eating affect cannot be resisted except by theurgic means or by physically ACTING on emotions: If the character is angry at someone, he must strike that person; simply yelling at him is not good enough as far as the ghost is concerned. Thus, characters may be driven to violence and even murder to resist the ghost. Only when they repress such behaviors can it attempt to feed.

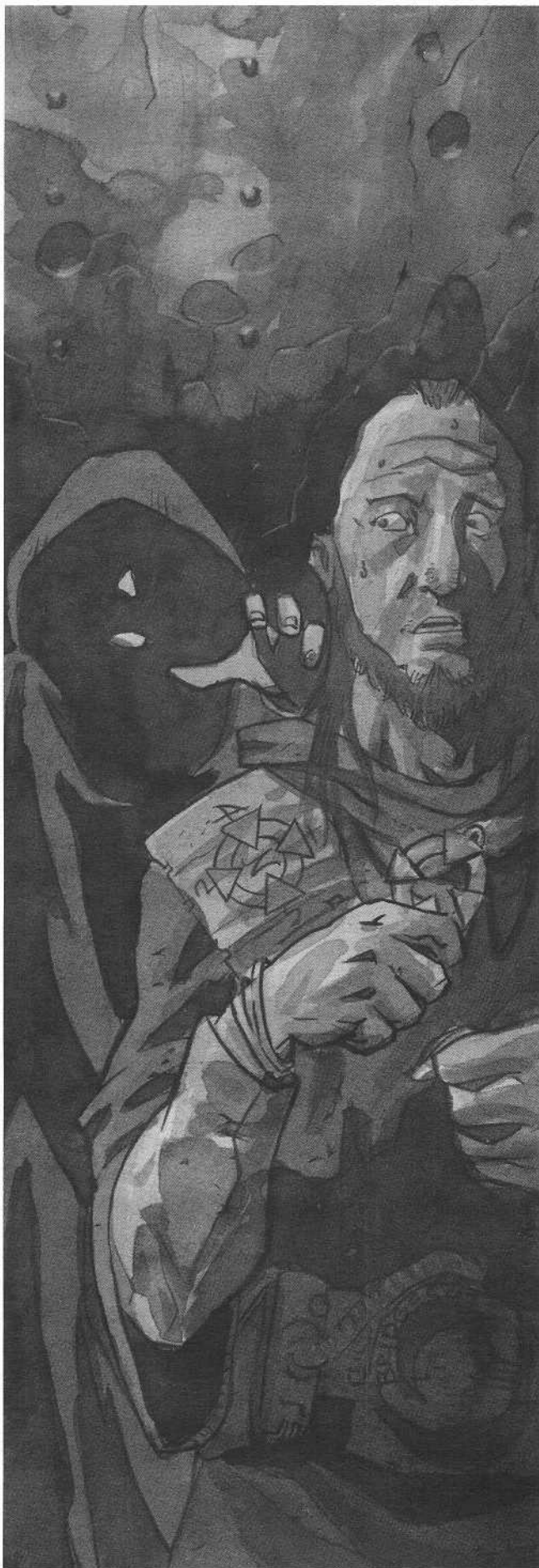
In addition, the ghost feeds on a character’s self-deception (“I am the leader here,” “I’m not good enough,” “My plot against the Emperor can’t fail,” or “I don’t believe in ghosts”). It uses the ego’s repression of psychic elements to gain access to a soul. Note that this does not include someone who is deliberately deceiving others, such as trying to hide his identity.

Once a character begins losing Wyrld, it will not at first be obvious what is happening to him. He will simply begin to feel drained and know that his psychic energy is lessening. Only when the ghost has attained 10 Wyrld points (see below) will it become visible.

**Awakening Urge:** Psychics will have a hard time keeping their dark halves in check with the ghost around. It can possess and enhance any Dark Twin. Once someone’s Urge has been awakened, it cannot be forcibly put back to sleep (Wyrld points will not halt it and the Urge gains +8 on its Passion + Impress roll to resist its host). In addition, it is easier to gain more Urge levels: all rolls to resist gaining Urge suffer a -4 penalty. Thus, if a psychic in the chapel were to commit murder, she would subtract four from her goal for her Passion + Focus roll. (See p. 140 of the **Fading Suns** rulebook.)

Once a character’s Urge is awakened, the ghost can begin feeding on that character. Its preferred targets will thus be psychics.





**Theurgic Weakness:** All theurgy rites which affect demons or servants of evil or darkness (Dispersal of Darkness, Exorcism, etc.) are effective against the ghost. It cannot effect a character's Hubris.

**Incarnation:** Once the ghost has gained 10 Wyrd points, its ghostly body will appear at times, an apparition of terror. Psychics will see it as a more malevolent version of themselves. Theurgists will perceive a fellow monk whose face is ever-hidden in the shadows of his cowl. Non-occultists will see the monster it is — a Gargoylelike being, never wholly seen, but terrify to behold.

Once it has gained 30 Wyrd points, it becomes real, taking a form relevant to its last victim: If its last victim was a psychic, it will look like him. If it was a theurgist, it will be the black monk with no face. If it was a non-occultist, it will be a four-legged doglike monster with scales and tusks. Regardless of the form it takes, it will have the following traits:

**Body:** Strength 15, Dexterity 9, Endurance 12

**Mind:** Wits 7, Perception 5, Tech 9

**Spirit:** Extrovert 9, Introvert 1, Passion 9, Calm 1, Ego 10, Faith 0, Human 1, Alien 9

**Natural skills:** All rated at 7

**Learned skills:** Focus 9, Lore (Ur) 9, Stoic Body 6, Stoic Mind 9

**Occult:** Psi 9, Urge 1

**Powers:** FarHand (all powers), Psyche (all powers)

**Wyrd:** 30

**Weapons:** In human form, it has a killer punch (5 DMG); in gargoyle form, it uses tusks (5 DMG). In all forms, it can pick up and use weapons.

