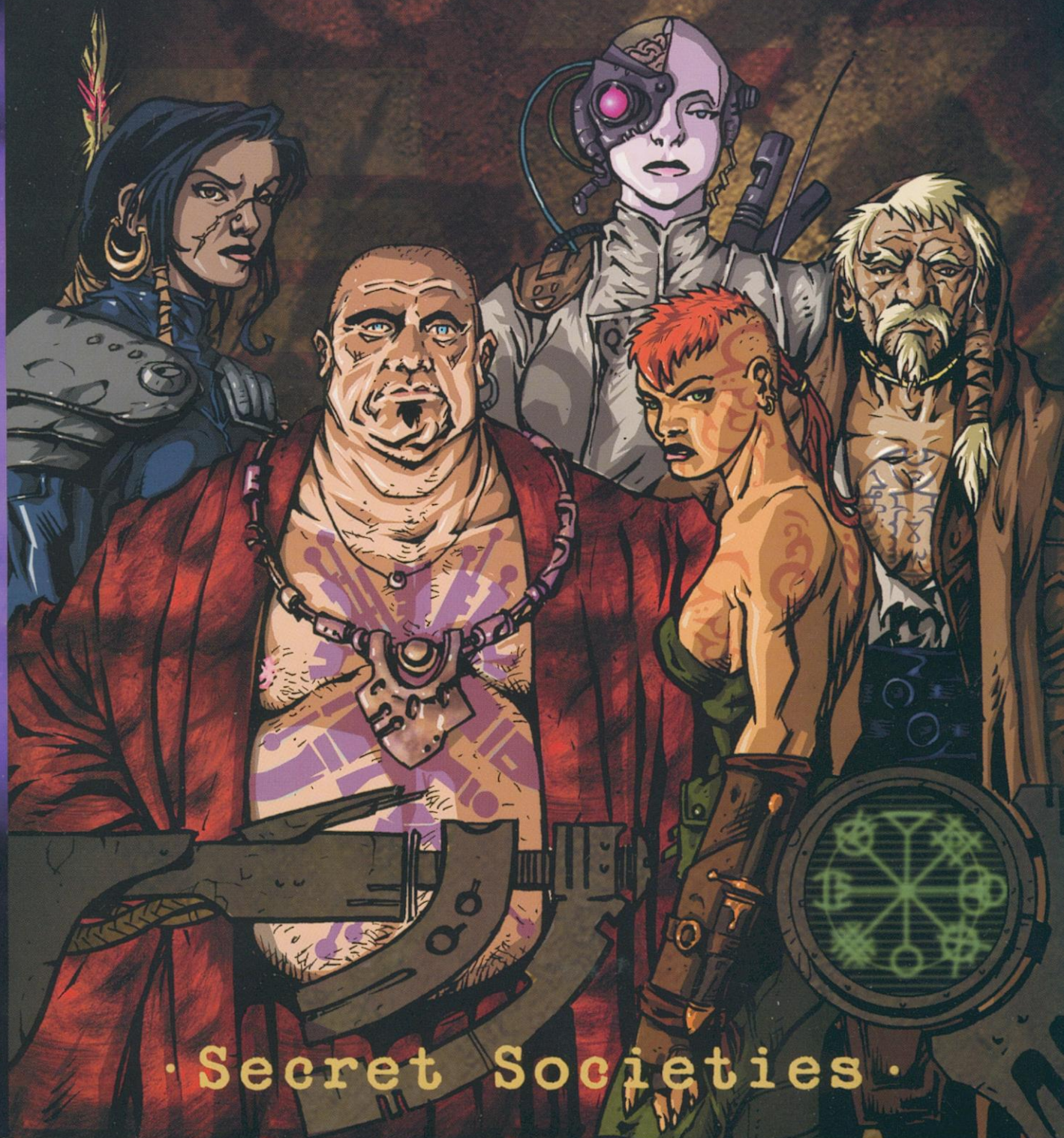


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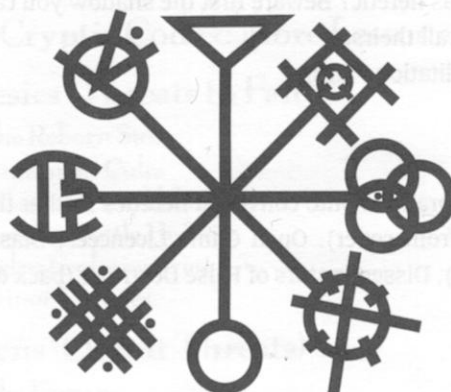
Heretics and OUTSIDERS



• Secret Societies •



FADING SUNS™



Credits

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Pilgrims:

Would you so quickly judge another as heretic? Beware first the shadow you cast yourself, for it is often this, your own darkness, that you cast onto others and call theirs.

— The Prophet, *Omega Gospels* (Meditations 8:3)

Emblems:

The emblems on the cover are those branded onto convicted heretics so that their crimes of faith are made clear for all to see. They are, in descending order (front cover): Open Game Licencees, Blasphemers, The Changed, The Dark Sign (occultists), Deniers of the Faith (atheists), Disseminators of False Doctrine; (back cover) Excommunicants, Pagans, Republicans, Technosophists.

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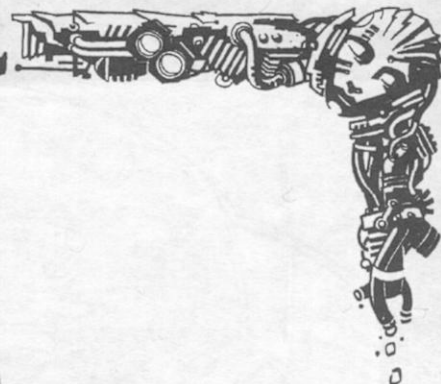
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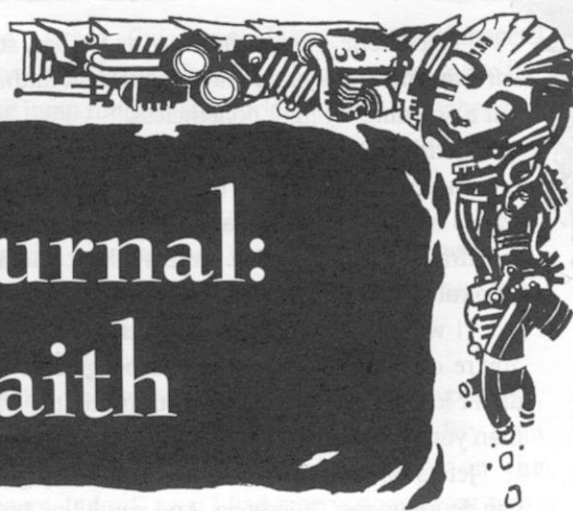
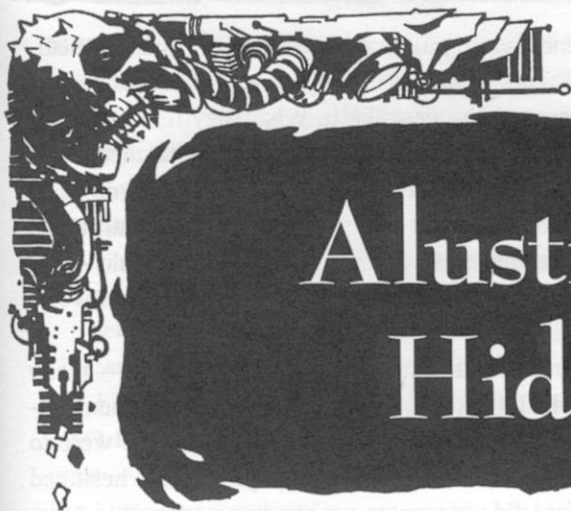
Heretics and OUTSIDERS

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Alustro's Journal: Hidden Faith

"Don't touch that!" Illuminatus Jefers cried.

Startled, I pulled my hand back in, but too late. I had already pressed the glowing stud.

A brilliant, prismatic array shot forth from the projector, and Doramos, the World Architect, Shaper of Planets, loomed huge above me. He looked straight through and past me, to whomever he lectured those many, many years ago when he recorded this holovid. It took my breath away.

I had, of course, seen many images of Doramos, but always in pictures, never a live moment like this. He swept his arms to the side, indicating a formula he had written in the air with a light pen, but it seemed to me with his great size that he motioned to the entire universe, beckoning us to see in it what he saw—a spark of the divine embedded in the material. His genius still has no equal these many centuries since his death.

Jefers reached past me and turned the device off.

"I'll ask you to keep that little gem a secret, eh?" he said, winking at me as he ambled back to the vast shelf he had been searching on my behalf.

"Of course," I replied. "I apologize. It was... magnificent, though."

"Oh, yes. Doramos is always impressive to watch, even when projected at the proper size. Even more impressive to listen to."

He must have sensed the yearning in me—or knew it too well among our kind, and so anticipated it.

"No, you can't listen. Not to that speech. It's special,

you see. Meant for the ears of his students alone. You wouldn't understand half of what he said, and the half you did get would awaken questions of faith you're not ready for."

"I don't understand. Nothing Doramos said really contradicts Church teachings."

"Nothing known to the public, no. But when speaking to those in the know, he revealed beliefs that only our order has yet grappled with. Oh, not heresy. Nothing that dire. Heterodox, perhaps. Revolutionary and groundbreaking? Definitely."

"I doubt there are many beliefs which would surprise me anymore. Not after my travels."

"Hmph," he said, lifting himself up the rickety ladder to examine the fourth shelf from the bottom. "No, I suppose not. Imperial Cohort these days, is it? Questing Knights and dangerous missions are your lot, yes? Not my cup of tea. An Eskatonic's true place is here, in the library."

"I don't dispute its importance. Am I not here? But surely these books had to come from somewhere. Someone had to collect them. If we don't quest, what do we have to feed the mind?"

"Bah! Too true, I suppose. Not for me! I read your journals. Oh, yes, many in our order do. Many more don't. Jealousy or disapproval, I'm sure. I know about your time in barbarian space. Barely made it back. I'd hate for my divine spark to find its way to the Empyrean through such ethers as they have there—full of demons, I'm sure."



"I saw none. People there are as we are: struggling to survive with dignity and faith. A different faith, to be sure, but a yearning for light nonetheless."

"After all you've been through and you still see the good in men, eh? I can't see past their vile treacheries. Every man wields a dagger aimed at another's back. Most are simply too afraid to take the blow. Others take it and miss. Those who rule are those whose aim was true."

"I wonder how you call yourself a priest, sometimes. Your cynicism is as strong as most priests' charity. If I didn't know you personally, I'd think that it was stronger than your faith."

Jefers turned and smiled a conspiratorial grin. "Ah, but you do know me, Guiseppe. And you know better."

"I do. Which is why I have never condemned you for your beliefs. And why I came to you now. The Church may not think them useful, but I do."

Jefers cackled and snatched a book from the shelf, and then jumped down to the floor, kicking up a cloud of dust as he landed. "So do many others who come to see me from time to time, looking for books such as these." He placed the old, dusty, leather-bound tome on the table between us.

I read the title on the spine, its gold-gilt letters still quite legible. "The Annals of Buttercup Vale, by Friar Puddleton? You must be joking. That's one of the most wretched children's books to survive the Fall!"

Jefers cackled again, his sides shaking with uncontrollable glee. "I know! I know! The last place anyone would look!"

I grabbed the book and flung open its cover. The title page had a very different name: *On the Harmonics of the Geo-Astral Grid, or the Alignment of the Leys*, by Doramos of Tyre. I gasped.

"This is it! You actually have a copy!"

"Of course, of course," Jefers said, pulling up a chair and sitting down. "I've read it many times myself. It's practically scripture, you know. Should be amended into the Omega Gospels, if you ask me."

"I don't think the Bishopric Council will ask you, Jefers. Not anytime soon." I pulled up a chair and began reading furiously. Jefers watched me for a while, a look of pleasure and contentment on his face. Those who share his beliefs are rare. He knows I am not a convert to his cause, but my interest in Doramos's work made me somewhat of a fellow traveler in his mind.

I read for hours. During that time, Jefers puttered about with his own research, leaving now and then to replenish the teakettle he kept there. Most of the book was beyond my knowledge, written with terminology only a terraformer would know. I suspected that even most terraformers of Doramos's day and after wouldn't have understood much of it, either.

Doramos wrote much of his science in a special metaphorical language couched in religious references. Or so later terraformers tried to describe it. What they refused to see was that, to Doramos, it wasn't metaphor. In his metaphysics, subtle realms of unseen energy existed all around us and yet followed certain principles that could be harnessed to change the material world, to transform it as an alchemist turns lead into gold. Nobody fully understood his work, however, and most of his secrets died with him.

I realized as I came near to the end of the work — many pages of which I had to skip out of sheer incomprehensibility — that I would need to enlist Jefers's aid if I were to answer the questions required of my quest. I had hesitated to do so, for I did not want to get him into any trouble. More than that, I feared that the lore he would gain from it might later fire his will towards a task not necessarily healthy for his soul.

"Have you ever heard of the Jovian Beacon?" I asked, the first words I had spoken for some time.

Jefers looked up from where he scribbled into a large notebook with a feather-quill pen. All his access to technology and he still preferred to write by hand. "Oh, yes. Of course I have. Doramos's theoretical satellite. Designed to align interspatial leys with planetary system lays. Part of his program to stellarform entire solar systems."

"Yes, I believe that was his intent. But he also speaks of it as a tool to better understand the jump routes. He thought that the Anunnaki had used such interstellar ley lines to plot their routes. Using the Jovian Beacon, a technological array placed near a system's largest gas giant — such as Holy Terra's Jove — he would supposedly be able to plot such lines and devise his own jump routes."

"A noble idea. Too bad he never built it. If only we had his notes on such a device, we might build one today."

"We do."

Jefers stared at me as if I were mad — or a king promising to grant a knighthood. "What... what do you mean?"

"We found his notes. In a lost bunker under Megiddo. We had to evade Avestites to escape, but we did. They don't know it was us yet. But we got them. I didn't know what they were at first, but I've spent some time deciphering them, and there's no doubt that they pertain to the Jovian Beacon."

Jefers was speechless. He opened and closed his mouth a number of times, but no sound came out. I thought I may have even seen a tear well up in his eye.

"I came to find out how to build it," I said. "But the information isn't in this book, as I thought it would be."

"No," Jefers said. "Not that book — you want this one." He ran to the bookcase and skittered up the stairs like a dapple monkey in a tree heading for a zuglar fruit. He yanked a book from the top shelf and slid back down the stairs. He



thrust the book open in front of me and I read the title: *On the Manufacture of Stellar Arrays According to Harmonic Principles*, by Doramos of Tyre.

"It's an early one," he said. "It contains none of his later work on the Jovian Beacon, but he used it as a basis for that theory. Would it help?"

I nodded. "I'll need assistance deciphering it, but yes, it should."

Jefers sat down across from me, staring into my eyes. "Do you intend to build such an array?"

I hesitated before answering. How far could I involve him? I certainly needed his expertise, but it came with a price — the risk of heresy charges for us all, my Lady too. But I saw no other way.

"Yes. We have... allies who intend to fund us."

"To what purpose? What do you seek?"

I was silent again for a while, but then spoke. "Yathrib."

He stared at me with wonder in his eyes. "Can it be done? Could the Beacon lead the way there?"

"I hope so," I said.

"I beg you, Guiseppe, let me help! It would be the culmination of my life's work!"

"If we succeed, Jefers, there will be much scrutiny. You may not survive it."

"If we succeed, Guiseppe Alustro, the Worldshapers will not have to hide their faith any longer. Delivering to the Church the jump route to the world where the Prophet saw the Holy Flame would be enough to redeem even an Antinomist."

I hoped he was right. For all our sakes.

"Then yes, we shall have you. And I thank you for it."

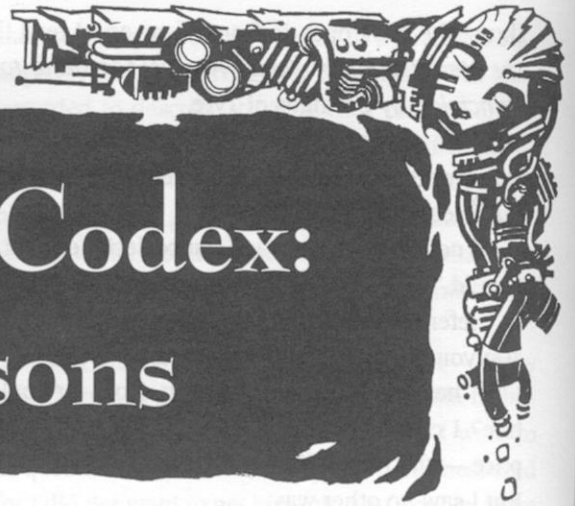
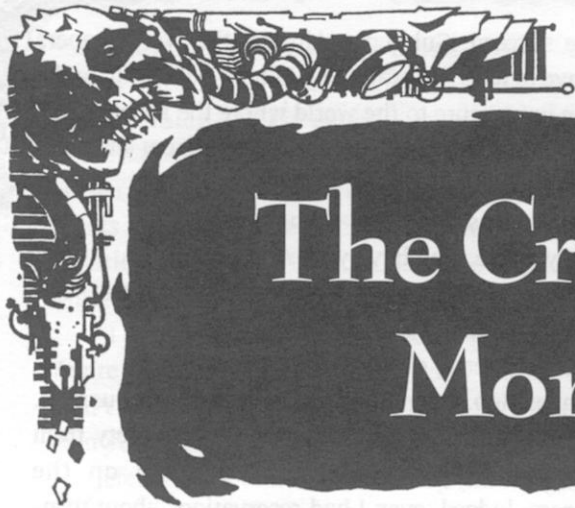
"No, Guiseppe, I thank you, with all my heart and soul. Where shall we build this array?"

"Why, Holy Terra, of course," I said, smiling.

He smiled, too, but not without a hint of nervousness. Once off Pentateuch, he had no guarantee of safety from Inquisitors and others who looked down on the Worldshapers. Indeed, even I had reservations about turning so much knowledge over to one of them. Their past hubris in terraforming has harmed the very balance of nature on some worlds — or so the Church claims. And yet, I saw little choice. For my Lady Erian's quest to succeed, we must build the array in the Holy Terra system — from where all Doramos's equations were drawn — and if it worked, then place it in Aylon's system. There, we might have a hope of finding the way to Yathrib.

I silently prayed to the Pancreator to protect us from our own sin and deliver us unharmed from our own folly.





The Cryptic Codex: More Lessons

Hail, heir to the Phoenix throne!

With this volume I once more seek to educate you upon the threats facing the throne of the Known Worlds. The last collection of dossiers concerned chiefly those intelligence agencies maintained by factions within the noble houses, guilds, and yes, even the Church. It also addressed some of the terrorist and revolutionary groups haunting the under-grounds of many worlds.