**Armor:** 5 + 5d (skin in human form, scales in true form)

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

**Note:** Once it is incarnated, it can be killed like any living creature, after which it will not haunt anyone ever again.

It does not remember things or events from its previous existence, only desires and images. Once it is material, it will escape the chapel and travel the Known Worlds seeking ancient ruins it once knew in an attempt to awaken its memories. If necessary, it will force any pilot in the chapel to fly the *Chameleon* to reach its destinations.

If by dawn it has not achieved its goal of 30 Wyrd points, it will fade away forever, having completely used up the last of its intention. However, if it gains at least 20 points by dawn, it will fade but still survive. It can no longer affect anyone in the chapel — but it can affect anyone who experiences the Sathra Effect in the *Chameleon*. It becomes dormant but can awaken again if someone is foolish enough to pilot the haunted ship through a jumpgate (unless the damper is re-enabled).

# Drama

The factions listed above will only try to invade the chapel on the night of the Vau new year. If the characters don't make it there by then, the fragment may be gone or the ghost may have slain everyone and taken the ship.

If they do make it there that night, then they will be trapped inside the chapel with hostile factions, fighting over valuable lore and fending off an entity from another epoch. Their only rewards are a fragment of lost lore (valuable on the occult market, but banned by the Inquisition), a starship (a potential trap if the ghost has not been destroyed) and the potential to make new allies out of their fellow chapel prisoners.

Below is a suggested table for the night of festivities:

## Timetable

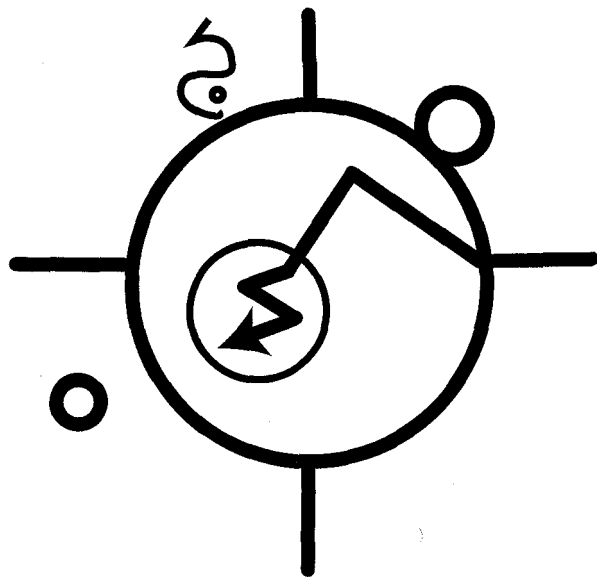
8:30 p.m.	Sundown
9:15 p.m.	Jyx arrives
9:30 p.m.	The Favyana arrive
11:00 p.m.	Philamon arrives
6:00 am	Sunrise

The gamemaster should keep the clock running during the drama, constantly reminding characters that time is passing — even if it may seem interminably slow at times.

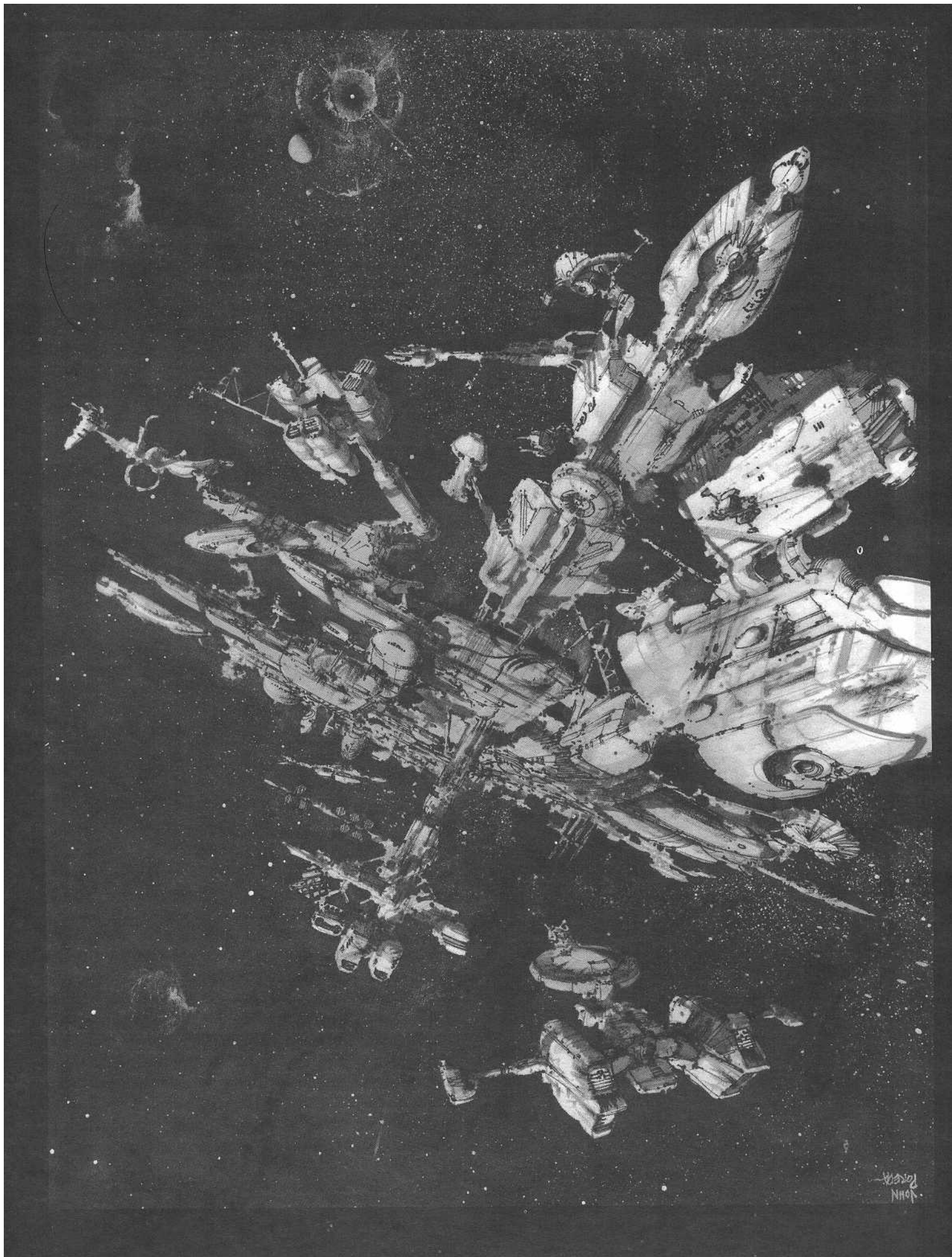
What if the characters do not arrive until after the other factions have had their night? There are other options available:

**Creature on the Loose:** The ghost has become fully real, feeding off and killing Flavio and Jyx, and it now plots to leave the planet. He forced the survivors (Philamon and the young Favyana) to do his bidding, and is now preparing the starship for launch. The one problem: he needs a pilot. Toward that end, he possesses one of the young Favyana to bring a pilot to the chapel under the pretense of treasure hunting.

**Empty Vault:** The characters arrive to find everyone dead. There is no sign or clue of the ghost. Waiting for them is a free starship, with seemingly no strings attached. The problem comes when they fly it through a jumpgate, experiencing the Sathra Effect and awakening the ghost again. It will begin to stalk and feed from them as they make their way towards their destination.



The Stellar Apocryphon



John  
Rosen

# Bazaars of the Known Worlds

## Barter

by Sam Chupp

*Lady Talia stood with both hands on her hips, trying to make the Portmaster see reason with every ounce of nobility she could muster. "You're telling me that a crate of incredibly rare Ur-Obun ceremonial shawls has magically vanished? Even though I inspected the freight myself prior to departure from Byzantium Secundus?"*

*The little man smiled the whole while, nodding softly, but his voice remained the same monotone. "If you would like to file a lost freight claim, then I will be glad to give you a map to the fourth industrial quadrant..."*

*Talia squinted at him. "That's Aftships, near Bad Air — the other side of the station! Those shawls are priceless! I want to speak to your lord, or dean, or whatever it is you have."*

*"The dean will not see customers, Most Respected Lady of Hawkwood."*

*Talia strode away in anger and frustration. Three hours later, having braved the trip to Bad Air with her bodyguard, Wiley, she found her companions clustered around a table in Big Under, the sprawling restaurant.*

*"Before you tell us all about your day, Talia, I have to show you this..." Margritte said, reaching into her pack and withdrawing a square meter of precious alien-woven silk — an Ur-Obun shawl. "Don't you just love Ur-Obun craftsmanship? I got this on sale at the Exchange at half what you bought them for on Byx II. Isn't it precious?"*

*Wiley saw Talia's humiliation. He reached over and set in front of her a very strong Decados-brewed whiskey named Burn. "There you go, ma'am. Welcome to Barter."*

Barter is a colossal, jump-capable starship graveyard that is owned and operated by the Scravers Guild. At first, the Scravers salvaging old wrecks thought only to save on fuel and crew by welding, lashing, and magna-grappling salvaged ships together. Then, over time, it became clear that the old starships could be worth more for their interior space than their former purposes. A few enterprising

Scravers started holding impromptu markets within some of the more atmosphere-worthy craft, shuttling yokels up and down for a minimal fee. Vice dens were also easy to set up, as the orbiting Sargasso of ruined vessels was outside direct Church influence. It became known that if you wanted to get real bargains or have a really interesting time, you'd go up and barter with the Scravers. After a while, the concept stuck, and Barter was born. Now, most of the League guilds have a piece of the action, muscling in on the Scravers, who were over their heads trying to pilot a decrepit junkpile in space all by themselves.

## History

Scravers will tell you that Barter has been around since the Second Republic, but anyone with any sense knows that this is unlikely. Although the truth is lost, it is most likely that Barter began (as the martial nature of the Foreships will attest) as a military salvage effort organized in Vladimir's time and has since picked up other starships much like a sea creature picks up parasites.

Although the Church has railed against the Scravers, nothing substantive has been done about Barter. This is chiefly because it is never in one place for long enough to truly become a "social hazard." It's true that its arrival brings the opportunity for temptations of the mind, body and spirit as it is quite literally a mobile black market. The fact that it makes certain to salve the local nobility's egos with treasures and delicacies, and the constant argument of, "Barter will be gone in a month or so..." does much to assuage the Church, even the Avestites. Only the most conservative call for Barter to be shut down and disintegrated completely. The wisest know that if Barter didn't exist, it would probably need to be invented — and that a Barter II would probably materialize shortly after the first Barter was destroyed.

Barter itself is like a tiny war-torn country in space. There have been three Barter Wars — full-scale engagements between internal factions formed along purely economic lines. During these major conflicts, merchants-



## Barter's Traits

Taken collectively, Barter is essentially a monstrously huge starship. Here are its traits (using the starship rules given in **Forbidden Lore: Technology**).

**Builder:** Scravers guild

**Tech Level:** Varies (TL 4 to TL 7)

**Length:** Approx. 500 km

**Width:** Approx. 350 km

**Crew:** 150

**Passengers:** Unknown — potentially thousands

**Cargo:** Hundreds of thousands of metric tons

**Speed:** 10% of light speed (8 days to jumpgate)

**Jumps:** 3

**Supplies:** 3 months

**Sensors:** 10 (Radar 5, Laser Radar 5, Densometer 5, EMS 8, and Neutrinos 10 — though not all of these sensors are necessarily coordinated)

**Weaponry:**

Foreships: Med Blasters x10

Good Air (starboard): Gatling Blasters turrets x2, Hvy Lasers x4, Lt Lasers x8

Bad Air (port): Lt Lasers x7, Lt Blasters x5 (more apt to fire into Barter than at other ships)

Aftships: Med Blaster turrets x5

Docking Ring: Gatling Blasters x2

Jumpdrive Pylon: Hvy Meson Cannon turret

**Energy Shields:** Good Air employs a standard Ambrim generator under the control of the Scravers, who will activate it for a nominal fee during times of distress. This usually provokes a massive fund-raising effort on the part of the nobles and wealthy merchants of Good Air.

**Maneuvering:** Barter maneuvers like a pregnant space whale in labor. It can barely turn on a planetary diameter, much less a firebird. -6 penalty.

**Cost:** Depending on who you ask, it's either priceless or worthless. Or both.

turned-soldiers roamed from corridor to corridor, and explosive decompression was the favorite execution and clean-up method. Firefights on Barter last two or three exchanges in most cases, so it wasn't long before projectile weapons were universally banned. Now only the Commerce Guards have guns, and even they are allowed few rounds. The Third Barter War was fought almost entirely hand-to-hand, face-to-face; in some cases, blood filled the corridors several inches deep. Because these wars are rooted in commercial conflicts, they are rarely ever solvable for long — no lasting peace will ever take hold of Barter because greed is the chief rule of law.

Technically, the Scravers Guild governs Barter — if anyone could really be said to govern it. They decide when to start the massive engines that move the thing, as well as Barter's next destination. They also control the Com-

merce Guards, supplied by the Muster, who, for a fee, provides security for merchants. Furthermore they have mandated by fiat the power to cut anyone free from Barter and will attack anyone latching on without permission.

Any pirates bold enough to attack the largest semi-operable collection of old warships in the Known Worlds quickly discover that, due to its immense size and mish-mash collection of mostly operable gunnery, Barter is quite capable of shrugging off most attacks (even if its defense is largely uncoordinated). Most of the time, however, pirates do not attack Barter, since it is seen as the place of choice to off-load juicy valuables to no-questions-asked customers.

## Description

Barter looks like a massive starship accident in progress, frozen in time by every conceivable attachment mechanism in the Known Worlds, with sleek military craft bunched at one end and large jumpdrives on a pylon jutting out perpendicular from it. Over time, the Scravers have created and enforced strict codes as to how and where ships may be attached. Barter grows along a two-dimensional plane, leaving the third dimension for the jumpdrive pylon.

There are two important directions to consider in Barter topography. "Foreships" refers to the sleek military craft (now aging and pitted, but still somewhat viable) which formed the core from which the rest of Barter grew. "Aftships" is the direction away from Foreships (towards or past the drive pylon).

In addition to direction, the quality of air creates distinctions. Good Air refers to the rich parts of Barter, while Bad Air refers the poor parts. Bad Air can quickly become No Air, a quality no one is overly fond of. In general, Good Air is located closest to the massive scrubber assemblies to starboard of Barter, and Bad Air is to port.

At the very center is the Barter Port Ring. This is where the majority of freighters come to load and off-load. There are no fancy docking pylons or tractor beam assists here; trained Charioteer pilots must fly out to your craft and guide the ships in themselves — for a fee, of course. No fee, no spacedock.

Transportation between nodes of Barter (what the Scravers call the vessels that are lashed together) is done by any number of conveyances: from walks through sheer vacuum in a pressure suit, to a casual stroll through a well-lit fresh-air walkway, to conveyor belts. Of course, the most glamorous passage is by personal shuttlecraft, and the most publicly-used transport is a high-speed magna-train that runs along all three axes and has as its nexus the Docking Ring.

Do not let this convince you that Barter is an organized, orderly place. For the most part the only order imposed is that generated for commercial reasons. Each node is completely different — each has wildly changing variables such as lighting, gravity, accessibility and space. One

moment you are crowded into a cramped frigate-hulk, and the next you find yourself alone in a vast warehouse of an old bulk freighter.

## Denizens

A truly cosmopolitan place, Barter is nothing if not diverse. You are just as likely to see an alien in the corridors as you are a humanoid. And, because each node is like a country unto itself, the laws, customs and etiquette varies wildly. There are nodes which harbor psychics, cyberfolk and some say even Antinomists (although this has yet to be proven). Everyone, however, is out to earn their breathing money.

There are many nobles who have come to live on Barter; it is a favorite of the more free-thinking and adventuresome al-Malik. Most of the rest of the denizens of Barter are either Scravers or freetrading merchants, or in the "services" industry — prostitutes, soldiers, slaves, and dockhands.

The Scravers act as if they are gods here. They are ruled from within by a complex hierarchy based on profitability; their dean technically controls the whole of Barter. The Dean's Council is the organization that decides upon the Progress of Barter — what systems it will visit and when. They also decide how long they should stay in any particular area. Starship combat or extremely delicate

maneuvers are watched over by Captain Amadeus Anduin, a former Charioteer who is perhaps the only starship pilot to log a majority of hours behind the controls of the largest contiguous starship in the Known Worlds.

## Commodities Bought and Sold

Almost anyone on Barter can find a place to sleep — fractional gravity being just as comfortable as any bed. What costs most is breathing and eating. Air to the nodes is sold exclusively by the Scravers; the better the air quality, the more expensive the price. Food is either shipped to Barter or grown in one of the agriculturally-adapted nodes — it's often much cheaper to have food shipped in than to grow it, although if need be, Barter could survive without support for up to three months.

Although it's true that anything can be had for a price, finding it for sale is another story altogether. Many folk make their living as Commerce Guides, leading people to "bargains" pre-selected by merchants. Many professional guides will bring you straight to places where you can buy all kinds of items, from a woman's tender mercies to a Shantor headdress.