Herein I hope to deliver a broad summary of the many chief heresies at work that may threaten the balance of power between your eventual throne and that of the Patriarch. There are indeed far more heresies at work in the present age than I can possibly present here, but I have chosen from them those with the greatest potential to arouse your political enemies, or which threaten the status quo, whether between noble and priest or noble and commoner.

Too many in the noble houses have ignored the threats to faith, feeling that it is the job of the Church alone to root them out and expunge them. A grave mistake. It is surely the duty of all the Pancreator's creations to defend the universe from wrongful thought and practice, although certainly the identification and discrimination of such seems an ever-changing thing, even within the hallowed and time-honored halls of the Church.

No, threats to faith must be monitored by any monarch who wishes to rule such a fractious estate as that left to us by Vladimir. In a more enlightened era, it would indeed be the Church's task alone to worry about the health of the flock, but in our troubled, chaotic times, it best behooves a monarch to seek his own solutions to what problems arise between sects.

By this I mean not to imply active meddling in Church

affairs, only the constant and diligent monitoring of the goings-on not only in the agencies of one's direct rivals to power but in the small places of the Empire, were a tiny seed of discontent may one day grow to become a thick-rooted weed suffocating the garden. Watch, judge, and act only if your puppets cannot be made to act in your place. Indeed, what may first appear to be a cult affronting the idea of proper faith itself may eventually prove, even in its own recalcitrance, a perfect tool to forge stronger ties to the Church leadership — or to discredit them, should it prove necessary.

Oh, any fit priest would moan to read this missive, but he would also realize that it states only what he already knows to be true. The proper ruler must be prepared to joust even the Patriarch if need be, all to better harmonize the Pancreator's creation. For make no mistake: Your father rules by divine grace, for it was not the Church who attained the throne through long Wars. It is his duty, as it shall someday be yours, to steward the universe as the Pancreator wills it. Barring direct communication from the Empyrean, you must do so as your wits and character see fit, knowing that you would not even sit upon the throne if it were not so ordained by the Pancreator. Your lot in life was His doing, as it is for us all, emperors, spymasters and peasants alike. Your innate skills are not mistakes or sins to be guiltily regretted; they are gifts to be expertly wielded in His service. Not even the Patriarch can boast of such a calling.

I do not here only address the issue of heretics, however; more dangerous still are the covens, secret societies of psychics driven underground by Church and societal persecution. For good reason; they represent a true threat, although I cannot help but wonder if their criminal status only



makes them more dangerous, for they are harder now to watch and identify. Although you are protected from their direct influence, you cannot always know if those around you (even me!) are not under their secret sway. Beware.

Of course, worse than surreptitious covens are such bogey-men as Sathraists and Antinomists. Before gathering these dossiers, it was my belief that these threats were so rare as to be hardly worth note, regardless of the blathering of Inquisitors. I now believe somewhat differently, and warn you to avoid succumbing, as I did, to complacency concerning these disturbing foes.

Far more pressing than heretics or demon-worshippers are the threats outside our borders, in barbarian and alien space. The Vuldrok are disunited, but dangerous and intense. The Kurgans are not only heretical but well-organized and unlikely to suffer conversion well. Worse, the Vau refuse to yield their secrets, even to the small group of spies we recently sent to their world of Vrtil-Ya. The Symbiots, of course, represent an omnipresent and vexing threat for which even theurgy, our best weapon against them, has yet to provide a cure.

I have provided dossiers on each of these foreign dominion's intelligence resources. Your Questing Knights may yet prove our own best resource here, and I hope and pray that their individual tasks may yet yield fruit and birth a new peace between our kind and others.

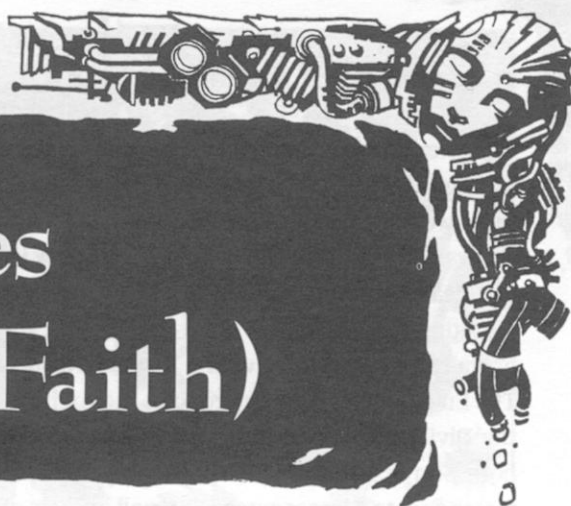
As ever, should you need me, I am at your service. Use the normal channels for communicating with me, for they are as yet inviolate.

Eternally your servant,

Sir Chamon Mazarin







Heresies (Threats to Faith)

The issue of heresy is a more delicate one than the Church will publicly concede. Not every disagreeable thought can be written off as heresy, for although the bishops would like to believe otherwise, they are not so consumed with their own self-importance as to think that only they have a direct view of the Pancreator's will. Even they concede that what may at first seem to be a wrongful idea, perhaps even dangerous to the status quo, may eventually flower into divine grace. Was not the Prophet himself contrary to his times?

Within the halls of the Orthodoxy, debate is constant over every minutiae of faith imaginable. It may take years — even centuries — to resolve the issue of whether a single, stray notion is canon or heresy. Although the fanatics of Temple Avesti believe their intuition on such things is greater than the erudition of the Orthodoxy, they do not hold the reigns of power in the Church at large, and so it is the Orthodox Patriarchs who issue bulls declaring which ideas are heretical.

The bishopric councils also issue bulls, but these do not necessarily hold universal sway; priests within different sees may choose to ignore these if they are not directly beholden to the issuing council. Indeed, the sees of such cosmopolitan worlds as Criticorum and Byzantium Secundus rarely agree with the doctrinal interpretations set forth by the Li Halan or Hazat worlds. The metropolitans may set Church law for their own sees, but they may be opposed by other metropolae. Only the Patriarch sets universal law. However, in practice, it is not always wise to oppose majority opinion, and so if enough bishopric councils agree on an issue, it is considered law in practice if not in fact.

What this means for the common lay practitioner is a confusing, bureaucratic mess. How is a simple shepherd to know if his divine vision was indeed a communication from the Empyrean or simply the result of ergot poisoning? Visionaries and madmen rise all too often among the common folk, allowed to preach only so long as they do not ruffle the feathers of the powerful. Once that happens, their brief time in the sun is brought to an end with either charges of heterodoxy (wrongful teachings, but from one whose

heart is in the right place) or worse, heresy — wrongful teachings that prove dangerous to one's spiritual health or that of others.

Those accused of heterodoxy may suffer persecution but are rarely brought before a Church court. They can often extend the issue indefinitely through numerous appeals, especially if they have defenders among the hierophants, those who debate theological law. Those whose beliefs prove true (or who garner enough politically powerful allies) may be awarded with their heterodox idea becoming canon — a joyous event.

Those accused of heresy rarely receive such a boon. They can be arrested by Church officials and brought before a Church court. In practice, however, the Church has far too few resources to bring in all but the most recalcitrant or dangerous heretics, and so many escape spiritual justice for years. Those brought in may yet gain reprieve by recanting their heretical ways. Contrary to guild prejudice, the Church prefers this way, for it saves them the time and expense of a lengthy trial and does indeed bring a wayward soul back into the light. Even if the recanting is done in word only, as long as the accused no longer openly practices his heresy, he is likely to get away with it, unless he has managed to make powerful or passionate enemies in the Church who are all too willing to make his coming to justice a crusade.

Those who refuse to recant most often suffer imprisonment until such a time as they change their minds. Those whose heresy is particularly public or grievous, however, are usually executed by fire or even torture, to not only purge their bodies and souls of sin but as an example to others, lest their heresy set in and become rife.

Of course, the rich and powerful often find ways to buy their way out of Church scrutiny, whether with lavish donations or tit-for-tat favors. Such obvious favoritism only erodes the commoners' faith in the Orthodoxy, fueling the new sectarianism, which in turn gives rise to new heresies — a vicious cycle.



The Reborn Sun

The Reborn Sun is a secret military society found throughout the Known Worlds, although it is strongest on those worlds under imperial authority (Byzantium Secundus, Tethys, Stigmata and Nowhere). This society is dedicated to the idea that the Emperor is a semi-divine solar personage, reuniting the elect (most often his soldiers, the cult's most prevalent membership) with a new universe, *Novus Opus*. The Emperor is often referred to as the Architect completing the Divine Plan of the Pancreator. Membership in the Reborn Sun is found mainly in the imperial ranks of armed forces and, to a lesser extent, in small pockets of Hawkwood and Brother Battle forces. On some worlds, such as Stigmata, the cult is quite open, and seems to draw heavy recruitment in high-combat, frontier regions. It would do the Reborn Sun a disservice, however, to claim that all recruits or members are military personnel. Members come from all walks of life, including heterodox priests, camp followers (the Reborn Sun is quite active in the barter towns that sprout up near imperial bases), merchants, and even some nobles and guildsmen, the former usually from houses Hawkwood or Justinian.

This quasi-religious organization is a recent phenomenon. Its members claim that their messianic sign of hope is the star that was supposedly born during Alexius's coronation. This star, called Abraxas, can be seen in the night sky over Byzantium Secundus in the southern hemisphere, just to the right of the Elysian Tree constellation star of Orpheus, which is in the dead midwest of the Celestial Equator. It has been confirmed by the Stargazers guild, and believed to be at a distance of some 2998 light years. It seems to be a medium-sized orange star, roughly the size of Urth's sun.

While the Universal Church frowns on the growing number of emperor worshippers in the imperial ranks, the Patriarch has made no overt move to halt the phenomenon, beyond his statement in 4998 reiterating Zebulon's role in the Pancreator's design as above that of any temporal ruler. The Synecallum, however, has been actively compiling a membership list in case the cult is ever officially declared a heresy. Alexius has not made any public statement condoning or overtly praising the Reborn Sun. However, his recent appearance before the Stigmata Veterans wearing a tunic with a single star was seen by cult members as recognition of his role as the incarnated solar ruler.

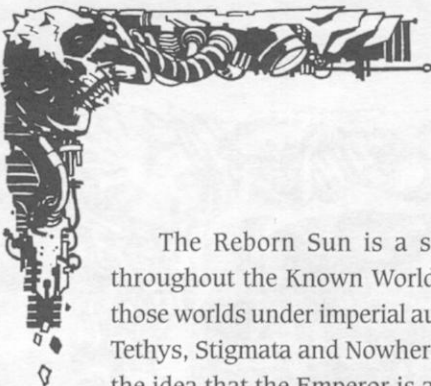
The Reborn Sun is a mystery cult. Initiates, with the aid of certain drugs, undergo a death and rebirth ceremony, accompanied by baptism, a new name and a revelation of a secret truth. The new initiates takes a pledges of eternal brotherhood and loyalty to fellow soldiers, the society mili-

tant and the Emperor. In some of the more extreme fringes, a sort of animal sacrifice is conducted, often in the form of a divinely blessed Shaprut ungulate, the heliohippus, or "Sun Horse," a miniature animal distantly related to the Shantor. The eating of a slaughtered heliohippus's flesh takes on a mystical significance. Early Diasporan colonists viewed these small ungulates as solar animals due to their golden yellow coloring and the strange, high-pitched singing the herds used to greet the dawn.

History

While it would appear that Emperor worship is a fairly recent phenomenon, it does have roots in the distant past. The idea of a semi-divine ruler can be gleaned from ancient Urth, with the deification of Iskander the Great or Caesar, or the prayers lent to their successors, the Byzantium Emperors, or the Nippon emperors, equated with descendents of the sun-god. All this is too academic to shed light on the recent phenomenon, except, perhaps, offering an explanation for the psychological origins of leader-worship. The recent appearance of this Emperor cult really finds its philosophical origins in the late Second Republic. When the Universal Church was declared the official state religion (in exchange for Church support in administrating a crumbling infrastructure), the Church cemented this bond with certain prayers and titles offered to the government's top representatives. Patriarch Virgil II, in 3983, instituted the special prayers offered to the Republican president, the *Credo Praefectus*, which recognized the Second Republican ruler as a Defender of the Faith. This gave the president status in the Universal Church as a *tertiarie*, a secular head of an association composed of the faithful (in this case, the government).

The idea of a universal leader, however, outlived the Second Republic, and the Church prayers for *Credo Praefectus* continued until the barbarian incursions into the Known Worlds. When Vladamir Alecto finally united the Known Worlds, a form of emperor worship was ready for him. The Alecto soldiery, taking some ideas from the Church and some from the Ukari/Obun idea of the "blessed ruler," formed a crude but effective cult with its own rites, customs and codes. His soldiers proved quite fanatical in achieving his Empire. Unfortunately, following Vladimir's mysterious death, the cult was soon condemned by the Church. The *Credo Praefectus* was offered to the head of the newly created Regency. Emperor-worship then seems to have died out except as a dim idea, until around 4900, when the Symbiot incursions began. The idea of the Universal Knight, which seems to have started with renewed interest in St. Lextius, spread in its



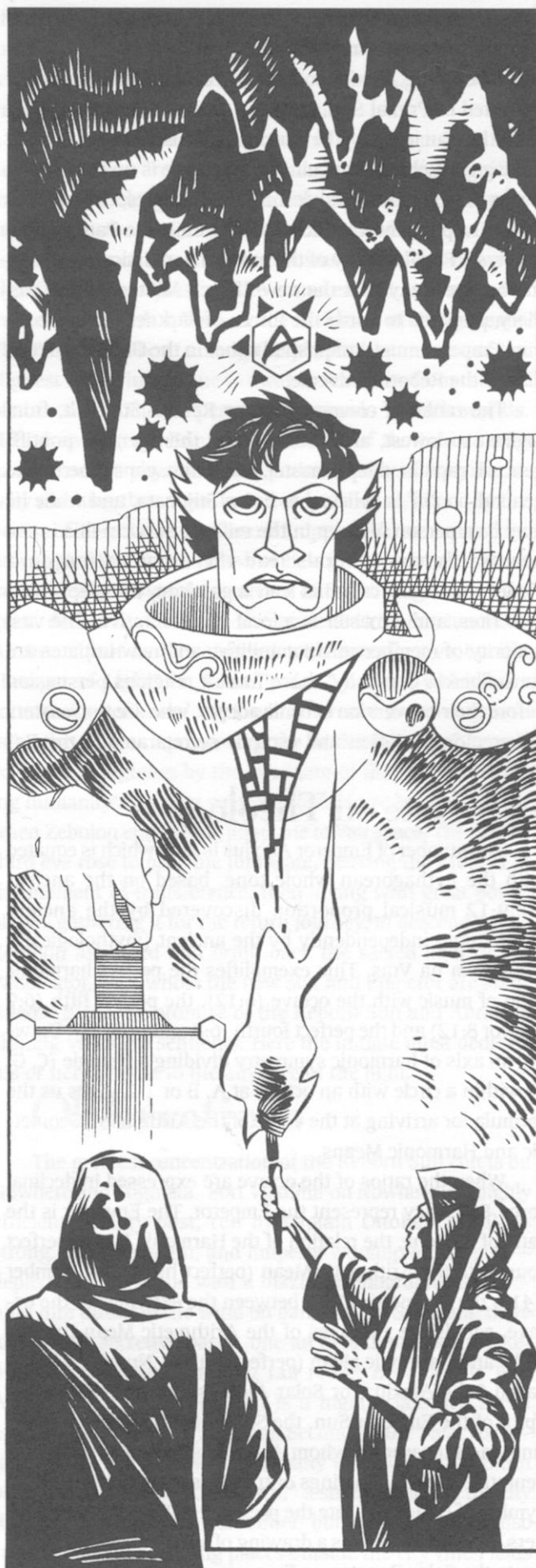
place. Curiously, there is little history of emperor-worship in the Hawkwood forces until around 4970. The al-Malik soldiery had a belief that their leaders were following a semi-divine plan, Tarif's Path, while the Li Halan possessed a fanatic peasant soldiery who often interpreted their prince's actions as emitting from the Pancreator. While elements of both of these house traditions may have influenced Hawkwood soldiers, the Emperor worshippers seem to have largely created the cult on their own terms.

According to garrison intelligence, signs of the cult first showed up on Stigmata with Darius Hawkwood as the object of its attentions. With Darius's death, Alexius Hawkwood became the recipient of its hopes during the middle and later period of the Emperor Wars. When Alexius arrived and relieved the beleaguered garrison from the overwhelming might of the Symbiots, the garrison — living on little but hope and primitive divinations — greeted him as a savior. It seems that this belief in Alexius began with some of the garrison engineers, in particular those in the Hell's Orphans battalion. This worship spread to other elements within the Hawkwood and loyal regency forces, and informed some of the fiercest units in Alexius's drive for Known World unity. The small cadre of worshippers spread, especially to many of the engineering and front-line tested troops. Elements of their beliefs were actually encouraged by the high command, as long as certain aspects of it were kept hidden from official view, high morale among the troops being a necessary component for building a successful fighting force.

Known Signs

While some underestimate the intelligence of Emperor worshippers, it should be noted that many are highly trained military engineers and communication experts with an intensive background in mathematics, linguistics and weapon design and mechanics. Generally, Emperor worshippers do not see themselves at odds with the Church. They place the interpretation of history on a certain doctrine, summed up in their oft-depicted drawing of two triangles intersecting to form a six-sided star. Within the star, the topmost (downward-pointing) triangle is drawn first, representing a passive, internal messenger, coming from above to instruct — in this case, Zebulon. Zebulon is the Divine Messenger, taking the message to those below, where it will germinate. Next, the bottommost (upward-pointing) triangle represents the active solar element, pushing upward to reunite with the Pancreator. This is the Emperor, completing with solar energy the Messenger's Task, reuniting creation with the Pancreator.

Naturally, as the active element, the Emperor appeals to soldiers, who look upon him as divine or semi-divine within the Pancreator's design. Since the Emperor is completing Zebulon's work, some believe him superior to the First Mes-



senger, for ascension is harder than descent. Others place Zebulon and the Church still lower or out of the picture entirely, believing Alexius to be a reflected incarnation of the Perfected or Primal Sun, and thus truly worthy of worship as the human image of the Pancreator himself. Still, the wiser among the Reborn Sun cult say that there is no contest between the ascending and descending triangles, only a focus on their appointed time for action within the Pancreator's universe. Finally, many of the more unsophisticated among the believers say that the new Church Militant is the soldiery, prepared to battle the forces of darkness that the divine Emperor must vanquish to usher in the Universal Paradise of the Reborn Universe.

The ranks of command in the Reborn Sun cult, from highest to lowest, are: the Emperor, then general-pontiff, general, captain, adept, master, commilito, conscribere. The general-pontiff is believed to be on Stigmata, and while he may be a person high up in the military service, this is not necessarily so. Generals lead the organization on a planetwide basis, captains lead a garrison, an adept oversees rites, and a master is a local representative. The vast majority of members are commilitos, and new initiates are conscriberes. Generally, those from a religious persuasion before their conversion become adepts, who are the masters of ceremony, religion and esoteric secrets among the Reborn Sun.