## Drama

**Maximum Danger:** In Bad Air there is a node, an old hulking ice-freighter called Maximus, which serves as a coliseum of sorts. Here animals from all over the Known Worlds are brought for games, as well as single combat between gladiators (serfs owned by the noble owner of the ship). The characters — through a bar room conflict — find themselves at odds with one of the gladiators and are soon drafted against their will into the gladiatorial arena. Little do they know that there is a secret cabal of gladiators who are trying to break free and destroy Maximus once and for all by releasing the magna-grapples that hold it to the rest of Barter.

**Seeds of Destruction:** There's a lovely set of shops in Good Air in an open atrium where the air is surprisingly fresh. Closer examination reveals that each shop in this little node-mall seems to have something to do with herbs, plants or vegetables. The shopkeepers always seem happy and are eager to give away samples of their wares. The secret behind the shops is that they are all fronts for Symbiot sympathizers, who are trying to infect the whole of Barter through this one, newly-connected node. What may tip the characters off is the beautiful green frond partly hidden, but unfurled into space from the side of the node — clearly a forbidden Rebreather, possibly visible to those in the abandoned cargo section of the adjacent node (an old Swellingpug freighter).

**Harry's:** In Foreships there is a bar called Harry's — a simple name, but run by a Vorox named — you guessed it — Harry. Harry is obsessed with old Urthish culture and always has magic lantern shows playing 24-hours a day. Since his node is centrally located and generally easy to get to, not far from a magna-train station and at the border between Good Air and Bad Air, Harry hears quite a lot which he is willing to relate to others for a price. He has the only functional bartending golem on the station, of which he is extremely proud, named Symm. Symm has a chip that allows him to play the strange old Urthish keyboard-instrument that is stuck in one corner of the bar. Harry's place seems to attract adventure, and this is a good place for many stories based on Barter to begin — the characters overhear a conversation, or Symm spills a drink on them, or perhaps two young nobles challenge them to a friendly game of cards.

**Illegal Entry:** A noble hires the characters and gets them to agree to pilot an old freighter out to Aftships on Barter and attach it, linking it in to the rest of the conglomeration. But the characters face many challenges: Scravers who want to blast them into space for not first gaining permission to latch, interested merchants wondering what they're selling (and climbing through their craft investigating everything). Not to mention the first harrowing Jump out-system, in which they get to see whether Barter will take them along or not.



# The Istakhr Market

By Rustin Quaide

*"To see the Istakhr Market once is to die happy. To see it twice is an admission that the market is the afterlife," pined the blind revolutionary poet, Ashraf Ibn Shunnar, sitting among the straw of his Byzantium Secundus prison.*

*"You have never been to Leagueheim," remarked his companion, Gerald, awaiting sentencing himself for his part in a counterfeiting operation.*

*"I have," replied Ashraf, "and her market is too clean and sanitized for me. She is the love too good for you, who scorns you for your bad fashion sense. The Istakhr Market is your mother — she will take you back no matter what condition you are in, prince or beggar. She is life itself."*

Gerald scratched his head. *"You make it sound like a religious thing."*

*"Ah, but that is the secret — she is!" Ashraf exclaimed. "When I die, I want my body burned by the Sanitation Guild on Beggars Square, within the Istakhr Market. The urn will be purchased in the New Market, of bright gold craft. My ashes will be interred by the Deadshop, near the Thieves Zone. Then a market guide, one of the Nudama, will run about the Old Market, sprinkling my ashes on the Street of Dreams, among those places where my heart rests, and then barter the urn to old Ahmed the Storyteller, who runs a small operation north of Healing Street. Do not give him the urn. That would be an insult. Barter and haggle until my old friend is happy with the price. Then my spirit will be at peace, scattered among the thriving population of the market, until the west wind, the Wind of Memories, takes up my ashes, dropping them on further tales and adventures within the Market's beloved embrace."*

On Istakhr, it is a compliment when a native says, "You know the market." The Istakhr Market, ever changing, is labyrinthine in the extreme, taking up more than a third of the city of Samarkand, winding over 18 kilometers in length. Over 800,000 people and aliens make up the thriving city within the city. The Market Tax enriches the al-Malik, helping them to maintain their status as one of the five Royal Houses of the Known Worlds. Their power, it is said, is directly tied to the Istakhr Market. Although this is perhaps an exaggeration, the house's history is certainly connected to the fortunes of the market. Goods within the market include techware of all kinds, medicine, weaponry, clothing, currency exchange, food, slaves (human and otherwise), animals, gems, rare goods and an assorted number of local and off-world services. Anything can be purchased in the market; it is merely a matter of making the right contacts.

Each market zone has its own folk customs, power groups and laws; the use of a native guide, a Nudama, is extremely useful, unless one has a friend with market savvy and familiarity. Unfortunately, as with any large gathering, undesirable elements collect to prey on the unsophisticated. Certain sections of the market are safe,

while others, less policed, fall victim to crime. The eyes of the Market Police, the Mutasih, are everywhere. As the secret police of the al-Malik, they have a heavy presence in the Istakhr Market.

## History

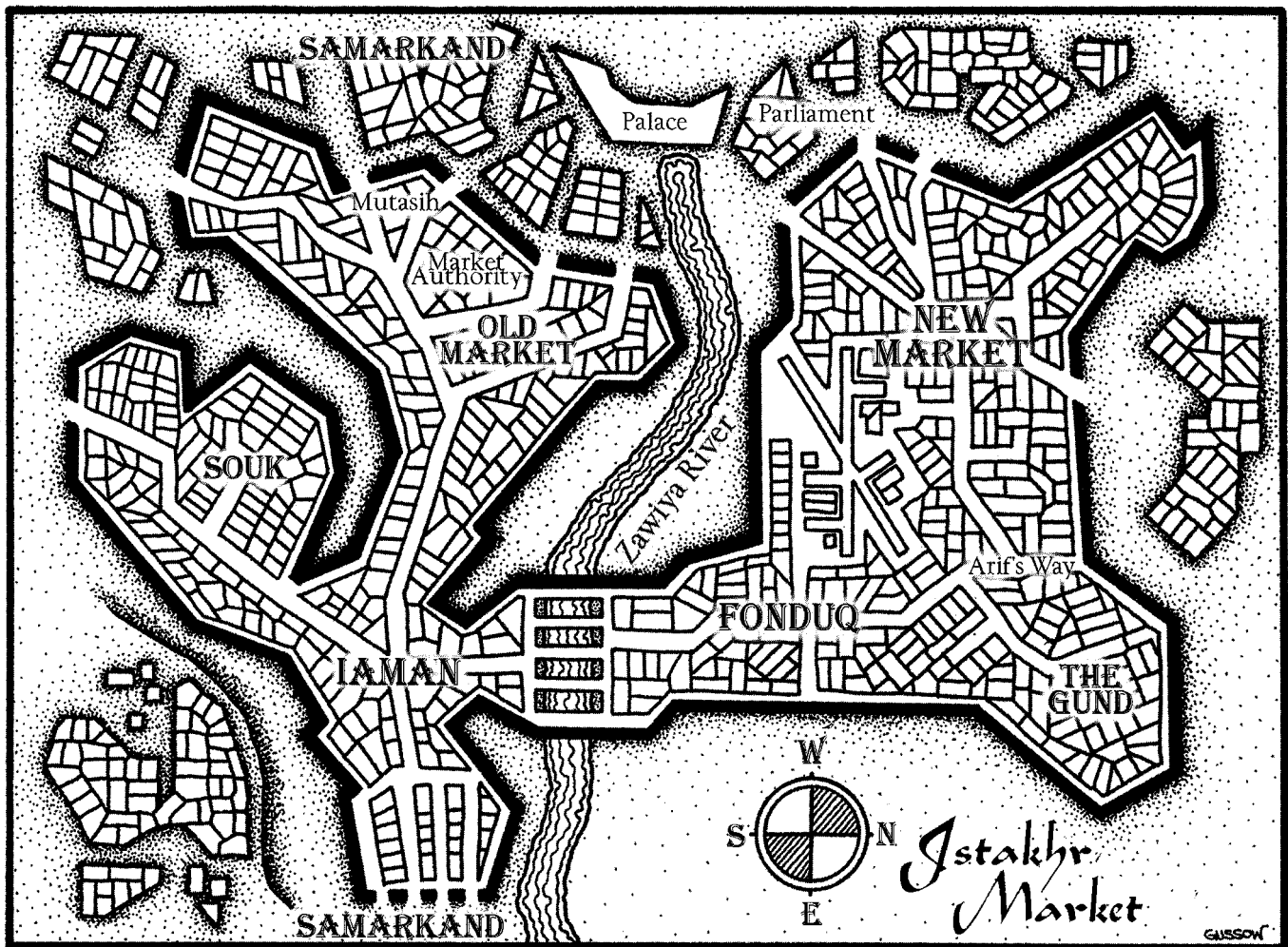
Samarkand rose around the Istakhr Market, a suitor prizing the jewel, for the market itself is older than the city. Oral tradition states that the market was created during the initial settlement of Istakhr. Clan warfare marred the early settlements of the world, and when the first city of Tyre was destroyed (2847), the population scattered. Lake Medina, fed by subterranean rivers, was an oasis on the borders of the Afid Desert, where the northern, more cultivated people of Najran would meet the desert nomads to barter goods.

Within a short time, a large marketplace was in existence, and clan Hashin seized the area, imposing a tax on the bartered and sold goods. Guarding the region from their rivals, the Hashin began the permanent construction of Samarkand city, originally little more than a fortress to contain the market. Off-world corporations and industries were drawn to Samarkand. When Arif al-Malik marched on the market, it was already famous throughout the Known Worlds, containing a population of over one million who visited or sold in the market daily. The market had already enveloped Lake Medina, and Samarkand grew into a shimmering metropolis. Eventually falling into al-Malik hands, the market enriched that house throughout the Second Republic era, although it did decline somewhat in this period. Under the house's rule, the market would grow to encompass almost half of Samarkand.

During the Second Republic, credit and high-tech commerce replaced bartering and haggling, yet the Istakhr Market drew many tourists for its "old fashioned" charm. During this time, Lake Medina disappeared altogether, filled in by the city. The Istakhr Market became home to many refugees fleeing the Fall of the Second Republic, including small corporations and technical experts, who added their sophistication and skills to the Samarkand market economy. As technological knowledge declined, bartering and open market trading increased. Rahimat al-Malik seized Istakhr in 4460, returning the planet and its market permanently to the al-Malik fold. Granting favorable selling and warehouse space to his guild allies, Rahimat infused the market with renewed vitality. Al-Malik power and wealth is directly connected to the teeming bazaars, shops, warehouses, guild fronts, smugglers and barterers who make the market their home. Twice, depressions in the market have ignited rumors of revolution in the house, and the al-Malik have often borrowed heavily to keep the market afloat during economic recessions.

Tahir Majnun al-Malik "The Doomed" provided necessary market reforms. The many cumbersome policing





agencies were united into one organization, the Mutasih, which became the al-Malik secret police. Tahir centralized currency exchange and rates in the hands of the Market Authority, although illegal exchanges still continue. His reforms long outlasted his reign.

The market suffered a slight recession during the Symbiot Wars, but made a full recovery once Alexis seized the throne. Refugees from the Symbiot worlds have infused new blood into the market, and the Emperor's peace has proved very profitable.

## Description

Once again booming after the Emperor Wars, the Istakhr Market has shifted its internal geography many times. The Old Market, once its heart, now belongs to the clothing and dream merchants, while the New Market houses the League and al-Malik-owned wares and enterprises. Generally, the Old Market barter in local customs, storytellers, desires and dreams, while the New Market employs a swifter business dynamic where currency and value quickly change hands.