A Note on Theology

The number of Emperor Alexius is 888, which is equated with the Pythagorean whole tone, based on the ancient 6:8:9:12 musical proportion discovered by the ancient Greeks, and independently by the ancient (mythological?) Obun Tyla na Vras. This exemplifies the perfect harmonic ratio of music with the octave (6:12), the perfect fifth (6:9 and/or 8:12) and the perfect fourth (6:8 and/or 9/12). Drawing an axis of harmonic symmetry dividing a triangle (C, G, F) within a circle with an octave at A, B or 1:2, gives us the formula for arriving at the value of the Arithmetic, Geometric and Harmonic Means.

When the ratios of the octave are expressed in decimal form, 888, they represent the Emperor. The Emperor is the ratio of the tone, the relation of the Harmonic Mean (perfect fourth) to the Arithmetic Mean (perfect fifth). The number 1415, the Geometric Mean between the extremes of the octave, equals the extremes of the Arithmetic Mean (perfect fifth) and Harmonic Mean (perfect fourth). Number 1415 is called Solis Alexius, or Solar Alexius, the undying divine spirit of the Emperor Sun, the Son of the Sun, which is the undying Emperor, of whom Alexius is the temporal representative. Hence, drawings of triangles within circles or the symbol of Helios indicate the presence of Emperor worshippers. Another symbol is a drawing of a rooster, which represents the Solar Rooster, or Emperor, ushering in the Impe-

rial Dawn against the darkness of the Emperor's enemies.

The number 365 is also of significance to the Reborn Sun. Not only does it denote the number of days in a solar year on Holy Terra, the cradle of humanity, but by placing numerical letter values on the name "Alexius," the summation of these equals 365. The code for 365 may also be hidden in a drawing, or represented by the numbers 91, 4, and 5, often in a scrawl, such as "Four virgins for the Emperor!" "91 days till leave!" and "Five days for drinking" ($91 \times 4 + 1 = 365$).

The six-sided star is also a symbol used by the Reborn Sun, often found at meeting places. Compromised locations are scrawled with 666, the number of the solar demiurge, or the sign of the owl, the wise bird whose knowledge, however, is of the realm of night and not of the solar day. Drawings of the Righteous Soldier (RS) — usually depicted as a cartoon figure smiling on guard duty while stomping on a snake — are often displayed at meeting halls or safehouses. The Righteous Soldier is also known as the Good Soldier, or Rilius Smith. Reborn Sun soldiers often have the Righteous Soldier tattooed on them, or the number 888 half-hidden in intricate design work. The signs are both tantalizingly visible and secretive: most soldiers have taken oaths not to discuss the Reborn Sun with "DP's" (military jargon denoting "Dependent Population" or "Dumb Pricks").

Astrological Mythology

The most secretive part of the Reborn Sun is the pilgrimage from Stigmata to Tethys to Byzantium Secundus, and indeed, the initiation stages follow a pilgrimage to each. On Stigmata, the pilgrim views Draco Major, the Great Serpent constellation found in the northern sky, near the star Nova Polaris. This is viewed in a secret cave in the northern hemisphere, in a remote location sacred to the Great Serpent. Upon completion of a 72-hour fast beneath Draco Major, the initiate is proclaimed a Master of the 23rd Initiation. Most believers make it to Stigmata.

The next journey, to adept rank, requires a mastery of the questions brought before the initiate on Tethys below the sacred constellation Heliohippus, the Solar Horse. The Solar Horse was held in religious awe by some of the earliest colonists on Tethys. It is located in the southern sky, near the celestial equator, but at times of the year can be viewed from the northern hemisphere. Viewing it from the southern hemisphere on a remote island, the initiate must not only answer the sacred questions but also meditate on the balance of the celestial equator.

The final pilgrimage takes the candidate to Byzantium Secundus, where the applicant for captain rank undergoes a death ritual below the newfound star, Abraxas. Drugs induce the death state, and the candidate is revived under the beams of the Emperor's Star. While there are pilgrimages to all three worlds for all Reborn Sun members, the rising ini-

tiates get the full significance of visits. For those rising higher than captain, the pilgrimage is no longer necessary, but other rigorous tests await.

The Meaning of the Constellations

Draco Major is the Great Serpent of ancient mythologies, the giver of knowledge, whose double coils produced DNA and the very secrets of life. The Age of Draco corresponds roughly to the time before Taurus (Greco-Roman) on old Urth, to even the time of the Anunnaki. Indeed, our fathers on Urth knew the ancient serpent as the sign of medicine and knowledge, and the renewer of life. The significance of Draco corresponds in some evolutionarily/spiritual way with our earliest beginnings, in the night sky when the stars shown fierce and no child of Adam called himself "I", for no names existed outside the reign of Draco. Draco sent priests and shaman to tend to her flock, and in a sense, humanity was closer at this time to the animals and plants of the Urth. The cult of the serpent was wiped out by the emerging solar gods in many parts of Urth, symbolized by Apollo's conquest of Python, and the casting out of the serpent from Eden. The initiate must, however, shed his old skin to Draco and emerge reborn, with a new name, before the serpent allows the initiation to end. The Great Snake, found in all ancient Urth mythologies, including the Prereflective Books of Moses, also finds a place in Obun and Ukari mythology as Akuu or Partuu, giver of knowledge. Stigmata is just passing out of the Age of Draco, so the snake's influence is still more present there than on any other world. The initiate must undergo the ritual when the night sky shows no influence of the moon.

Heliohippus, the Solar Horse on Tethys, is the bringer of light and the balance between the celestial equator, now seen in the southern night sky, and then the northern. By subduing the Solar Horse, sentients conquer nature. Akhet Heliohippus, or the "Horizon of Heliohippus," as was written in an ancient astrological work, means that the great solar horse strides the borders between Wakefulness and Sleep. Draco kept all but his universal priesthood in the happy animal slumber of existence, but the solar horse gallops between the northern and southern skies, symbolizing the conquest of the worlds of light and sleep. The initiate here must shed Draco for the dawn and the promise of the solar day. Heliohippus, whose age is passing, is also connected traditionally to the ethereal plane (which is closer to the physical than the astral). On Urth, the Age of Aquarius has passed. The zodiac sun has pierced Zebulon at the jumpgate to Vau space, allowing all sentients to bathe in the light emitted from his disintegrating body. Sacrificing Heliohippus means gaining power over the ancient mysteries, and bathing in the solar blood of the great horse grants the subduing

of nature. Discovery and new horizons follow. The initiate must undergo the ceremony during the time of the new moon, when light from the sun reflects from the orb to the world, bringing hope.

Abraxas, striding the night sky of Byzantium Secundus near the Elysian Tree constellation star of Orpheus signifies that the mythological tree of universal life — Axis Mundi, entwined by the snake and whose leaves feed the solar steed — has been conquered by the new star above. This new star signifies the conquest of the transcendent universe, the mysterious eighth sphere, or the Stellatum of the ancients. The Emperor is born among the physical but is also of the Highest Empyrium, come to awaken sentients from the rule of the moon. The Emperor, then, stands in both worlds. Heliodromus (Sun Runner) is the title of the initiate who has outrun his physical horse (animal) body after symbolically crushing the snake; he is now pure spirit, joined by the beams of Abraxas to the Eternal Emperor. These beams pour down, piercing the universe of lies (the universe of gross materialism) to signal the advent of the new age, when the great darkness, called in the ancient Urth Persian texts Ahriman (not to be confused with prereflective Lucifer "Bringer of Light" or Satan "Judge," both of which have connotations of knowledge), will be overcome. Developmentally, the snake, representing the ancient giver of knowledge, was outgrown by the shedding of the final skin during humanity's infancy, and the Solar Horse burst into light when Zebulon entered the jumpgate to Vau space. The steed's third eye rose to pass the jumpgate, piercing the Prophet at the moment of transference, then arcing with great power above, gathering it for the return journey, to descend where Zebulon ascended and bring back the sacred light of the Pancreator, with whom the new star and Emperor are identified. This is the promise of the Reborn Sun and Abraxas, shining visible to sentients. Here the initiate must dedicate his or her own life to the advance of the light.

Observations

The greatest concentration of the Reborn Sun cult is on Nowhere and Stigmata. Fort Vladimir on Nowhere is a highly efficient military post, run by Captain Ottokar. Morale is strong, training tough, and Emperor worship quite open — depictions of Alexius with a blazing iconographic star behind him flutter in the wind on banners. On Stigmata, there are several secretive bases, one an abandoned Second Republic subterranean mining rail route, now called "Fort Alexius," but whose location is a highly classified secret among the order. On Byzantium Secundus, the Palazzo barracks in the capitol city harbor many worshippers, who can be found off base in "Little Urth," a small section of the city that caters to military personnel, but members have also created secretive meeting places outside the city (the Fields of Mars).



Certain elements within the Muster favor the Reborn Sun while others see it as bad for business. The Reeves deny that they are involved in any banking transactions with the Reborn Sun, and such claims are disbelieved but unproven.

The Reborn Sun's intelligence gathering is formidable, but its members mistrust the Imperial Eye, stating that it is comprised of double agents and an old guard hostile to Alexius's reforms. A few Reborn Sun members have built individual trusts with some agents, but this is rare. Since many of the Reborn Sun are placed in sensitive military posts, it is hard at times to distinguish information sent through the normal chains of command and that gained separately. It is rumored that Reborn Sun intelligence proved useful to imperial authorities on at least two different occasions. The first involved the capture of General Runnymede Hawkwood, a Ravenna count who served in the imperial forces and was passing on sensitive military documents to the Decados. Two non-military members of the Reborn Sun (one, the mother of a soldier's daughter, the other a prostitute) were dispatched to follow the general. They discovered his drop off-point in the Church cemetery of St. Maya's Cathedral, just outside the capitol, and even holotaped a transaction. Three soldiers of the Reborn Sun then secretly ambushed the general and handed him over to a contact in the Imperial Eye, along with the proof.

The second case of shared information is harder to verify, save for the accounts of Admiral Foster of the Imperial Navy and two of his captains in secret testimony to the Emperor. Apparently, Reborn Sun seers (psychic soldiers), foresaw a Symbiot attack on Stigmata imminent in 4997, and warned both elements within the Imperial High Command. They perfectly pinpointed the invasion force's estimated time of arrival, and as a result, the Imperial Navy wreaked havoc on some 23 Symbiot ships, sending the remnant scurrying back through the jumpgate.

It is thought that certain elements of the Vuldrok are receptive to the Reborn Sun, at least among some long-term Vuldrok settlements on Leminkainen. This may prove a new ground of recruitment, although there is debate about indoctrinating large segments of non-Known Worlders into the imperial military.

Many of the Reborn Sun's members believe that taking information from Alexius's enemies, especially House Decados, is a divine mandate. The Decados were the first to realize the threat the Reborn Sun posed, and they rightly fear its reach and power.

Known Members

- **Grovin Mitchau:** A wealthy, powerfully built member of the weaponsmith family of Tethys, Grovin Mitchau served time with the imperial forces, rising to the rank of captain with commendations from the Emperor before retiring his

commission. It is rumored that Grovin is high up in the Reborn Sun hierarchy. He is believed to finance much of its operations, building retirement settlements for old veterans and their families, providing military care, and also providing the funds needed to keep the cult growing and active. Books and posters are published with his funds, and he is also one of the higher-ranked generals in the organization. The Mitchau family has long been loyal to the regency and the Hazat family in particular, since their fortunes have been tied to the wars of both. Yet one branch, the Texugo-Mitchau, favored the Hawkwoods. It is this branch from which Grovin hails. Although he maintains large estates on Tethys, he has recently moved to Byzantium Secundus. He is a friend of the Emperor and is comfortable at court. It is whispered that he might be psychic or a student of some minor theurgy.

- **Adept Emerson Long:** Rumored to be one of the founders of the Reborn Sun, Emerson Long is a member of the Brother Battle Order. Saved by Alexis and his Hawkweed troops during the worst of the Symbiotic fighting on Stigmata, Brother Emerson hailed Alexis as the divine savior of a beleaguered humanity. Posted as an ambassador on Byzantium Secundus, Brother Long started expanding the small cadre of believers by recruiting veterans and new soldiers. It is whispered that Long, while still a Brother Battle ambassador, has risen in the Reborn Sun to the rank of adept.

Revealed Members

- **Captain Maximus Keegan:** Keegan is depicted as the first martyr of the Reborn Sun. A much-decorated Hawkwood veteran from Delphi, he and his troops were captured by the Decados in the final days of the Emperor Wars while they aided the al-Malik forces on Criticorum. After the huge loss of Decados forces on the moon above Byzantium Secundus, the Decados high command, in desperation, sought to publicly condemn and execute Keegan as an Emperor worshipper, thus casting doubts on the Church/Imperial alliance. Keegan, however, escaped his cell on Cadavus, and when the Decados judge, Count Sergei, and several high-ranking war ministers arrived at the cell to question him, he announced from behind them, "I serve the Eternal Emperor!" and set off a detonation charge that took his life and the lives of the inquisitors. Just how much the Decados learned from Captain Keegan is unclear, but the testimony of a local Amalthean healer who left her post on Cadavus, and who was witness to his death, indicates that, while tortured, his faith kept him from revealing anything beyond his name. The independent collaboration of two other military prisoners seems to confirm the Amalthean's story. Captain Keegan is honored as a martyr by the Reborn Sun, and crude drawings and small statues of him are common objects among the membership.



Anunnaki Cults

[Note: The following report, delivered by one of our adjunct agents, displays a supernatural bias. There may well be other explanations for the occult phenomena mentioned herein.]

Independent cults of pagan Anunnaki worshippers can be found across the Known Worlds. While leaders of these cults are often con artists, bored dilettantes or primitivist spiritualists preaching misappropriated versions of Obun and Ukari beliefs, certain actual groups have been shown to possess terrible secrets and real power.

There is no unity between these various cults, except perhaps in the broad philosophical basis from which their beliefs were formed — beliefs heretical to the Universal Church's theology, culled from ancient alien and pre-human belief systems. As chartophylax of [location deleted], I have access to many records commonly believed lost. I present you with my findings, augmented with sensitive government records, Mutasih reports normally kept under lock and key.

Recently, certain al-Malik and Decados undercover agents were rumored to have contacted so-called "Anunnaki agents," both within and without the Known Worlds. The Decados, utilizing Ukari shamans, supposedly began negotiations with certain entities identified as Ukari gods. These reports come from the upper echelons of the Hidden Martyrs, following a recent incident on Icon. While it would be easy to discount this rumor, the death of several Hawkwood Rook agents prior to a meeting between Grand Duke Maxamino Li Halan and a Decados operative at Casaverde points to some sort of high-level plotting. Facts are hard to come by, but several members of the Grand Duke's staff mentioned a "spirit being" that "tore through men like straw" before being brought down. No Anunnaki, surely, but perhaps a demon of some sort? Regardless, the Decados seem to believe in the Anunnaki connection. Even if they are being fooled by Ukari shamans, this matter surely bears deeper inquiry.

A very secretive element within the al-Malik, followers of Tahir Mahjun al-Malik the Doomed, are believed to have made contact with barbarian human agents representing some sort of Anunnaki legacy, but we know not to what end. The only verification I have is from an al-Malik botanist who claimed to be present at such a meeting. He told me of the incident over strong coffee in a metaphysical bookshop in Tabriz. His knowledge of Anunnaki lore was impressive. We have to ask ourselves if the Anunnaki are indeed awake again, after remaining silent for so long since the end of the ancient Obun-Ukar wars.

History

This section only deals with a brief overview from human history, involving human worshippers of the ancient preadamite aliens. Among the alien races, Anunnaki worship is quite active among the Ukari on Kordeth and Aylon, and among the Obun followers of the Bintaru and neopolytheistic religions. Madoc's oceans still hide Oro'ym secrets; these sentient amphibians consider themselves heirs of the Anunnaki.

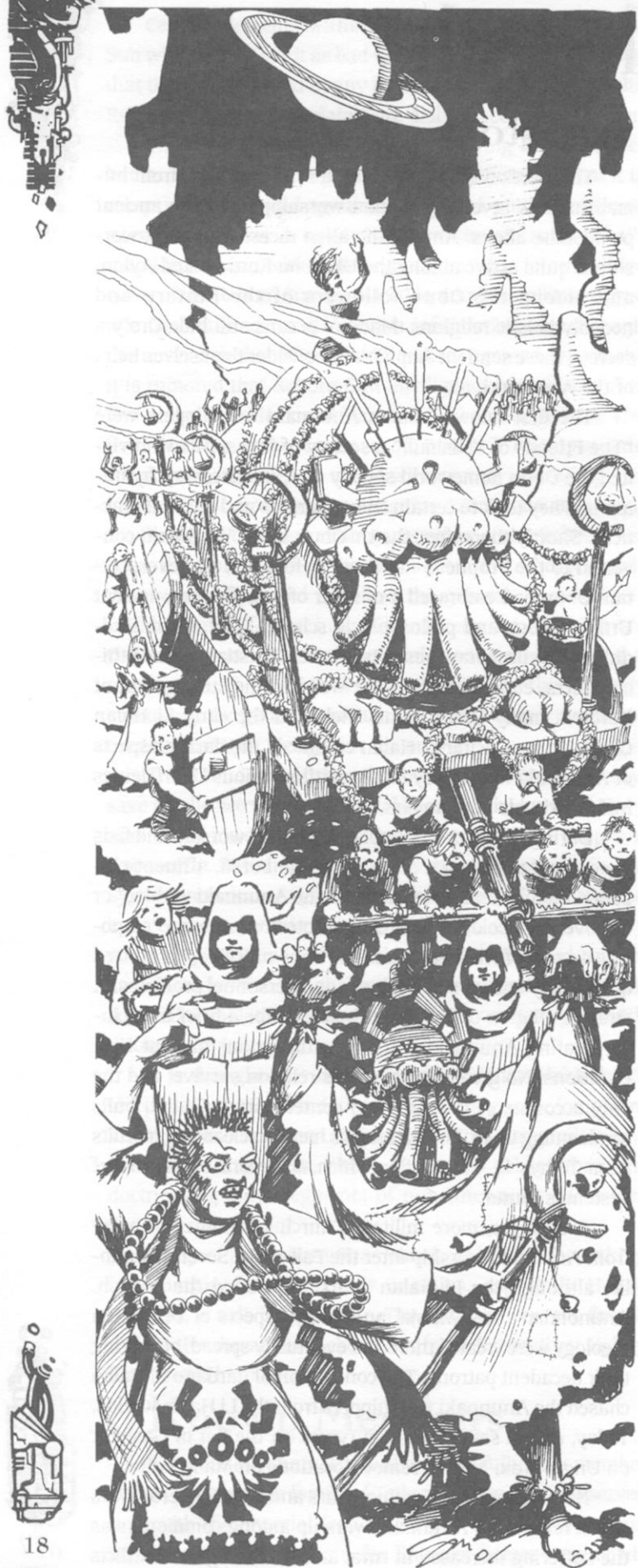
The first known human Anunnaki worshippers were "The Friends of Velisimil," a society of free spirits who visited the Obun homeworld shortly after its discovery by humans. They took to certain Obun worship and cultural practices. Shortly thereafter, the Ur-Obun saint, Ven Lohji, converted to the Prophet's message. Before her, however, certain Obun had embraced a number of prereflective, ancient Urth religious and philosophical schools (Mahayana Buddhism, mystical branches of Islam and Christianity, the Ethical Edicts, etc). After the Ukar war and the subjugation of Kordeth, many Ukari found shelter in the early Li Halan Court. Prince Lucifer Li Halan embraced the darker aspects of Anunnaki worship by incorporating various Ukari deities into his rituals and prayers.