There are also market factions; the Shunnar favor the local merchants and planetary families, and take the desert eagle as their symbol. Their rivals, the Jibril, favor

the League, and take a winged man as their insignia. Lesser parties compose the Mukhtar (al-Malik supporters), the Ubaid (a strange sect which professes a system based off market and economic principles), the Zadornin (Thieves Guild) and Nadim (local workers). These parties feud constantly, often in armed clashes. Recently, the Ubaid and Nadim had a pitched battle which lasted two days, begun over the display of certain items near Nadim territory. The Mutasih finally broke it up, but these market quarrels are the daily gossip of the market dwellers. Each faction pledges loyalty to the al-Malik, albeit for different reasons (the Nadim like the house's alleged Republic leanings, while the Ubaid believe the al-Malik are the defenders of the market).

The market is heavily patrolled by the Mutasih. The open police are identified by their red and blue uniforms, but the majority of the Mutasih are hidden. Their open headquarters is in the Old Market in the Administration Building, but they operate in every zone. It is through the Mutasih that the al-Malik keep control in the market, preventing riots, coup attempts and house enemies from plotting. The uniformed Mutasih, the Masha'ili, carry assault rifles and wear leather armor (captains sometimes have synth silk).

# The Zones

Six broad zones define the market. In every zone, Nudama sell their services to guide unfamiliar visitors through the intricacies of the market. Since tent cities and avenues can change overnight, this is a useful service. They have their own guild and code of honor. Beggars are found throughout much of the Istakhr Market, as are thieves and confidence tricksters.

## The Souk

The Souk is a labyrinth of covered lanes and shops. Filled with local guild shops selling jewelry, clothing, tools and household products, the stores have open fronts with large interiors, covered with orange brick roofs. The *amin*, or shop owners, inspect the quality of their apprentices' crafts. This zone also houses large food and equipment warehouses, and is the home of the Nadim, or Workers Party. The most democratic of the market's factions, the Nadim has recently replaced a corrupt leader with a reformer, Bashira. Nadimites are the most zealous supporters of the old Republican ideals. Bashira lead her party into a more militant stance, breaking slave shops and openly clashing with their enemies. The Souk is prey to petty crime, but is well patrolled by the Nadim and Mutasih.

Part of the Souk is a tent city. Here desert nomads sell their wares, everything from recovered tech to healing balms.

## The Old Market

Once the heart of the Istakhr Market, this district now houses Istakhr merchant families in huge buildings. Patrolled by the Shunnar, it has undergone recent renovation. Anything can be found here, but it is the medicine shops, children's toys and dream hawkers that give the old zone its flavor. The Children's Bazaar is the largest in the Known Worlds, and Dream Street sells hallucinogenic cakes, foods and drinks. Each street in this zone is devoted to a theme, so there is a Street of Health (Medicine), a Street of Perfumes, etc.. The Administrative Building holds the headquarters of the Mutasih.

The Shunnar represent the Istakhr merchant interests, and claim Arif al-Malik as their founder. Their rivals are the Jibril from New Market. The competition takes on a visibly friendly air, with pageant rivalries and charity one-up-manships, but underneath there is a dark war of deep-rooted conflict.

## Iaman Market

A zone mainly known for food, local and otherworldly produce, it is also infested with cheap bars, prostitution, open thievery and illegal shipments and sales. It is unsafe to travel alone at night. During the day, the police often make sweeps through the area. Home of the Ubaid, a market sect which believes in "pan-capitalism," a largely discredited Diasporan economic philosophy, they have made the zone slightly safer in the daylight hours. Generally honest, they set up in the rundown zone

to prove their economic theories, and have had some success.

## Fonduq

The strip belongs to the Thieves Guild, the Zadornin. Local transportation and tech is sold here, and many of the foreign/alien "cities" are located in this zone. Gambling, begging and numerous off-world restaurants give this zone its flavor. Mindful of their reputation, the Zadornin patrol the area, so it is safe during the day. At night, it is best to be cautious. Illegal trafficking and slave "fronts" are found here.

## The Gund

Controlled by pro al-Malik native and foreign entrepreneurs, weaponry of every kind can be found here, as well as off-world flights (it is home to the largest starport on the planet), mercenary hiring, and guard recruitment. The Mukhtar keep the zone well patrolled, although petty thievery goes on in the border zones. Separating the Gund from the New Market is Arif's Way, a public thoroughfare where the al-Malik make their pronouncements. Public floggings and executions occur here. Before the thoroughfare is a permanent "carpet city," where locals sell everything from refreshments and jewelry to information.

## The New Market

Here the Merchant League holds large buildings displaying its services and products. This is the safest and best patrolled zone in the market. All Merchant League products and services are for sale here, from Charioteer pilots to Chainer slaves. Each of the guilds has its own building. Jewelers, love merchants, temp services, entertainers, artists and diggers (the local Interment Guild) also center their services here, and the Jibril are the richest market faction. Well sanitized, it is also the least lively section of the Istakhr Market. Al-Malik-owned enterprises are found here as well.

## Denizens

### Arif Ablendan, "The Blind Storyteller"

**Race:** Human

**Quote:** "You interrupt my story to ask where certain illegal activities take place in the great market of spotless Istakhr, Queen of Worlds? You sully our market and the good name of the Duke when you blatantly ask such things as an ignorant child. Return in an hour's time with compensation for an old man's memory and I will barter with you in this, a day of my undeserved old age, when I should have sons to protect me from the ignorant questions of off-worlders."

**Description:** An old man with a white beard, dressed in the traditional desert attire of the Istakhr nomads, Arif Ablendan is blind. He sits on a carpet in the Souk zone, telling traditional Istakhr tales. A young grandson, Judar, helps him with money transactions and negotiations, which take place in the family tent. Arif grew up in the harsh Istakhr deserts, but took to the Istakhr Market as a



young man and never left. A successful thief, his knowledge of the market was so great that he was approached by the Mutasih. Unknown to all but a few, he is a member of the secret police, and they pay handsomely for his knowledge of the market. "Not a coin drops in the market that Arif Ablendan does not hear of it," is a market saying.

**Body:** Strength 3, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

**Mind:** Wits 9, Perception 10 (0 for sight), Tech 4

**Spirit:** Extrovert 3, Introvert 5, Passion 2, Calm 5, Faith 3, Ego 7, Human 7, Alien 2

**Natural skills:** Charm 8; Impress 6, Melee 4, Observe 8, Sneak 5

**Learned skills:** Inquiry 8, Knavery 7, Performance 9, Sleight of Hand 5, Debate 7, Streetwise 10

**Wyr:** 4

**Equipment:** Whisper Pin

**Weapons:** Palm Laser, Knife

**Vitality:** -12/-10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

## Things

### Eyes of Tarif

TL 7

**Cost:** 2 Benefice/500 firebirds

These spherical eye pads allow the viewer to see the vibrational trails of objects. A human walking through the market may leave an individual blue trail, while an urn may leave a trail of dull red. The Eyes must first "lock onto" the object before its trail can be discerned; this involves staring at the object for five seconds while the nanocomputer reads its energy signature. Observing a busy crowd will only produce a pandemonium of colors, while concentrating on an individual's aura will allow the viewer to follow a trail of distinct marks.

Using the Eye can be a skill in itself, for especially adept Eye users can follow some objects by locking onto associated objects, such as the true target's recently worn scarf

or favored knife. This requires opening the Eye's iris fully, allowing for a plethora of energy signatures — and following one from the many can be an impossible task. Roll Perception + Eye of Tarif Use skill, negatively modified by the gamemaster depending on how old the trail is or how obscure the connection: a day-old trail may be a Herculean task, while tracking a dog by locking onto its leash may be only Hard. The trails usually fade completely after a day.

Initially sold as novelty items by Tarok Ibn Sadiq, a former Scraver, these have proved useful in tracking people down. Based off a poorly understood Second Republic visual/vibratory energy converter, each eye only lasts for about one day before its crystal core burns out for good. The expense of replacing it is more than the cost of buying a new Eye (imported from Leagueheim).

The Mutasih have been able to make goggles based off of this technology which run for a week. They loathe sharing this secret, however. (Cost: 5 Benefice/1000 firebirds)

## Drama

**The Plague Boat:** A shipment carrying banned but valuable Symbiot goods from Stigmata is scheduled for the Fonduq zone. Rakin Ibn Farran, a local thief overlord, is the contact. Rakin's rival, Madul Amon, found out about the incoming shipment and passed the information to the Mutasih. The players are "persuaded" to aid the Mutasih.

Searching for Madul in the Fonduq zone, they find him in the Dreaming Nomad restaurant, dead from a gunshot wound, his assailant having escaped. He entered the eatery with his girlfriend, Halah, who is also missing. Asking around, the characters can discover that she used to work in the Old Market, on the Street of Dreams, and she is also being sought by Rakin's men. If the characters find her, she will reveal that Madul's informants told him that the Symbiot shipment is due to arrive at midnight, at an old Scraver warehouse in the Fonduq. If the Mutasih are informed in time, the ship will be destroyed before it can land in the market. If the characters and the Mutasih arrive at midnight instead, a battle with Rakin's men will ensue.

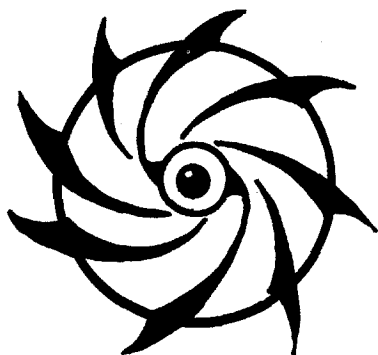
The shipment contains indigenous mice-like creatures from the Symbiot homeworld. Their purpose remains unknown, but it is most probably to spy out Istakhr and spread the Symbiot taint.

**Plot Against Empire:** The death of a Decados noble, Lord Harrin Decados, is laid at the door of the Hawkwood Ambassador. News of the crime is kept silent, due to the gravity of the situation. The Hawkwood Ambassador, Sir Geoffrey, claims he is innocent, but his ceremonial dagger was plunged into the Decados lord's heart. Known to be bitter rivals, there was no love lost between the two men. Hired by either house, the players must seek the truth.

One of the Mutasih investigators states that the dagger could be a forgery. Hiring a Nudama, she leads them to the master forger, Taysir Abd Riyad, who at first denies any



knowledge of forging the knife. If pressed with threats or pricey bribes, he relents, stating that he made the knife for a simple dock worker, perhaps one of the Nadim. Investigating the Nadim, their leader, Bashira, says that there is a dangerous splinter group, dedicated to creating a Third Republic. Their leader is one Zetes. Tracking him down leads to a struggle with Zetes's followers. They foolishly hoped that the incident would renew the war between the great houses, eventually allowing the Emperor to be replaced by a Third Republic.



The Mutasih

## Mutasih Suggested Traits

The ranks of the al-Malik secret police are filled with people from all classes, from house knights to beggars. It provides one of the few means of legitimate advancement for the more unsavory members of society — although these recruits are watched carefully by their noble patrons, with draconian punishments (from severed limbs to severed heads) delivered to those who dissappoint their new employers.

**Characteristics:** Dexterity, Perception, Wits

**Natural skills:** Charm, Observe

**Learned skills:** Inquiry, Lore (Istakhr Market), Streetwise

**Blessings:** Shrewd (+2 Wits against attempts to fast-talk)

**Curses:** Possessive (-2 Calm when cut out of the action)

**Benefices:** Householder (al-Malik, 1 pt), Gossip Network (1 pt), Rank (1 = Recruit, 3 = Agent, 5 = Field Agent, 8 = Supervisor, 11 = Spy Master), Secrets



# WEIRD PLACES

## Stella Incognita

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