During the Second Republic, Anunnaki worship and fads were popular among a segment of the bored, affluent citizenry. Many attempts to "awaken the Anunnaki within," or discover "the color of your Obun protector," or even "corporate secrets of Anikrunta and the Sons of Rillos," promised quick, easy answers to business and personnel problems. A strange religion called Vorkuth spread for a brief time, incorporating Anunnaki worship with various ancient Urth traditions. No great works on this religion survive, and the only accounts of it come from contemporary Church bulls condemning them. Church records mention cleansing its cults from Tethys in 4114, after which no record of this belief system is found.

A stronger, more militant Church led humanity away from Anunnaki worship after the Fall of the Second Republic, although the Li Halan court still defied the Church. Antinomian cults, Manja, and many aspects of Draconian theology were created there and eventually spread, outlasting their decadent patrons. The conversion of Cardano Li Halan chased the Anunnaki worshippers from the Li Halan worlds. Today, only a small pocket survives on the fief of Gashkar on Ungavorox, and on remote locations on Malignatius.

Nonetheless, the Symbiot Wars and later Emperor Wars saw a renewal in Anunnaki worship among commoners as the suffering increased in rural areas. These great conflicts





shattered faith in the power of the Universal Church to heal deep rifts between the classes.

Known Cults

I present here short backgrounds on known Anunnaki cults. Some are easily revealed as frauds, but others... Many questions need answers.

The Vekallaa Society

The recent surge in Anunnaki worship can be traced to the 49th century seer, Madame Sakujna of the Lyonesse Astoria family, who used her wealth to pursue Ur teachings.

Claiming to be in touch with "Hidden Archons," she created the Vekallaa Society in 4887, named after the Ur-Obun "Lightbearers," or gods. Although she faced criticism from the Lyonesse and Li Halan authorities, she was too well connected to care, and simply moved herself to Ravenna. Today, her books read like mystical nonsense, yet she struck a chord in her time and gained many followers. By claiming she was in contact with Ur intelligences and that she was chosen to teach their secrets, she proved to be a harbinger of much of the cult activity that followed.

The Church shut down the Vekallaa Society in 4911 and again in 4933. It still exists today in secret, although greatly reduced in numbers, under the leadership of Arild Transvelt of Ravenna. They claim to know Zebulon's "Hidden Teachings," and their sign is a serpent wrapped about an Ur staff. Countess Melanthia Torensen found them so dull and fragmented she took the brightest Vekallaaists with her and founded her own Anunnaki cult — the Solar Morning. The Vekallaaists are largely harmless, although socially well connected.

The Solar Morning

Founded in 4957 by the eccentric Torensen noble, Countess Melanthia, this group studied various Ur texts and incorporated them into ritualistic dances and prayer circles. Initially located on Ravenna, this group moved to Byzantium Secundus, where it drew as members many of the leading lights of intellectual society, including the poet Flain Feich (*Odes to False Dawn*) and the architect/engineer Cynthia Seacist. Branches soon appeared on Criticorum and Gwynneth. The Solar Morning members hold themselves to be the "new children" of the Obun deity Yheteeni, mistress of the sciences and natural laws, one of the Major Principalities of the Obun Lightbearers pantheon. The Solar Morning's task is to lead humanity back into enlightenment. Although the Archbishopric of Byzantium Secundus issued statements warning against too great an interest in Ur philosophy, the Solar Morning members were largely protected by their social station and connections. They introduced a cultural revival in Obun sacred dances and education methods.

Recently, Annuziata Decados nearly splintered the Byzantium Secundus organization. The remnants regrouped and now meet in Flain Feich's ancestral home in the Imperial City, off Fishwright Street. Their sign is a five-rayed star over a butterfly. The Solar Morning possesses some useful divination practices, involving reading Obun oracular sticks, the *II Va*. More theologically problematic, however, is the occasional practice of allegedly channeling spirits not of human origin. They claim these beings are guides and even angels.

The Solar Dawn is surely the most benign and easiest to approach of the Anunnaki cults. Currently, the poet Flain Feich is their leader, following Countess Melanthia's demise. It attracts the upper echelons of society, with the occasional sculptor, poet or musician joining their ranks.

The Third Order

Countess Annuziata Decados is believed to lead one of the more problematic Anunnaki cults, called the Third Order. The countess, born a bastard to Count Zenechka and his social secretary Feliz, was educated by the count to supplant his drunken son, Anastagio, the product of his loveless marriage to Lady Zyta Van Gelder, a noted misanthrope. Doted upon by her father, Annuziata's unsavory reputation at court soon led her to the shadier corridors of power, eventually positioning her on Byzantium Secundus.

Joining the Solar Morning, she fell under the spell of Drudwyn Maccus, an old seeker of wisdom who had studied Obun rituals, and became his mistress for a time. They reportedly teamed to summon spirits in a bid for the Solar Morning leadership. Defeated by the old guard and expelled from the group, Annuziata published and circulated a book of their rituals, *Secrets of the Solar Morning*, at her own expense. At some point during this period, she and Drudwyn had a falling out, and she took up with Lady Lucia Hazat, a drug-addicted beauty, and settled on Aylon. Drudwyn later died a mysterious death, strangled by a maddened servant.

On Aylon, Annuziata gave up her addicted lifestyle and entered some Ur ruins, fasting there for two months. It was here that she claimed to become possessed by the Anunnaki spirit "Adwan," and wrote her *Prophecies of Adwan*. While some scholars believe that Adwan might correspond to the ancient Ukari minor deity Awu, or the Obun Adwiddin, Adwan's message was one of darkness and fear. Essentially reiterating the works of the ancient Criticorum philosopher Ragor Atkin, Adwan stated that the strong must seize the spiritual force from the herd ("the sleepers"), and use this strength to evolve into gods.

Adwan apparently gave Annuziata metaphysical exercises with which to summon him, as well as spells for wreaking havoc and draining others of their life force, all of which she published in her book. These spells have been verified by the Eskatonic Order. The countess then gathered a small

group of disciples and purchased an abandoned monastery. Lady Lucia went insane, supposedly due to the elaborate "masking" techniques whereby various gods were summoned to possess the countesses' followers in blasphemous orgies. Eventually, word leaked out and the al-Malik authorities closed the monastery down. The countess escaped to Acheon on Criticorum, this time with a male Ukar lover, the Taudwon Vikar. With him she created the Third Order, a group pledged to return the Ukari deities to the physical universe. Cells have since appeared on Ravenna, Byzantium Secundus and Aragon.

On two occasions (that we know of), she has spied for the Jakovians, and at least once for the Mutasih. Her information, gleaned from divinations, seemingly revealed valuable information. The countess has met at least once with Gyrurka Sogol, the leader of his own brand of Anunnaki teachings, the Sacred Task (see below). Followers of both paths claim there was a mystical duel between them, which either Sogol or Annuziata won, depending on who tells the tale. The truth, as reported by our own undercover agent, was that they discussed certain problems of Ur translation at an outdoor cafe. Oddly, while the countess has verbally blasted many rivals, she has remained respectful to Sogol.

Philosophically, the cult represents the final triad of the Ukari deities' return. The First Order was carried by the Ur-Ukar, who were vanquished by the Obun gods. The Second Order was lead by the pre-conversion Li Halan, and represented the passing of the Ukari knowledge to select members of humanity; this ended with the conversion of Prince Cardano Li Halan. The Third Order brings the fulfillment of the Anunnaki design, by opening the vortex between the stars and allowing certain Ukari deities' back within the physical universe; it represents the passing of the torch fully to humanity. The Third Order's sign is the Eye of Anikrunta, centered in a red triangle.

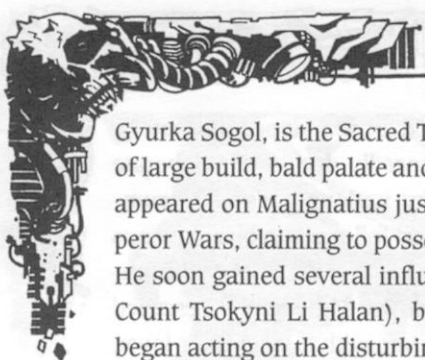
Reports of deaths, assassinations and ritual sacrifice hang over the Third Order. The Church is fully intent on tracking down its cells. Even the al-Malik Mutasih on Criticorum are rumored to be planning a cleansing of the cult.

On Criticorum, the cult meets below the ancient crypts in Tada Town. Countess Annuziata currently dwells in the old Sorbad Hotel, in Acheon. On Aragon, the cult meets in an as-yet-undiscovered location, while on Byzantium Secundus it is whispered that they gather at a member's estate, Johnathon Weldson of the Scravers, near the University of Viridian.

The Sacred Task for the Harmonious Return

Some have attempted a synthesis of Obun and Ukari teaching and methodologies, along with other ancient teachings, such as Oro'ym lore. One such attempt, begun by





Gyurka Sogol, is the Sacred Task. Sogol, a middle-aged man of large build, bald palate and mesmerizing personality, first appeared on Malignatius just before the advent of the Emperor Wars, claiming to possess the lost teachings of the Ur. He soon gained several influential followers (Dr. Rostislav, Count Tsokyni Li Halan), before the Li Halan authorities began acting on the disturbing reports about his claims and teachings. The Decados invasion interrupted the Hidden Martyr investigation, and Sogol moved himself and his followers off-planet. He showed up next in the Istakhr Market, but now seems to hold forth his ideas in Acheon, on Criticorum.

His teachings consist of methods to "wake" people from their psychological slumber and gain "cosmic immortality" by creating a soul, which, according to his system, most sentient humans lack. Borrowing and mixing Obun and Ukari theologies, Sogol claims that the Anunnaki taught all the sentient races, including those of Urth, how to live a balanced life and aid the gods in their maintenance of the Pancreator's universe. Due to a cosmic shift of horrific proportions, some races, such as humanity, lost this connection and became unbalanced. He uses several Obun and Ukari terms to denote spiritual states of consciousness that existed before the splitting of the deities into opposing camps, and seeks to reunite his followers with the spirit of primal unity that existed before the mythological war of the Anunnaki.

Sogol seems to have been in the past employment of the Mutasih, and received some wounds fighting against Merchant League drillers on Kordeth. He is known as "Father Tada" among the deep Ukari, and *va Susa* among the Obun.

The mathematician Akasky, who split from Sogol to found his own version of the teachings, says that nothing is certain about the man, even his birth date. From conversations with Akasky, it seems that Sogol spent 30 years acquiring wisdom by wandering on Urth, Obun, Kordeth, and the Li Halan and Hawkwood worlds. According to Akasky, Sogol fell under an "evil influence" sometime after he left Istakhr. It should be noted that the proud Akasky is intellectually aloof, a member of the Van Gelder minor-nobility, and so is disinclined to follow any single teacher for long, especially one of commoner rank. Akasky also stated that Sogol possesses psychic or theurgic powers, which he displayed from time to time.

Sources on Acheon say he now teaches sacred prayer and exercises. There is the whiff of the con man about Sogol, but also the feeling of an unearthly presence. He is able to find Anunnaki artifacts with amazing accuracy, and he may prove helpful if approached in the correct manner, perhaps with one of his trusted students as a go-between. His knowledge of politics is exceptional, and he was able to point out one of our moles by "false smell," thus compromising our agent. It is said that his training methods, while harsh, do not lead to demon-worship, but form instead a philosophical path towards a higher evolutionary stance. His followers seem to have infiltrated several intelligence organizations in their search for Ur artifacts. A former Rook now serves as a close follower of his.

He is rumored to possess ancient Second Republic maps to Ur sites, and is quite knowledgeable about the Ur races. Some Obun speak of his knowledge with considerable awe. For these reasons, he can be very important to us. His willingness to work with the Mutasih in the past shows he can work with intelligence services.

Sogol dwells in an old library he purchased off Tahir Street, in Acheon. His followers meet here and at various safe houses throughout the city. The sign of the Sacred Task is a seven-sided star within a triangle.

The Ustirian Li Halan

A remnant of the pre-conversion Li Halan dwell in the Ustirian fief of Gashkar, on Vorox. Claiming descent from Prince Ustirin Li Halan, they are forbidden to leave Ungavorox by the Icon authorities. They dream one day of reclaiming the ancient leadership of the Li Halan. According to the account of a rare visitor, the famed hunter Sir Musa al-Malik, they actively worship the Ukari deities. One of the Ustirian Li Halan, Lord Chou, managed to bribe a Merchant League ship captain and escape offworld. The Li Halan authorities placed a price on his head. He is rumored to have been in Decados space, but now seems to exist under an alias on Ravenna. He is extremely dangerous, and is believed to be scouring the Known Worlds for Ur artifacts. The Ustirian Li Halan differ little from the Third Order in their philosophy, except that they believe the Li Halan should be the ones to usher in universal darkness.

Noble Cults

Various Decados nobles practice differing forms of Anunnaki worship and Antinomist practice. They were the chief inheritors of the darker aspects of Anunnaki worship after the Li Halan converted to the Universal Church.

Among the al-Malik, a very small following of Duke Tahir Majnun al-Malik the Doomed still maintains a presence. They believe that the universe is full of devouring energies and that the individual must build up *kharaj*, or soul-tax, to feed these powers. Their sign is the Black Star, representing al-Mannat, the feminine energy of the void, named the Beloved by Tahir.

The Hazat seem to be plagued by a highly secretive Anunnaki/Antinomist cult of some sort, with connections leading to Count Belardo Goya de Aragon.

Peasant Cults

An alarming trend is the rise of peasant cults of Ur worshippers. First recognized as early as 4810 in areas of Aylon where Ukari/human communities live in proximity, the growth has since spread on Aylon, Velisimil, Kordeth, Madoc, Criticorum and Aragon. These rural Anunnaki worshippers are not to be confused with the Gjartins of Leminkainen and Manitou, although some similarities do seem apparent. Father Gritter of Shaprut, who has studied the Aylon phenomenon close hand, says it is largely a mix of Ukari beliefs and rural human traditions. Hidden places of worship to the Ukari deities Sapa, Dzwornga and even Anikrunta have been discovered in remote areas on Aylon. It is doubtful that over a few hundred people at most belong to this cult, although in some places, statues of Universal Church saints have been found next to Ukari deity icons.

Church mendicants increasingly report blasphemous peasant cults hidden in remote areas, practicing all manner

of forbidden worship. In a remote cornfield on Criticorum, peasants sacrificed livestock to the effigy of a deity they called the Harvest Man, built of entwined hay, fruits and vegetables. The leader, a peasant named Roya, seems to have had visions after eating ergot-spoiled bread. Two Avestites who had come to investigate reports of the cult were sacrificed and lit on fire, tied to the Harvest Man.

Another group of peasants on Aragon worshipped an ancient Second Republic hologram of a Midian-Dragon, which seems to have been part of a 3-D ad campaign on a billboard advertising solar batteries. The dragon, known as Steeled, was thought by the local peasantry to be an Anunnaki god until an investigation discovered that it was merely an advertising gimmick. The hologram dragon would repetitively emerge beneath the neon-glowing words to fly back and forth across the billboard, now partially enclosed in a cliff-side.

A recent Sons of Rillos revival was begun on Tethys by an out-of-work actor cured from an alcoholic delirium. Swearing that the Ukari deities cured him, he passed himself off as a healer and gained a rural following. This was soon suppressed by the authorities.

Finally, on Madoc, a secret-brotherhood of fishermen, the Picgnostic Dagan Brotherhood, learned secrets from the Oro'ym. It is believed that the brotherhood receives economic benefits from the sea-dwelling amphibious Oro'ym, and the fishermen in return protect the Oro'ym spawning grounds.

Not all reports of Anunnaki cults are credible. However, the increased activity alone is worth attention. Are the Anunnaki active once more? Is the distant whisper of their awakening seeping into our unconscious desires, spawning all manner of false cults? I pray it is not so.



Eskatonic Worldshapers

The Worldshapers are a peculiar lot whose heresy blurs the lines of science and theurgy, and so they have brought upon themselves a dual mistrust by the Church, which both disdains science and damns theological difference. They are at best, eccentric; typically, enigmatic; and at worst, dangerous revolutionaries with a frightening view towards what has led to the Known Worlds' current dismal condition and how to repair it. Although they trace the roots of their beliefs millennia back to the earliest Urthish traditions, in fact they owe much of their philosophy to the work of Doramos, the World Architect, the Second Republic scientist who transformed terraforming into a metaphysic for a new era. While it was Doramos who introduced the Second Republic to worldshaping, or the occult properties of terraforming, it would be years before his teachings became the Worldshaper Heresy. The Worldshapers' harshest critics now hold the responsible for the fading suns, while the heretics see themselves as not merely the heirs but the creators of the new kingdom which must be born of the endtimes.

History

Worldshaping as an occult science is rooted in the metaphysical rebirth of the Second Republic, with the mystics and scholars who plumbed the depths of ancient Urthish beliefs and melded them to newly discovered alien philosophies. This era was an occult renaissance, as ancient Urthish metaphysics were rediscovered — sacred geometry, the hermetic disciplines, European and Asian alchemical systems, and traditional cosmologies were all reopened and mined. Nature and the universe were not mere matter but symbols of the divine, and science within these traditions involved not simply understanding the world around us, but understanding the very mind of God.

Just as ancient sacred sciences were being reinvigorated, humanity was also discovering the belief systems of alien peoples. The enigmatic Vau, the philosophical Obun and the warlike Ukari, and other peoples, provided a wealth of esoteric beliefs to be plundered, absorbed, and in many cases (if not most), misunderstood or fraudulently misrepresented. But each of these systems provided new ways of understanding space, the worlds, and the Creator.

In short, Creation was remythologized. The *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, was given galactic scale.

But sacred science is nothing without technique, and commensurate with the renewal of the occult was a series of tremendous advances in terraforming. The science saw some crude expression in the First Republic, but it was in the Second Republic that it found fruition. Landmasses were clay to sculpt and mold; forests and jungles, oceans and rivers,

all these became playthings and ornaments as their geographical features were pieces of a planetary puzzle. Likewise, advanced knowledge of genetics and biology made it possible to adapt or transform species for new habitats: scientists could design worlds and populate them with the flora and fauna of choice.

And the best of the best of these terraformers was Doramos of Tyre: philosopher, scientist, metaphysician, engineer. His early published works on terraforming technologies and methodologies were hailed as revolutionary, and he was astutely perceived as a scientific genius while still an apprentice scientist. But his true interests were in the sacred sciences that were being rediscovered by his contemporaries. As he read technical manuals and engineering monographs, he also studied the growing corpus of Second Republic metaphysics: Pythagorean harmonics, Avicenna's angelology, the astrological portions of the Obun *Talokelanti*. Doramos came to believe that his two worlds of interest, the hard sciences and the sacred sciences, could be united — and in fact, were meant to be, within a mystical interpretation of terraforming. To Doramos, the "Great Work" of alchemy took place not within a crucible, but within a planet; the athenor, or alchemist's stove, lay buried beneath the mantle of the world.

His small treatise, *Oration on the Shaping of Worlds* was the first known exhortation of terraforming as a spiritual endeavor, and he begins with the alchemical injunction: *visita interiora terrae rectificando invenies occultum lapidem. Investigate the interior of the earth. Rectifying, thou wilt find the hidden stone.* In his *Oration*, Doramos combined his technical knowledge and his metaphysical revelations into a new understanding of terraforming, which he called *worldshaping*. He attempted, in his own brilliantly Quixotic fashion, to blend and merge ancient metaphysics and modern science, Urthish cosmologies with alien philosophies. His oration left little untouched: Obun correspondences, Chinese geomancy, Pythagorean harmonics, sacred geometry, the spatial order of the Empyrean, Ur iconography, Vau physics, Vedic astrology. He plumbed the depths of these to create a unique metaphysic linking artifice to apotheosis, science to salvation. Worldshaping, the greatest of all sacred sciences, was a metaphysic for the Second Republic; it was the sacred act of participating in Creation.

His new metaphysic did not gain many converts. Doramos quietly continued his sacred work, taking on only the sole apprentice Gilgar, the famed terraformer of the planet Grange (now known as Pandemonium). But the *Oration* did create a ripple in the intellectual pond, touching the awareness of theologians, metaphysicians and scientists alike, and

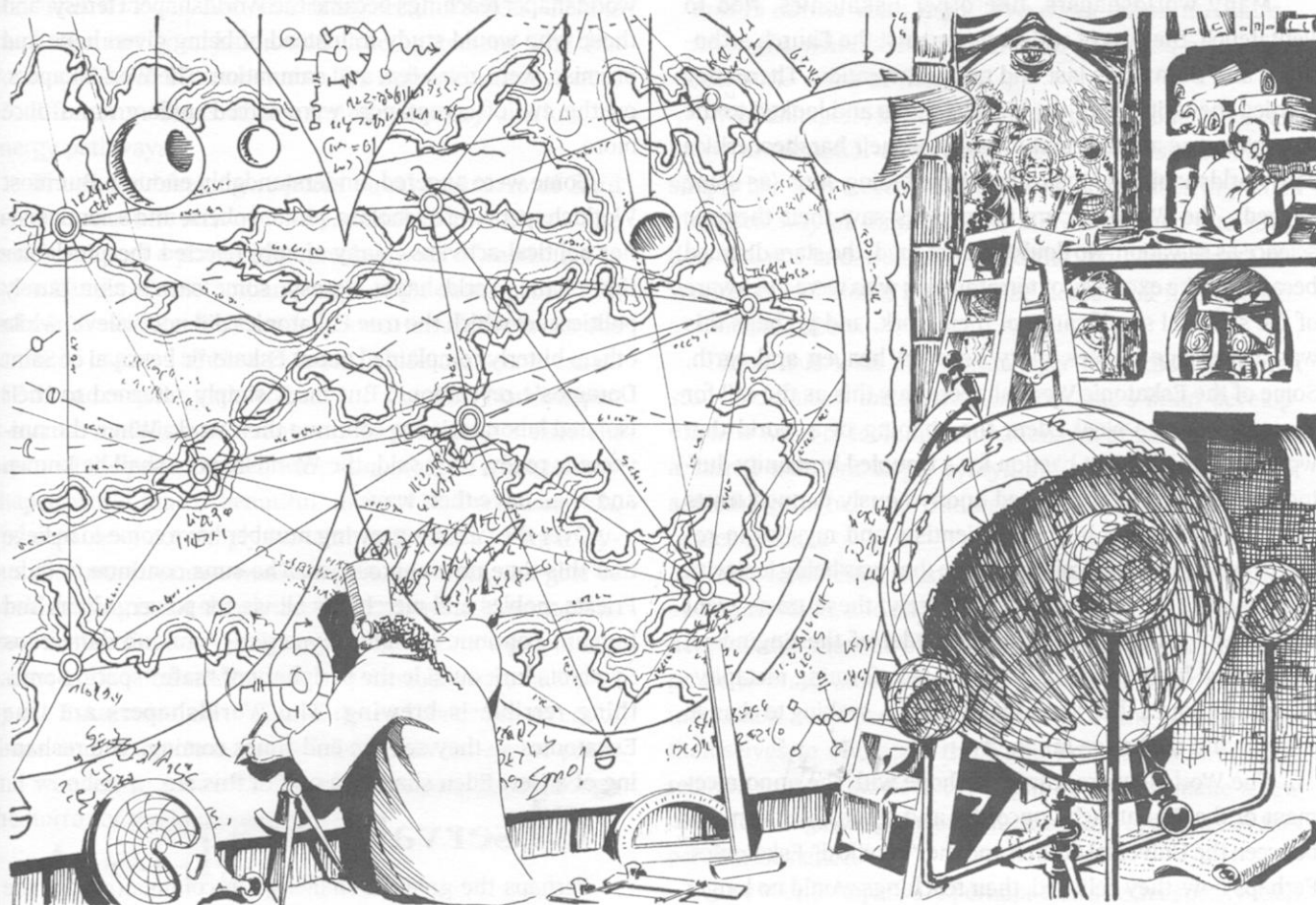
eventually scholars and philosophers began talking about Doramos and his worldshaping philosophies. The majority of pure scientists thought it folly and madness, arguing that there was no room for faith in science, or science in faith. Most scientists, however, were content to ignore Doramos's inclinations: his work spoke for itself. If he believed himself to be the hands of God, let him.

Gilgar in turn attempted to train others in the sacred arts imparted unto him by Doramos. Unfortunately, many of his followers lacked such skill, and perhaps the only thing worse than a bad terraformer is a bad metaphysical terraformer. Many proposed projects never got off the ground. There was often no way a metaphysical terraforming experiment could even commence or receive funding, particularly after some early mishaps. Take, for example, Nicola Vey-Gracien's idea for transforming the almost lifeless Zagroski Sea into a basin of the Aqua Celestis, the Waters of Paradise. Instead, she made it a bed of toxic sludge, incapable of supporting life for generations. The planet's corporate landholders simply wanted fresh water.

Doramos's greater admirers were among the metaphysicians, occultists, and philosophers who drew upon the same readings that inspired the World Architect. In his *Oration* they found the perfect marriage between science and supernatural, and some began calling him a seer for the new generation. In time, mystics with no true knowledge of

terraforming became part of the movement, and the resulting metaphysics exploded in a thousand directions. Nahar al-Nouri saw all matter as the product of an evil, lesser divinity, and felt that the true purpose of terraforming was to cleanse the sinful mantle that entombed the sacred divinity within; unfortunately, she identified this evil divinity as the Pancreator. Baltasar Epimedes felt that the physical universe was created as the result of a primordial war in heaven, and that each planet was the tomb of a slain celestial entity, awaiting the next cycle of creation to be born anew: Holy Terra was the resting place of the Great Enemy. It is not surprising that the Church cared little for much of the worldshaper philosophy. Take, for example, the following from the *Ptolemy Sutras*:

Within each human is the Holy Flame, like a burning ember within a clay pot, at first dim and barely lit. Through quiet and study, through meditation and revelation, the flame shall burn brightly, and the Enlightened may begin to loosen the constraints of mere mortality, and shall have mastery of time and form and space and matter. We are Little Gods, each granted a finite portion of the Pancreator's light, but we are sleeping; and as we awaken to our true nature, as we grow towards fullness and union with the Maker of all, we too shall become Makers. This is not hubris: our sacred mission is to continue the



act of Creation begun by the Pancreator. And this is no blasphemy: it is the inherent birthright of a blessed humanity.

The Church was initially powerless against such outright pride — until the Dark Ages. As the suns faded, the power of the Church grew, and the Digamma Apocrypha became officially verboten — along with anything else reeking of “Digammite tendencies”, including much of the worldshaper corpus. Church theologians condemned the Promethean “Worldshaper Heresy,” which sought to usurp the power of creation, and Church inquisitors were keen to discover these heretics who taught that man could act as God. And the Worldshaper Heresy was seen as particularly damnable: for how could the fading of the stars not be linked to this Promethean heresy?

But the worldshaper teachings found advocates and supporters among the mystics and theurges who proclaimed the coming of the Eschaton. The wide-ranging metaphysics of the worldshapers, touching equally on contemporary science, ancient Terran tradition, and mysterious alien beliefs, was fascinating to many early Eskatonics, and they helped both preserve and contribute to the new metaphysic. The worldshapers even found some anonymity among the Eskatonics: within that group, these terraformers were simply one more group of heretics for the Church inquisitors to root out.

Many worldshapers, like other Eskatonics, fled to Pentateuch, the seat of resistance against the Church orthodoxy, and Doramos’s last and greatest creation. There they studied the writings of the Worldshapers and looked to the very planet as another text to study. If their harshest critics saw worldshaping as the cause of the fading suns (as some alleged), the Worldshapers themselves saw their theurgic science as salvation. No doubt, they argued, the stars dimmed because of the excesses of terraformers who were not aware of the spiritual significance of their work, and perhaps this was a message to seek unity between heaven and earth. Some of the Eskatonic Worldshapers saw this as the call for the creation of a New Eden, the shaping of a world that would become the last bastion for a troubled humanity during the end times, and issued anonymously penned tracts calling for harmony between scientists and mystics in rediscovering the terraforming science that was being lost with each passing generation. Unfortunately, these tracts went mostly unheeded by the Supreme Order of the Engineers, and vilified by the Church. Still, the terraforming metaphysicians continued their contraband studies, seeking to change a world and to change humanity.

The Worldshapers saw some hope with the announcement of the Pentateuch Concordat and a possible harmony between the Universal Church and the “heretical” Eskatonics. Perhaps now, they believed, their teachings would no longer

need to be hidden, and they would be able to pursue their craft, to work in open with the Engineers who controlled the remnants of the giant terraforming engines of the past. Perhaps this was yet another rebirth, and worldshaping would be seen as the apotheosis of science united with religion for the betterment of all.

Unfortunately, this never happened.

Many of the Eskatonic teachings were accepted; if not elevated to canonical status, they were at least removed from outright heresy. The literatures of the Digamma Apocrypha, the Universalist “Heresy” — these were moved closer to doctrinal acceptance. But in the act of compromise, some things are lost, and the Church saw worldshaping as one heresy it could neither condone nor forgive. If Eskatonic theurgy was accepted because it proved its utility in the Symbiot Wars, then worldshaper philosophies were still too intricately linked to the fading of the suns. And though Doramos’s *Oration* entered the Digamma Apocrypha, its piety recognized, the majority of his followers’ literatures were not so recognized. These the Church outright rejected. A minor codicil of the Pentateuch Concordat of 4955 was the outright rejection of the Worldshaper Heresy: *And for any who believe that the shaping of planets is a sacred art, or is part of the mandate of humanity, let him be anathema. For we are the Created, not the Creators.*

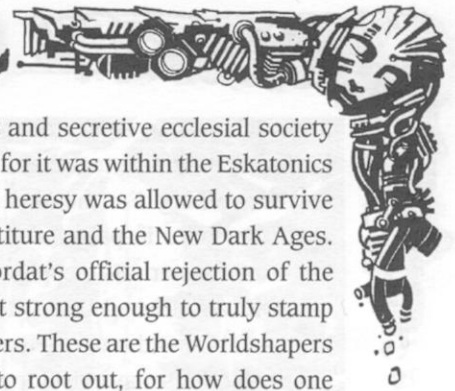
There was no great debate, no grand protest. The worldshaper teachings became the Worldshaper Heresy, and those who would study it, instead of being given hope and promise, were given fear and damnation. The Worldshapers, on the eve of acceptance, were forced underground once more.

Some were angered, understandably enough. But most Worldshapers were scholars, philosophers, and scientists — not political activists. Many simply rejected the proclamation of the Worldshaper Heresy; some saw it as a purely political act which the true Eskatonics did not believe, while others bitterly complained about Eskatonic betrayal of Saint Doramos’s revelations. But most simply returned to their isolated laboratories to continue their work. When the universe is ready, they said, the Worldshapers shall be known and shall have their way.

Over the years, a growing number have come to believe that this time now approaches. The suns continue to fade. Priests, nobles and merchants all vie for power. Aliens and humans continue to fight. Mysterious Vau and dangerous Symbiots lurk outside the periphery of “safe” space. Something terrible is brewing. The Worldshapers are true Eskatonics — they see the end-times coming. The reshaping of a New Eden shall be a part of this era.

Observations

Perhaps the greatest challenge in commenting on the



activities of the Worldshapers is the fact that they are a secretive and unruly lot lacking strong social or political solidarity. To complicate matters, they are deeply embedded in an already secretive, opaque, and quasi-heretical priestly order. In one task, though, are they united — their goal of creating the perfect world, of bringing about the marriage of heaven and earth.

However, what this alchemical marriage constitutes and how it is to be achieved is itself a point of contentious debate and metaphorical obfuscation. What makes “the perfect world” and how to achieve it has been the subject of many occult terraforming treatises — and these are not easy things to read. They are treatises equally scientific and occult; not simply terraforming texts, which are already difficult to penetrate, these metaphysical treatises mix geology, physics, meteorology, the occult sciences of sacred geometry, alchemy, numerology, astrology and more. It is not simply sufficient to determine oxygen content in the atmosphere, soil acidity or aridity, and adequate greenery to maximize photosynthesis: the planetary meridians must also be discerned, the appropriate stellar alignment must be divined to conduct the work, and the alchemical properties of the earth and water must be analyzed and balanced. Likewise must the numerical and astrological significance of a world, its satellites, and its neighboring planets must all be recorded and analyzed. It is not so much a matter of what the planet is as what it *means*. And, like many occult sciences, there is much abstract speculation and little agreement. *The Ten Books of Global Transmutation*, for example, surveys over 35 different methods of discerning planetary charkas, or energy pathways.

Thus worldshaping requires equal measures of hard science, occult science, and creative thinking. The terraforming of a planet is as much a work of sacred art as is the illumination of a manuscript or the construction of a cathedral. Within their work, sacred terraformers (in the words of Lazarus of New Hebron), “hide the secret names of God and map the paths to heaven.” For each Worldshaper, it seems, there is a different way of producing a different notion of the perfect world, which can often be a masterfully shaped world that is beautiful, mineral and resource rich, and capable of not simply sustaining life but making it joyous. For most serious worldshapers, however, the goal of worldshaping is not simply turning lead into gold (on a planetary scale, of course); they seek to transform a potentially barren world into Paradise. The Worldshapers were embraced by the Eskatonics, after all, and the end times are an era of chaos and destruction, to be followed by an age of peace and wonder: to create Paradise is to ensure hope through the horror of the imminent end.

Assembly

The heart of the Worldshaper heresy can be found oc-

culted within that enigmatic and secretive ecclesial society called the Eskatonic Order — for it was within the Eskatonics that Doramos's worldshaper heresy was allowed to survive and thrive during the Divestiture and the New Dark Ages. Even the Pentateuch Concordat's official rejection of the Worldshaper Heresy was not strong enough to truly stamp out the alchemical terraformers. These are the Worldshapers who are the most difficult to root out, for how does one differentiate between the various heresies that abound in that that order of mystics, quacks, and dangerous theurges?

What little is known of the Worldshaper society comes almost entirely from conjecture, rumor and riddle. Those few Worldshaper heretics who have been caught are not prone to revealing information about their secretive order. Or at least, not prone to revealing it in anything less than esoteric gibberish. Take, for example, the following script from an Avestite inquisitor's interrogation of an admitted Worldshaper:

Investigator: *Who do you report to? Who do you work with?*

Heretic: *I report to Sun and Moon! The Stars are my brethren!*

Investigator: *Where do you meet to conduct your business? When do you meet?*

Heretic: *We meet at the crossroads of eternity, where soil touches ether and where the noonday sun is darker than night! We meet when the stars are right, when the configuration of sacred orbs unlocks the gates of heaven!*

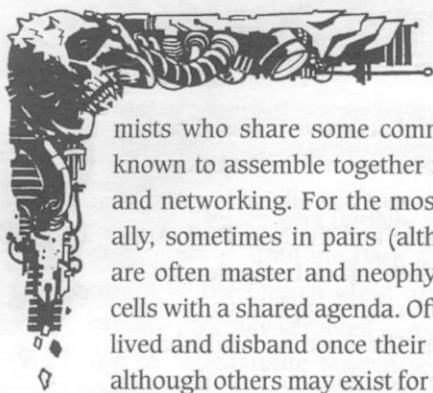
Worldshapers, like the rest of their Eskatonic allies, are prone to metaphor and allegory, but it seems they do not simply use it as a secret cant. Instead, it becomes ingrained into their way of thinking. The aforementioned interrogation did not end well: the more the Inquisitor broke the Worldshaper heretic, the more he descended into pseudo-alchemical babble.

Thus it is with the Worldshaper heretics: one cannot study Doramos's metaphysic without one's brain developing new ways of looking at Creation. All of nature becomes a sacred text writ large; everything becomes a symbol of something higher and transcendent — and the mundane ceases to exist.

The Worldshapers are thus notoriously hard to fathom and understand, and any discussion of how the Worldshaper heretics associate and operate is necessarily complicated and prone to error. Much of what is learned is either rumor or fabrication, some perhaps disseminated by the Worldshapers themselves to obfuscate the truth. From a few seemingly reliable sources, however, it might be safe to make a few assertions regarding the organization and operation of this occult association.

The Worldshapers are perhaps less a secret society than a collection of heretics, mystics, and Second Republic alche-





mists who share some common beliefs and are at times known to assemble together for the purposes of education and networking. For the most part, they operate individually, sometimes in pairs (although those working in pairs are often master and neophyte), and on rare occasion, in cells with a shared agenda. Often times these cells are short-lived and disband once their stated mission has been met, although others may exist for years, with only sporadic contact over their lifespan. No one truly knows just how many Worldshapers exist: it is doubtful that they have all met or participated in any sort of census. The numbers thus may range from the dozens to the hundreds.

Just as the Worldshapers do not have a fixed congregation, neither do they have an established leadership; no centralized magus or even a leading council of elders leads this bunch of eccentrics, though for a brief time the Turba Philosophorum assumed this role. If they truly lack any leadership, it likely due to inherent disorganization, not out of any democratic leanings.

Perhaps it is out of sheer tenacity and zeal, then, that this group survives to this day. And survive they do, somehow attracting new converts to their cause. As with the rest of the Worldshaper contingent, very little is known about their recruitment methods. It is known that they recruit from within the ranks of the Eskatonics, for the Worldshapers believe that only the Eskatonic neophytes have the appropriate psychospiritual training to truly embrace the Worldshaper metaphysic. Once identified and secretly inducted into the Worldshaper assembly, new Worldshapers are mentored by a senior magus in their heretical ways, mingling the already esoteric teachings of the Eskatonics with the verboten teachings of the Second Republic world architects.

Time and again the Eskatonics have come under scrutiny for the Worldshaper heresy that thrives in their midst. Although the Eskatonics do maintain the Sanhedrin to conduct internal investigations into Antinomy and dangerous practices, these Sanhedrin do not do a particularly good job of policing the Worldshapers. Some suspect that this seeming inefficacy is in fact due to the Eskatonic leadership turning a blind eye towards the Worldshapers in their midst. Others suspect that Magus Moore and the Presbuteroi do more than simply ignore Worldshapers, and that this heresy still receives secret support from the Eskatonic leadership.

Activities

According to the Church, the greatest threat the Worldshapers pose to the Known World is spiritual contamination. But at times their activities enter the realm of the secular, and even here they have been known to pose a danger to the unwary populace and the innocent citizen of the Empire.

For the most part, the Eskatonic heretics keep to themselves: although they may chafe under Orthodox authority and dislike having to hide their existence, they are not advocates for intellectual freedom. What is the occult if it is not hidden? They are typically more than content to cloister themselves away from society and conduct their studies in private. Perhaps if this were the extent of their heresy, they would not truly be a threat to any but their own souls.

But heresy does not work this way. It spreads and seeks to contaminate others, and the influence of the Worldshaper heresy can spread far and wide in ways often unseen. Sometimes Worldshapers may call upon the services of others to aid them in their personal quests for sacred artifacts or scientific relics — the journals of Doramos have yet to be found, the key to his notes on Pentateuch have yet to be uncovered, and the lost art of sacred terraforming has yet to be fully rediscovered. The Worldshapers will go to great lengths to recover, preserve and advance their forbidden metaphysic.

Thus the Worldshapers tend to surround themselves with a network of agents and conspirators to do their handiwork. These might be unwitting lackeys, conducting business through layers of forged identities, or they might be trusted agents who have proven themselves repeatedly. Likewise, at times a Worldshaper heretic might ally himself with like-minded conspirators outside the Eskatonics. Those caught in the Worldshaper net may be of any type, but they are typically those individuals who are most likely to contribute to or profit from the Worldshaper endeavors — from the Engineer seeking to rediscover lost science or understand mysterious terraforming technology, to the antiquarians seeking ancient books or sacred relics, or even environmentalists who are enamored of the Worldshaper sacred stewardship ethic (the slippery slope towards pagan nature worship). It is here that the worldshaping taint might enter the mind and the soul, for its metaphysics are an appealing domain to the unwary, mingling science and speculation as they do. Those who seek the secrets of the past — be they technology or theurgy — often lack the purity of heart and are prone to infernal influence. Worldshaping, with its veneer of the sacred is nothing more than a carefully disguised lure for the power hungry — for what greater power is there than to shape a world?

But the Worldshapers do not simply devote themselves to arcane science: they have recognized that there is a mundane, technical aspect to terraforming which continues to this day. The terraforming machines currently operational are all that is left of the forgotten science, and the Worldshapers revere them as sacred monuments to a lost art. Unfortunately, a few accidents involving terraforming equipment have been traced to Worldshaper experiments gone awry. For example, the pair of Worldshaper terraforming radicals who sabotaged the terraforming engines beneath

the Hub on Pandemonium in an attempt to completely rid the planet of all human occupation: *Solve et Coagule* they called themselves, after the alchemical maxim *Dissolve and Reform!* Only by restoring Grange — sometimes called by the Worldshapers “Gilgar’s Folly”— to its original wild state, could Gilgar’s alchemical plans reach fruition. They planned for the utter destruction of all human habitation on Grange. Thankfully for the human inhabitants of Pandemonium, their destructive plan was intercepted and stopped. Unfortunately, their criminal activities only added to the negative reputation of the Worldshapers.

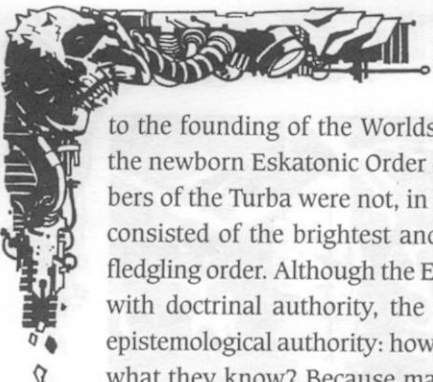
Known Worldshapers

The Worldshapers have, like other mystics, a propensity for secrecy, believing that their teachings can only be understood by a few. This is compounded by years of persecution by the Church, of course, and it is this same persecution that causes Worldshapers to go underground. Thus the identities of true Worldshapers are hidden behind false personas; when they correspond or disseminate their oftendammed tracts, they take on pseudonyms based upon esoteric principles or processes. For example, Brother Apeiron, Brother Akashaveda, Sister Conjunctio, or Magister Nei Tan. And very few Worldshapers have ever been caught. Those who have were perhaps foolish and extravagant. But Church investigators are a patient and intelligent lot, and have begun collecting increasing amounts of information on Worldshaper activities — or at least rumors of the same. And a part of this growing body of information includes knowledge of a few prominent Worldshaper personalities, whose true identities the Church would dearly love to discern.

- **Mercurius:** Mercurius is a member of the anagogical Worldshapers who believes that all of Doramos’s teachings are based upon a hidden metaphor, and that “worldshaping” is itself simply an allegory and not the true act of terraforming with engines and machines. While most Worldshapers believe that worldshaping itself acts on two levels — the global and the psychospiritual, Mercurius believes that the global work need not even be accomplished if Doramos’s true teachings are understood. The worlds which must be shaped are the inner worlds of psyche and soul: Doramos simply used terraforming as a language for a celestial process. Once the “heavenly world” is created — i.e., once inner perfection is reached — then all mastery over space and matter is possible; the most powerful theurgies known to the Church pale in comparison. Mercurius has been working on decoding Doramos’s notes for the planet Pentateuch, written in a yet-undeciphered script, under the belief that his blueprint for the perfect planet is in fact the key to apotheosis.

- **The Turba Philosophorum:** The *Turba Philosophorum*, or Convention of Philosophers, dates back





to the founding of the Worldshapers and their embrace by the newborn Eskatonic Order of mystics. The earliest members of the Turba were not, in fact, solely terraformers; they consisted of the brightest and most erudite mystics of the fledgling order. Although the Eskatonics were less concerned with doctrinal authority, the Turba spoke to the need for epistemological authority: how did the mystics come to know what they know? Because many of the Worldshapers were in fact scientists as well as mystics, the Turba often had a strong majority of Worldshapers in its midst, and in time, became seen as an entirely Worldshaper-based authority. As the Eskatonics became more and more established, and a semblance of heirarchy arose among them, the Turba became less of an authority and more of a learned body, whose voice could lend credence or destroy the credibility of a debated mystical text or philosophical argument. As the Worldshapers went underground, the Turba went with them but their authority did not diminish. The Turba has existed to this day, typically quiet on matters of Worldshaper activity but occasionally speaking out on the need for a revival in metaphysical terraforming. Some Worldshapers believe that the Turba has neither authority nor teeth and should be advocating reform more substantial than a mere revival of Doramos's work; others believe that the "public" face of this anonymous group belies scores of covert activities. Regardless, the actual membership of this Council — even the true number of members — is hidden from Church investigators

who are keen to discover the learned elders of these heretics.

• **Alkahest:** If the inquisitors and investigators of the Universal Church were to identify a single most notorious Worldshaper, it would be the mystic Alkahest, whose pseudonym derives from the great alchemical fluid that dissolves all materials in the search for the prima material. And this name is aptly chosen, for Alkahest strongly believes that the Universal Church is so corrupt, so power-hungry, and so starved for the truth that it can only be reformed after destruction. Alkahest is not alone in this radical belief, of course; he — or she — shares this notion with other Worldshapers who have too long chafed under the tyranny of the Church. Alkahest operates from a hidden base — dubbed the New Jerusalem — from which his own operatives gather data on ecclesial activities and at times attempt to interfere with Church operations. Many terrorist activities have been traced to — or blamed on — Alkahest and his followers. The Church is not concerned about the efficacy of Alkahest's plans — none have come to fruition yet — but about their influence and the rate with which they seem to grow. Those few Worldshapers who have been caught recently have espoused Alkahest's destructive measures, and this has given the Church pause. Give a child matches and eventually he will strike a fire — and the Patriarch would like to stop that fire before the Church is immolated.

Brother Battle Heresies

Observers from all parts of the Known Worlds visit Brother Battle monasteries, tour their training facilities and see their rituals. Many Church officials have scrutinized the Brothers' ceremonies for any trace of heresy, watching for everything from misspoken words to secret hand gestures to any lack of piety on the part of the worshippers. They have all gone away pleased with the lack of heterodoxy — or disappointed in the same.

In fact, a day in the life of a Brother Battle apprentice would make that of an orthodox priest seem both worldly and extravagant. They wake well before dawn for their prayers and exercises, and spend the rest of the day engaged in similar tasks. This is not limited to apprentices. Even the highest-ranking Brothers take great pride in their days of devotion and toil. They have no time for heresy, as they tell their apprentices.

Somehow these rumors of heresy persist, however, never completely going away. After all, secrecy is a part of this order, for it refuses to teach its most important battle skills to anyone else. Ceremonies for the order's most elite mem-

bers are closed to outsiders in order to protect these martial secrets, and patriarchs long ago granted the order special dispensation for this. The order has used this (and some diplomacy) to keep anyone, even Inquisitors, from observing these rites.

Some grand masters have implied that should real evidence of heretical rites appear, then they might allow selected Church leaders access to their rites, but this has never been put to the test. This only seems to stimulate whispers that the Brothers use their dispensation to hide other, darker secrets.

Not all these gossips say that the entire order is evil. A more common concern is that certain Brothers have banded together to promote their own heretical views, and they use the order's secrecy to cloak their own nefarious doings. Indeed, the order has not been completely free from revelations of heresy. More than a few Brothers have gone down in flames, and its leaders constantly preach for them to remain on their guard against heterodoxy. Many would be surprised to learn that the order itself has rooted out more

heretics within its walls than even the Inquisition has.

The order does little to publicize such punishments, but also does not cover them up. Inquisitors and other investigators are allowed to interview such malefactors, though the Brothers' training usually means they go through such questioning in silence (except for a few groans and accidental screams).

These small-scale transgressors do not excite the conspiracy mongers much, however. They are more interested in what secrets the order's leadership hides, and here the rumors run rampant. Some say that the order's increasing contact with a secular world risks corrupting it, and that close contact with barbarians has allowed such foul doctrines to filter in, corrupting Brothers who learn of them. Others fear that the order has incorporated some Sathraist doctrine, and point to the fact that many of the order's earliest monasteries were built on the sites of their ancient enemies. And still more say that the order's doctrine of battle has always been a heresy, inspiring its followers to worship battle and practice hubris rather than following the Pancreator. As always, there is some truth to every rumor.

The Moneylenders

Long ago, Zebulon preached against the evils of usury. Those whose only contribution is money deserve little but scorn, for their way is that of a leech, living off the blood of others. This admonition received attention during the Diaspora, but fell by the wayside during the Second Republic. The Church revived this denunciation during the last days of the Second Republic, and it came to the forefront during the days of the collapse. Usury was one of the Republic's many crimes. According to the Church, Republican leaders lived by sucking the very blood of its citizens, feasting on their labors as if they were Aylonian sweet meats.

After the Fall, the Church turned its concerns into secular law, convincing most planets under its sway to ban the practice. This remained a major point of contention between it and the new guilds. The Privilege of Martyrs mitigated some of this strife, for the League interpreted it to mean that its members could take on this loathsome burden of charging interest for the good of humanity. The Church objects to this interpretation, but the number of nobles (and Church officials) who often borrow money means that it doesn't push the issue too far. It does try to ensure that rates do not rise too high, and that lenders at least justify their habits, though that is usually accomplished with a small donation to the collection box.

Brother Battle has punished its share of usurers during its long history, and its sermons denounce this practice almost as stridently as do the Avestites. Even now, the Brothers make a point of not charging interest — though its service fees and requested donations can reach exorbitant

amounts. Those who store their money with the order must pay some of it to withdraw it later, and those who borrow this money must pay for the service AND make a donation.

This practice reached its height during the Emperor Wars. Many groups and nobles felt safer borrowing money from the Brothers than from the Reeves. The amount of money the order made by this practice shocked its members, who put these funds to use upgrading equipment and acquiring more land for the sect. In 4968, several Reeves, lead by Melissa Winters, became concerned that the Church was taking its customers. They arranged a meeting with the Brothers most involved in this trade. The Brothers met, insisting that the Reeves needed to add a more devout element to their business practices. To their amazement, the Reeves agreed, and began explaining the religious aspect of what they did. After all, accumulating wealth required the Pancreator's blessing, for those without it fail miserably. The meeting lasted hours, at the end of which the Brothers left to meditate on what they had learned.

The meetings continued for the next month, by the end of which time the Brothers had become firmly convinced that they could reconcile the pursuit of wealth and their religious needs. Their prayers evolved from those that asked for protection from the corrupting power of money to those that sought aid in making more. When other Brothers accused them of using their power in the unholy pursuit of money, the moneylenders responded that money itself was not the sin, only the misuse of it. As long as the money stayed in the order, it was far better for the order to have it than for it to corrupt someone else. For money, like a sword, is a tool, and is no more evil than those who wield it. Since the Brothers' purpose is pure, the money would not corrupt them. Instead, it would serve to show to any who doubted that the Pancreator blessed the order's cause.

And so the accumulation of wealth began. While the order had made money before, this expanded desire coincided with increased opportunity. Many who mentioned the order in their wills died during the wars. Many others sought out the order to take care of its money for them. The Brothers hired themselves out as mercenaries as never before. Still, the biggest source of income came from those who needed loans. They paid the order back, with a sizable donation, or the Brothers came and took what was owed.

Despite the wealth pouring in, the Brothers in charge of managing it spent very little on themselves. They still lived their austere lifestyles, trained constantly, and prayed fervently. Only the form of their prayers changed, and this happened slowly. As the strains of building this wealth grew, their prayers became more demanding. Instead of begging the Pancreator to show them His will, so they could act as He wanted, they began asking that He help them in their chosen task. They called on Him to bring them money, force





their clients to pay, and punish those who did not. Their prayers moved from the chapels to their offices to the vaults.

The moneylenders within the order began holding more meetings with the Reeves, later at night, and in their safest rooms. Even these Brothers are probably not sure when their worship turned from the Pancreator to Mammon, but turn it did. The accumulation of wealth has become their primary aim, and they focus on it before all else. They do not spend it on luxuries; indeed, they avoid spending it at all. Now only they know just how large this hoard of firebirds has grown, for they hide its true size even from the Grand Master himself.

The moneylenders are not a large group, but they have taken over much of the order's finances. Their threat to the Brothers is manifold. Not only is their spirituality in opposition to the order's, but they control the purse strings. Loosening these strings are anathema to them. In rejecting applications for funds, they tell the supplicant to practice greater austerity, for frugality is beloved of the Pancreator. In fact, spending any of their coin feels like a sin.

Codes

This is a small heresy, and all its members know one another. They have developed no special codes to identify each other, for they need none. However, they have spent a great deal of time trying to identify new recruits, for their

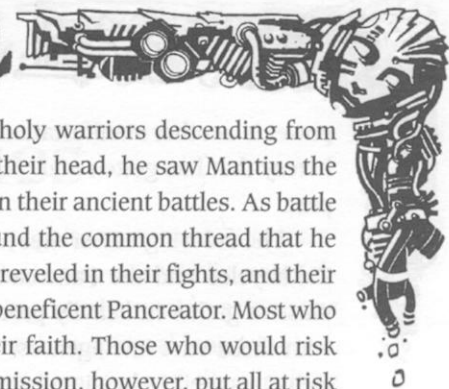
philosophy does not fit with many Brothers. Any potential recruits are watched and monitored for a long time, and their indoctrination takes a long, involved process.

Known Members

- **Adept Gambhir:** While the order's treasury is officially under the control of the masters, and especially the grand master, they have delegated its day-to-day control to adepts, and Mammonism has rooted itself most firmly here. Adept Gambhir turned to finances after wounds suffered on Hargard in 4874 left him without an arm. His reassignment was to be temporary, lasting only until he could raise funds for a cybernetic arm — something the order refused to do for him. He proved especially adept at the job, and soon received a summons to help manage the books on De Moley. Here the existing moneylenders slowly introduced him to Mammonism, and he quickly became an adherent. Now he fills the role of roving auditor, visiting monasteries around the Known Worlds in search of financial misdeeds — and new recruits.

The Rule of Battle

The order's earliest days were chancy ones at best. Their foes seemed to multiply moment by moment. Pirates, heretics, Sathraists, and even the Church itself took up arms against it. Saints Malcolm and Godfrey did their best to keep



the order together, but it took Saint Godfrey's cousin, Count Jackson Fiate de Moley, to start the order on its course to glory.

That Jackson could do so came as a surprise to everyone who knew him as a youth. Though his family always had a strong religious bent, during his youth Jackson rejected that for the glory of combat. He trained under his family's military advisors, but whenever peace reigned, he joined mercenary groups in order to continue his warlike ways.

To his family's embarrassment, many of these groups proved to be little more than bandits and slavers. Jackson proved himself well suited for such companions, and battled indiscriminately, taking on the remnants of the Second Republic, other nobles, and even the Church itself. Soon all those who knew him cursed his name. His father decided that Jackson's actions — and position as sole heir — called for extreme measures.

Well-trained commandos abducted Jackson while he caroused on Lamorak (now a lost world). His father then hired **Emily Krapelin**, the Church's best mind-physick and a rumored miracle worker, to redirect his interests. Krapelin's time was limited, for Jackson's father was in ill health. Using a mix of counseling, chemicals, prayer, sensory deprivation, and more radical treatments, she convinced Jackson to accept his duty to family and society. Perhaps more convincing, however, was his father's decline. As his father grew weaker, Jackson grew more devout — and more reliant on Krapelin. After his father finally died, Jackson left the care of the fief in the hands of his householders, and the two began a long pilgrimage.

Krapelin seemed determined that the holy places they visited were as well known for their battles as their miracles. Jackson found himself attuning more and more to the ancient tradition of humanity's holy warriors. Word of his cousin's deeds began to reach him, and this also seemed to inspire his new quest. As the pilgrimage continued, he began communicating with Godfrey more and more.

Their tour took them to many of humanity's holiest places — and some of its bloodiest. He also met each site's guardians and learned their specific ways and philosophies. With Krapelin's aid, he began realizing that all these systems had numerous similarities. Slowly he began to develop his own theory of the holy warrior — a development he felt stemmed from divine imperative.

It all came together for him when he went to visit the shrine to St. Mantius in Holy Terra's Scotland. The acolytes here claimed descent from generations of holy warriors, perhaps dating back to before the Pancreator. They taught him their history, a history that began long before the Prophet was born. On March 19, 4064, his days of study, prayer, and meditation all culminated in a grand vision.

He saw generations of holy warriors descending from the clouds to greet him. At their head, he saw Mantius the Soldier, and he joined them in their ancient battles. As battle after battle raged on, he found the common thread that he had sought. The warriors all reveled in their fights, and their wars were truly gifts from a beneficent Pancreator. Most who worship never truly test their faith. Those who would risk their life to further a divine mission, however, put all at risk and receive a commensurate return — the full measure of the Pancreator's love.

Those who would fight for their God find themselves the most tried and the most cherished of His creatures. This heavenly love finds its true place on the battlefield, with one's life at risk and one's foes at one's feet. Many warriors have spoken of the thrill of combat, but most only see a small part of the picture. Their thrill is nothing compared to those filled with the holy fire. Each sword swing for God is a sacrament, every wound received in His service a divine kiss.

This vision sent Jackson into an ecstatic fit and then a raving delirium. Krapelin cared for him until he finally recovered his senses. The caretakers of the shrine, in awe of Jackson, granted him full access to their substantial library. There he turned their manuscripts into the Rule of Battle, the secret document that would rule the Brother Battle until this very day.

The Rule of Battle is part training manual, part holy writ, and part prophecy. Jackson wrote some of it while in Scotland and the rest on De Moley, though much of it came from earlier texts. It provides the basic structure for the order, including its hierarchy and initiation rites, and these are detailed in the publicly available Rule of Battle. Other parts are not in the public version, however, and some of what has leaked out has raised some questions. The brothers guard the holy teachings closely, and no one under the rank of adept ever learns any of it. Some bits of it have become known. Quotes like, "Fighting for the Prophet is the Prophet obtained," have raised some eyebrows but little real concern. The adepts never hear of the prophecies, however, and only masters may read them... and not even all masters. The grand master has the final say about who can access these predictions, and usually only allows them to be read in his presence.

The Rule of Battle repeatedly emphasizes the sanctified nature of war in the Pancreator's name. Such wars are not to be shied from or even prevented. Instead, they are to be in all ways encouraged... and then won. Warriors should never go into battle for their own purposes, however. They should only fight as the Pancreator directs them, but then they should fight without reservation. Combat is its own cathedral, its own worship ceremony. Indeed, the Rule claims that Zakhayelos, the Lord of Hosts, is not a separate entity from the Pancreator. Instead, it claims that this Empyrean



power is another manifestation of the Pancreator, the sort of heresy that has gotten many Eskatonics into trouble in the past.

The order's greatest rites and ceremonies center around Zakhayelos and the Pancreator's holy hosts. Adepts and masters gather in heavily protected sanctums to commune with these vast intelligences. The best electronic countermeasures their technicians can devise shield them from prying eyes, and no one can hope to penetrate their physical defenses. There, in deep catacombs and towering cathedrals, before battles and after wars, they conduct their rituals.

These rituals reach their true conclusions on the battlefield, where the Brothers achieve their true union with the Pancreator. There they find themselves in rapture as they wade through armies of their foes. Masters speak of the incomparable bliss that fills them during their most epic melees, as well as the sense of becoming one with infinity.

Thus, the worship of battle and the propagation of war are two of the order's primary, albeit secret, functions. Both of these roles take on added import due to Jackson's prophecies. He made most of these in his later years, long after composing the rest of the Rule of Battle. By the time of his death in 4135, his prognostications took up entire volumes, and dealt with the past as well as the future.

Jackson saw himself as not just the continuation of a long line of holy warriors, but the reincarnation of them as well. The Pancreator had returned him to his earthly form in order to reestablish a lineage of holy warriors ready to fight the Pancreator's battles. Like the warriors of the past, he built temples over those of his enemies. Shortly before the end of his life, he became convinced that not only was his spirit the same as other ancient warriors, but that all of them had been an aspect of Zakhayelos. In other words, he described himself as an aspect of an aspect of the Divine.

From the cathedral on De Moley, built on the ruins of a Sathraist worship site, he began predicting a series of cataclysmic wars that would bring humanity, and even the entire galaxy, to the brink of ruin. He foresaw the most dire fates for those who would be peacemakers, and described the future as a period of war interrupted by occasional outbreaks of peace. Some of his predictions were very exact, and included the destruction of the corporations and the extinction of certain noble houses. Others were much more general, and included lamentations about humanity's frequent rejection of the Pancreator.

Jackson's prophecies described war as the high point in

human history, those times when people returned to the Pancreator before peace made them complacent and turned them back toward sin. While he acknowledged the horrible deeds committed during war, he described the spiritual progress that warriors could make as far more important. This growth is so important, in fact, that he calls on the order to promote war and do its best to reduce times of peace. In fact, the Rule of Battle ends with the admonition for the Brothers to do all they can to stimulate warfare throughout the universe. The highest rituals of the order emphasize this repeatedly, and they now try to conduct these rituals on Stigmata, as close to the war with the Symbiots as possible.

Codes

Again, those who have joined the Rule of Battle generally know each other, holding most of their larger rites once a year in the De Moley cathedral. Older Brothers have studied the most promising younger members for years, slowly bringing them into the fold. The most warlike learn the basics of the true Rule, but rarely the inner mysteries. The masters reserve these for those who show the truest blend of military fervor, religious devotion, and theurgical affinity. When making the sign of the jumpgate, members of the Rule of Battle always make the sign of the order's jumpgate, which involves starting with the palms pressed together at about stomach level, extending the arms high over the head, and then separating the hands to make a circle from the apex to the face.

Members

We believe that Master Claudius of De Moley is the leader of this heresy, but he has never committed any action that would give us proof. What evidence we have of this heresy comes from monitoring communications of high-level Brothers, but they almost never name names. We have yet to succeed in penetrating their most important meetings and rituals, which occur annually on De Moley.

Not all masters are part of the rule, but it would appear that most are. Master Hendon, most often seen on the Hiran front, seems to be one of the most vigorous proponents of the Holy Warrior ideal, and his word carries great weight in promoting younger Brothers. His meetings with Master Jamenthia of Heliopolis seem aimed at clarifying Jackson's prophecies, and we believe Jamenthia has enlisted a number of Eskatonic scholars to help make sense of them. These scholars may well prove our best opportunity to obtain a copy of the Rule of Battle.

CyberEvolutionaries

Although the present age is not one that views technology as a boon to humanity — let alone as the key to its spiritual development — this belief is not universal. Within the Merchant League, the nobility, and even the Church, there are those who see technology as humanity's savior, for it is that which separates intelligent species from the lesser creatures with which the Pancreator has populated the universe. Most of these techno-fetishists are harmless crackpots whose skewed views of reality pose no threat to the Empire. Unfortunately, there are some whose views are indeed dangerous. Chief among them are the so-called CyberEvolutionaries, heretics who believe that transcendence comes from the perfect melding of man and machine.

History

For as long as humanity has created tools, there have probably been those who viewed them less as *extensions* of themselves than as *parts* of themselves. It's an especially difficult perspective to understand — let alone accept — in our times, but it was once a widespread belief, which may be why the heresy holds an attraction even now. CyberEvolution provides its adherents with a link to the past, to a more enlightened "golden age" when men had fewer doubts about the ability of technology to speed our race on the path to apotheosis.

That mythical golden age was surely the Second Republic, for during that godless time, advocates of CyberEvolution openly proclaimed their views to a jaded and misguided public. Of course, the roots of this heresy go back much farther into the past, to the time of the First Republic and even before. Fragmentary records from before the Human Combine Age reveal the existence of a prereflective heresy called "transhumanism" that promoted the notion that the human form — and mind — could be improved through the judicious use of technology. However, it wasn't until the rise of the zaibatsu that cybernetics and other related technologies became sophisticated enough to realize even a small part of the transhumanists' perverse goals.

As technology became even more advanced — and faith in it more complete — transhumanism began its slow development into the heresy of CyberEvolution. Data recovered from ancient think machines, as well as magic lantern shows from that time, show that transhumanism was initially limited in its extent. Only the wealthiest and most powerful citizens of the First Republic, many of them employed by corporations, had much interest in replacing their Pancreator-given flesh with metal and plastic as a means to improve themselves. Transhumanism thus remained a heresy of the

privileged few rather than a popular movement. It is interesting to note that initially, the heresy was wholly materialistic in conception, emphasizing transhumanism as a means to *physical* immortality rather than spiritual longevity.

The collapse of the First Republic and the resulting Diaspora changed everything. It is often forgotten — and the Church has a vested interest in keeping it forgotten — that the Prophet's revelation of the Holy Flame did not occur in a spiritual vacuum. The Diaspora was a time of great religious as well as political ferment. New faiths and philosophies sprang up with great regularity, many of which combined alien and human elements to create new syncretistic faiths. In addition, many Disaporans sought wisdom in more ancient prereflective beliefs, the bulk of which showed great contempt for the material world in favor of an ideal realm of pure ideas. Over time, these beliefs influenced even transhumanism, but it took another non-religious development to create CyberEvolution as it exists today.

That development was the widespread acceptance of technology as humanity's savior during the Second Republic. So great became the love affair with techno-fetishism that corporations regularly used the phrase "cyber-evolution" as the means to laud their products' abilities to improve the quality — and even nature — of human life. Indeed, many thinkers of the time looked beyond the cynical marketing ploys of the corporations and saw CyberEvolution as the perfect term to describe humankind's inevitable development into a supposedly higher form, one based on the merging of flesh and technology.

Amid these various influences, the beginnings of the modern heresy took shape. Unlike many heresies, there is no universally acknowledged founder of this movement, in part due to its extremely fragmented nature — which continues even today. This decentralization is largely due to the peculiar confluence of opposites that led to the formation of CyberEvolution. On the one hand, there were the lineal descendants of the transhumanists, whose thoroughgoing materialism was bolstered by the irreligious worldview of the Second Republic. On the other, there were those who saw human evolution as fundamentally spiritual in nature, harkening back to prereflective heresies, such as the Knowers and the Pure Ones.

Of the two factions, the Spiritualists have always held the upper hand. Their strange beliefs colored CyberEvolution profoundly. Even the Transhumanists accept these beliefs, albeit as metaphor, in their own approach to the group's goals. Broadly speaking, the Spiritualists believe that God (whom they never call the Pancreator, for reasons that are



obscure) allowed the Empyrean Intelligences to create the "templates" (called *Eide*) for everything in the cosmos. God likewise allowed the Intelligences to instantiate these *Eide* in the material world — the act of Creation.

The Spiritualists hold that, not being perfect like God, the Intelligences produced both poor *Eide* and equally poor material instantiations. Why would God allow this? They answer that God saw intelligent beings, like humanity, as capable of improving themselves beyond what the Intelligences created eons ago. The Spiritualists believe the purpose of human life is to develop the technology necessary to improve one's template, to do what the Intelligences could not.

Experimenting with cybernetics is actually a means to test which improvements best serve that end. Interestingly, all CyberEvolutionaries reject golems as "dead ends" that do not serve the cause of improving humankind's Empyrean *Eidos*. Cybernetics is the answer, since it builds on the flawed template rather than discards it. To discard the original — if imperfect — *Eidos* would be a grave error, since the Spiritualists believe that everything in the cosmos is sustained by the continued existence of the *Eide* of which they are examples. These *Eide* reside in the Empyrean realm that some CyberEvolutionaries call the "Universal Think Machine." Although not at all like the crude think machines we possess, the *Eide* function as "programs" that must not be shut down lest entire classes of beings fade from existence.

The secret is first to develop the new template for humankind and then find a way to "upload" it into the Empyrean, making changes to the original without destroying it. In so doing, humanity will evolve en masse into a higher state of being — the one God wants us to possess. Leaving aside other considerations, the CyberEvolutionaries recognize a major impediment in their plan: they have no idea how to tap into the Universal Think Machine or upload an improved *Eidos*.

Because of disputes about the veracity of the Spiritualist mythology, the two halves of the heresy never completely saw eye-to-eye — until the Fall of the Republic. Faced with persecution by a Church freed from the constraints imposed by the Republic, the early CyberEvolutionaries could not afford to bicker over which aspects of their beliefs were best emphasized. In the interest of survival, those who saw technology as a means of spiritual fulfillment made common cause with those who possessed more materialistic goals. This move seems to have preserved the heresy from destruction, especially in the dark days prior to the promulgation of the Privilege of Martyrs. In the process, it also appears to have forged a lasting accommodation between the two strands of the heresy. In fact, it could be argued (and has been by Father Beynish Wakstok in his monograph, *Evolution of a Heresy*) that the true origin of the CyberEvolutionary

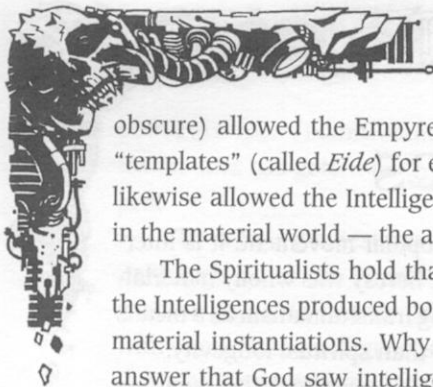
heresy stems from this time after the Fall of the Second Republic but before the Church softened its anti-technological stance.

After the Privilege of Martyrs was firmly established as Church doctrine, especially once it was expanded to include both the nobility and the guilds, CyberEvolutionaries enjoyed a modicum of peace. Their position was still as precarious as ever. If the Inquisition discovered them, they would just as surely perish in flames. However, the Privilege of Martyrs provided them with plausible covers under which to operate. Now, a person employing technology wasn't automatically presumed to be a sinner whose soul must be purged by fire — at least if he was a priest, a noble or a merchant. Such a person would still be met with skepticism and even fear in some quarters, but it was enough that the heresy had gained some breathing space. They could return to their grand project of improving upon humanity so as to achieve its transcendence into a higher form. (The development of CyberEvolutionary beliefs is described in the section below)

In one of those ironies that history often foists on humankind, CyberEvolution returned to its ancient place among the privileged of society. Indeed, the Privilege of Martyrs demanded it, since only certain segments of Known Worlds society could safely use advanced technology without fear of ecclesiastical sanction.

In using the Privilege of Martyrs as a cloak to hide its activities, the heresy developed some interesting characteristics. Chief among them was its membership. From the beginning, CyberEvolution was an odd alliance of common people and scientists, each of whom saw technology as the means to better himself — although for very different reasons. This alliance was always unstable and added another level of tension beyond the more obvious Transhumanist/Spiritualist rift. Because Church doctrine permitted the privileged classes of the Known Worlds access to technology, the heresy became more strongly focused on those classes. Over time, the influx of dissolute nobles, apostate priests and venal merchants became a tide that washed over the dwindling numbers of commoners within its ranks.

By approximately 4700, aristocrats had fully taken the helm of the heresy — with lasting consequences. CyberEvolution's original emphasis on technology as a means of *universal* ascension to a higher form of being was downplayed (although not completely abandoned). In the face of Church oppression, the heresy's new leaders argued that its goals could never be achieved without "expert guidance." Mirroring the prevailing culture of the Known Worlds, they accepted the belief that CyberEvolution needed a special class of leaders, men and women trained in the ways of politics and diplomacy. By giving these leaders special rights and privileges, they would be better able to safeguard the



entire heresy until such time as it completes its long sought-after quest for the improvement of all humanity.

Over the next 200 years, CyberEvolution survived by keeping a low profile. The aristocratic heretics within its ranks tightened their grip over the movement, using it as a power base from which to pursue other agendas. With rare exceptions, such as the Istakhr Riots of 4803 and the Panjav Incident a decade later, there were few examples of overt CyberEvolutionary activity in the Known Worlds. All that changed when the Church advanced the Doctrines of Exemption Exceptional and Temporal Exemption in response to the Symbiot threat. These new doctrines gave the common folk the permission they needed to wield technological devices without automatic reprisals.

Freed from the constraints that kept them from acting as openly as their aristocratic leaders, the commoners within the heresy began to reassert themselves in the areas of both leadership and doctrine. Indeed, there is evidence that the fissures within CyberEvolution became more acute sometime around 4920 or so. For example, the unsolved assassination of Count Zlatan Decados in 4922 is now believed to have been a public reprisal by one faction within CyberEvolution against another. In the decades since, there are many more instances of warring factions attacking one another in disputes over policy and doctrine. It was during these years that a splinter faction, one emphasizing material gain and political change, arose for the first time — the so-called CyberRevolutionaries.

The CyberRevolutionaries dispense with much of the spiritualist doctrine that motivates their CyberEvolutionary cousins. Instead, their goal is simpler: free the improvement of humanity from the "shackles of ignorance," by which they usually mean the influence of the Church. The Revolutionaries want nothing less than a return to the morally relativistic worldview of the Second Republic, one in which ends and means were interchangeable if they served the cause of "scientific progress." Of course, what these terrorists really want is the replacement of our current form of government with an oligarchy of cybernetic elites, whose rule is vouchsafed by their "greater advancement on the road to human perfection." Although they represent a small faction within the heresy, the CyberRevolutionaries are more apt to use violence to achieve their ends, which is why they merit particular attention in this report.

Observations

The CyberEvolutionaries would be laughable if they weren't so technologically advanced. The rifts within their ranks — between the true Evolutionaries and the Revolutionaries, the Spiritualists and the Transhumanists — are profound and their lack of coordination considerable. Their zeal is likewise not as acute as many other heretical groups.



Indeed, many CyberEvolutionaries want nothing more than to be left alone and go about their perverse business without any higher goals of overthrowing either the Church or the state. Yet, make no mistake: these heretics are dangerous.

All factions of the CyberEvolutionaries believe in *unrestricted technological development*. They abhor oversight of any kind, seeing it as an impediment to their greater goals. This makes them more likely to take dangerous risks in an effort to advance the technology they believe they need for their cause. Worse still, this heresy is profoundly attractive to those who see the Second Republic as a golden age of scientific and technological discovery. CyberEvolution appeals to anyone who's wondered what heights humanity could achieve if it were unfettered by "outdated dogma" and "government interference." That's a siren song many cannot refuse.

Therefore, we recommend that CyberEvolution be watched carefully. At present, these heretics lack the organization and daring needed to succeed. However, that could change very quickly as some of the Empire's brightest minds are seduced by the honeyed words of this frightening creed. Likewise, the frustration of the CyberRevolutionary faction could boil over at any moment. If so, it risks raising the wrath of the Church, which could retrench into rampant technophobia among the faithful. This could undermine all that we've worked so hard to achieve since the end of the Emperor Wars.

Codes

One of the more insidious elements of this heresy — at least from our perspective — is its method of disseminating information. Because nearly every CyberEvolutionary member possesses at least minor cybernetic implants, they have adopted a system of electronic data transfer that is silent, covert and nearly impossible to crack. CyberEvolutionaries who regularly engage in surreptitious activities are equipped with an optical enhancement, known in the heresy as the "knowing glance," that enables the user to send, receive and store encrypted data. Because the enhancement uses an optical interface, two heretics need not be in physical contact with one another to exchange information. So long as they can see one another, they can establish and maintain contact.

As if this method of dissemination wasn't problematic enough, the codes used by the heresy are fiendish in their complexity. Most data transmissions can't be read without the presence of at least two — sometimes more — exchange nodes working in tandem. Thus, even if we should capture a CyberEvolutionary and wrest the data away from him, we

very likely cannot read it without the cooperation of one or more other heretics — an unlikely proposition indeed. Add to this the complexity of the think machines used by the group to produce their codes, and it's little wonder we have had few successes obtaining much information from them.

Known Heretics

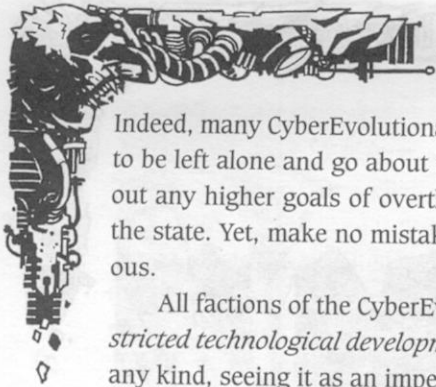
The precise membership of any CyberEvolutionary cell is unknown. Best estimates suggest they are quite small, if only because of the difficulty of obtaining the cybernetics and other technologies these heretics require. At the same time, it is also possible that their true numbers are hidden, skulking in the shadows where their cybernetic enhancements won't draw attention to them. Even so, there are a number of CyberEvolutionaries whose activities — if not their identities — have come to light. The most significant are:

- **Baronet Andros Harmonic:** A suspected member of the CyberRevolutionary faction, Harmonic hails from a noble family on Criticorum. Although his involvement in terrorism against the Church cannot be proven, his pro-cybernetic stance is well known. Unlike some of his fellow heretics, Harmonic is a firm believer in the noble order and believes that cybernetics offer another means by which the aristocracy can maintain its hold over the "rabble" of the Known Worlds.

- **Boss Kwan Kai-Shek:** Boss Kwan operates a "free medical clinic" on Cadavus which has long been rumored to be a front for an illegal cybertech facility. We can confirm the truth of this, thereby placing Kwan well within the CyberRevolutionary faction of the heresy. What remains unknown is his source for the proscribed tech, some of which shows a sophistication unseen since the Fall.

- **Jakov Oolo:** A Master Engineer based on Leagueheim, Oolo is probably one of the most gifted physicks and tech redeemers in the Known Worlds — and a CyberEvolutionary as well. To date, Oolo has kept his heresy a private matter, but that may soon change. Our agents have uncovered evidence that he's completed work on a grand experiment codenamed "Alias" that may represent a fully synthetic lifeform. If true, Oolo poses a grave threat to both the Empire and the Church.

- **The Teacher:** This mysterious heretic is either a guildsman or a noble of great power and influence. His tendrils reach out across the entire Empire and focus on a variety of CyberEvolutionary goals, most especially the melding of man and machine. Thus far, his identity remains unknown, but we have reason to believe he may operate on either Aragon or Midian, based on the concentration of his agents on those worlds.



Minor Heresies

The Second Coming

The Second Coming is a heretical group whose beliefs arose during the time of the corrupt Matriarch Cassia II. They draw their inspiration from a variety of sources — the *Omega Gospels*, the sermons of Bishop Nduka Buhari, the pre-Patriarchal writings of Questor — all of which they interpret to foretell the coming of a second Prophet, who will “illuminate the darkness and drive away those who serve it.” The Second Coming (who believe themselves completely Orthodox in belief) proclaim the need to reform the Church, which has fallen prey to a combination of human frailty and demonic influence. Given their origins during the reign of the worst of the Jacobean Patriarchs, this position is understandable.

Where the Second Coming steps over the line into heresy is the refusal to accept the standard exegesis of passages in the *Omega Gospels* where the Prophet denies the uniqueness of his message (such as in Hombor 12:22 and Ven Lohji 2:11). While the Church has long held that the Prophet’s words are a recognition of the truth within even prereflective faiths, the Second Coming sees “evidence” that foretells a second Prophet who will “come after me [i.e. Zebulon] and reflect the Pancreator’s grace to those who have forgotten its beauty.” As recently as 4992, the Church condemned the Second Coming’s interpretation of such passages, arguing that the Prophet spoke not of *another Prophet* but of ardent believers who would come after him and take up the divine mission of shining the Pancreator’s light into the darkness.

Despite such explicit condemnations, the Second Coming continues to spread its heresy, especially on al-Malik and Decados worlds, where the desire for ecclesiastical reform is greatest. Worse still, some of these heretics have adopted an apocalyptic perspective, believing that the coming of the second Prophet presages the end of the cosmos. These millenarians contend that there will be numerous signs before the end, ranging from natural disasters to the return of Saint Mantius, who will guard the new Prophet against his enemies — which is to say, against the corrupt Church.

No priest or bishop publicly supports the Second Coming, even those who seek genuine reform. Both the Inquisition and the Avestites have taken a keen interest in the heresy, culminating in the arrest of Father Berac’h Nicolayic on Severus in 4999. Since then, Second Coming activity has gone underground, but there is no reason to believe the heresy has been expunged.

The Perfected Ones (Kurganites)

Although the Prophet regularly spoke of the Dark Between the Stars and the unholy entities that dwell there, he did not offer a systematic cosmology to describe these demons. That task fell to later Church scholars, such as Doh-Jung Yim and St. Milana, who clearly established that the Qlippothic realms were not a true “anti-Empyrean,” but rather a warping of the Pancreator’s light, by which these realms, through their very existence, acknowledge the supremacy of that light. Demons derive their power not from an independent source but from a twisting of the Pancreator’s refulgent grace.

Of course, not everyone accepts this position. Even among otherwise Orthodox believers, many mistakenly view demons as powerful in their own right rather than as perversions of the natural order. The heretics who call themselves the Perfected Ones take this view even further, positing the existence of a demonic “lord of the universe,” whom they call Arligan. Arligan is an “anti-Pancreator” who rules over a hierarchy of dark beings and uses the mortal structures — such as the Church and the Empire — to enforce his evil will upon sentient beings.

The Perfected Ones believe themselves to be the only true worshippers of the Pancreator, since Arligan has so thoroughly corrupted the Church that the genuine teachings of the Prophet have been obscured. The Perfected Ones therefore seek to destroy all of Arligan’s tools in the universe, in order to establish a purer religion, according to the wishes of the Pancreator. They likewise oppose the Empire and Royal Houses as agents of the lord of the universe.

The origin of the Perfected Ones is obscure, but many scholars point to similarities between their beliefs and those of the Kurgans, particularly the recognition of a demon king opposed to the Pancreator. There is even linguistic similarity between the Kurgans’ Erlik Khan and Arligan, making this theory a plausible one. How this belief came to exist in the Known Worlds remains a mystery however, but Inquisitors on Grail and Rampart (where the heresy is most prevalent) continue to investigate the matter.

As noted above, the Prophet said very little about the organization of the darkness, except to say that “the dark is legion, cloaked in a thousand guises; the Pancreator is One.” The Church has interpreted this to mean that there is no single ruler of the Qlippothic realms as there is of the Empyrean. Most theologians argue that the dark cannot produce a single all-powerful being because it must scatter its power



among the jealous many. The dark is ever diffuse, ever entropic, always dividing, never uniting. A few theologians suggest that the lower Qlippoths are so dark that mortal minds cannot know them. If there is a single powerful entity lurking there, it is beyond our ken, for it is literally and figuratively beyond all perception, and thus conception. Even this interpretation does not support the Perfected Ones, whose beliefs run counter to centuries of Church teaching.

Avestite Flama Incarnata

The Flama Incarnata, or Incarnate Flame, is a secret subsect of reactionary zealots within the Temple Avesti. Denied by Avestite leaders and denounced by the Inquisitorial Synod, these hyperliteral fundamentalists embody the "holy pyromania" that many feel characterizes the Temple overall. The most grievous excesses of Avestite pilgrims are probably the work of the Flama, who equate piety with zealotry, firmness with cruelty and purification with destruction.

Members of the Flama Incarnata who were unable to resist advanced interrogation techniques confessed to the belief that their sub-sect dates back to the late Diasporan Templa Vesti. Indeed, they feel that their doctrine represents the true soul of Avestism, and that the Temple's leadership was compromised when Pontius Cciardi agreed to place the sect under the authority of the Universal Church's Orthodoxy. As a result, the Flama has flourished among the lower echelons of pilgrims, who take its doctrine as license to shrug off the leash of their own superiors within the Temple and to ignore the constraints placed upon them by the Patriarch. Impromptu public burning is the favored *modus operandi* of the Flama, with the Temple as a whole bearing the historical brunt of such actions.

Closer observation shows that the Flama Incarnata can only be a relatively new hybrid of heresies and questionable doctrine. Like the ancient hardcore Pyric Avestites, members believe that the flame residing in the temple lamp on Pyre is literally one and the same as the Holy Flame of the Celestial Sun; further, they extend this false honor to the lamp orbs of all Avestite temples. To compound this grave error, they have adopted the Universalist Heterodoxy, a common misinterpretation of Horace 77:1-8 shared by both the

Eskatonic Order and the outlaw Incarnate sect (with whom the Flama Incarnata also shares part of its name). Put simply, the Flama believes that each member contains a piece of the Holy Flame in their heart that guides their actions in the pursuit of sinners. Even more terrible, they believe that it is this selfsame Holy Flame that shoots from their flamieguns to purify sinners with its cleansing touch. This idea forms the bedrock of their twisted faith, and they passionately resist all attempts at reformation. It is rumored that the Flama have had traffic with a hitherto unknown Empyrean intelligence named Furjagiyelos; if this is true, it must be determined whether this is a true angel of the Celestial Sun or some darker entity using the sub-sect's ignorance to masquerade as a force of goodness.

Elaborating upon the pyrophilia noted in their parent sect, the Flama Incarnata communicate largely through fire imagery and metaphors, some derived from the Omega Gospels and Avestite documents like the Fervitudes of Pietrarcholus, others drawn from popular literature and song or regional colloquialism. Most know by heart the lyrics of every song that employs burning and fire images, and secret commands may be passed in public simply by humming a few notes. Jumpgate cross insignia worn by members may have the flame portion of the emblem fashioned from a more expensive thread or other material, or the flame may simply be larger than the approved proportion for that insignia.

Temple Avesti has, thus far, regarded the Flama Incarnata as an embarrassment to be dealt with internally, and so has not been forthcoming with information on known members. As more cases of unwarranted burnings come to light, however, the Inquisitorial Synod may apply greater leverage against the Temple's leaders lest the guilds and noble houses decide to intervene. One suspected Flama cell on Criticorum, lead by a Brother Clement, has been especially active in the poorer quarters of that world; some attacks upon decadent nobles and merchants have prompted House al-Malik to bring suit against the Temple Avesti. Many members have been known to speak of a semi-legendary pilgrim called Pietrarcholito, or "Little Pietrarcholus," a volatile theurge supposedly able to shoot fireballs from his empty hands and blaster bolts from his dark, burning eyes.



Beastfriends

Certain clergy members have become concerned of late about a new form of potential heresy: *sophia animalia*, or the love of animals or animal wisdom over one's fellow sentients. While this is not considered a heresy as yet, it may be soon declared heterodox by certain bishops of the Orthodoxy.

The recent scrutiny of this obscure topic is due to the newly discovered phenomenon of what the Vuldrok barbarians call "the beastfriend," a person with a seemingly supernatural sympathy with animals. The Gjarti-worshipping Vuldrok respect such people, for they are believed to experience a certain form of Grace from Nature, gifted with power by the spirits or the natural world — to anger a beastfriend is also to anger the spirits, which brings bad luck.

The Church has no official position on such natural empathy, although the Orthodox bishops suspect it, fearing it may draw spiritual contemplation away from the stars and towards more earthly, less luminous, concerns.

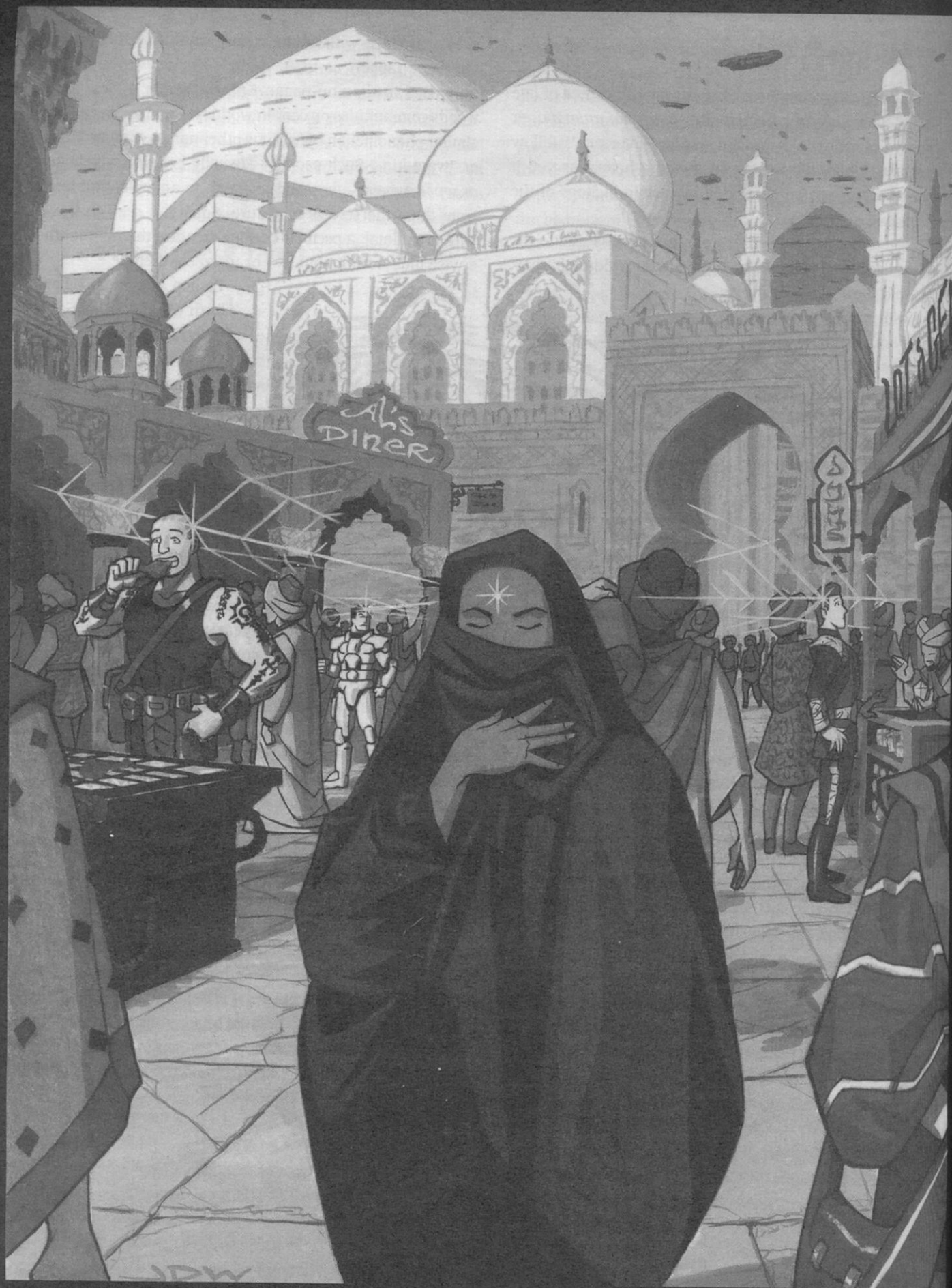
Although there is no interstellar tradition concerning the so-called beastfriends in the Known Worlds, Bishop Adolphus has embarked on a scholarly survey of past fig-

ures associated with animals, suspecting that they shared the same rapport as their Vuldrok counterparts but went unnoticed in the non-pagan Known Worlds. A few backwoods communities on certain worlds recognize a seemingly similar phenomenon by various other names: "animal-folk" or "were-kin." Such people — usually hermits, woodsmen or woodswives — are said to speak to animals, and learn from them the secrets of nature. Some are seen to travel with an animal, a peculiar or alien creature that might otherwise hide from humans — or try to eat them.

Bishop Adolphus has put forth the claim that Saint Ven Lohji, the Ur-Obun disciple of the Prophet, was a beastfriend, as was the legendary Saint Mynah of Grail. He thus recommends that the Church open its arms and heart to such persons that exhibit similar sympathy as did these saints, for they clearly reside in the Pancreator's light.

Other bishops, however, perhaps fearful of some of the creatures known to travel with Beastfriends, recommend forcing any beastfriend to become Penitent, as the Church does with psychics. The issue is undecided as yet, although those who view the Beastfriends favorably are in the majority — for now.





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Covens (Occult Threats)

Our ancestors supposedly knew a time when such things as psychic powers or theurgic miracles did not exist. Or so some historians claim. And yet, so many ancient accounts are rife with amazing feats and miraculous happenings, especially during the Age of Miracles, the time of the Prophet. Indeed, it seems to me rather that it is only the open practice of such powers that comes and goes; the powers ever exist, although whether in numbers large or small it matters not.

You have already had more learning and training in such matters than most citizens of our Empire. You must know how to wield power without fear of unknown influence. While the conspirator's nightmare of a universe secretly run by hidden psychics whispering thoughts into the unsuspecting minds of rulers everywhere is an outright fiction, it does have its truth in certain known instances. Psychics have abused their power at times, although rarely for long and to great effect. Nonetheless, such a danger exists, and so you, charged with one day assuming the throne of all humanity itself, must know how to perceive such threats and use them to your best advantage.

Do not fall into the peasant's superstition that a psychic's only goal is to overcome common humanity (although there are covens who do believe this). Know instead that they can prove to be powerful allies. I have always advocated the relaxing of Church laws levied against the practice of psychic

powers. Those harsh laws only drive these gifted people underground. They did not ask to become psychic; an accident of their birth or some strange circumstance brought out such powers in them. How can we not say that these powers are ordained by the Pancreator, given to humanity as a reward for expanding across the universe?

Regardless, it is an issue you should weigh, as your father surely does now. Only the Church benefits from the practice of psychic penance. Yet, these are your citizens as much as theirs, and it is for you to say how they will be judged fit for society. In working with psychics and their covens, know that friendship means much to them and goes far in earning their undying allegiance.

Do not, however, extend such kind thoughts towards those psychics whose gifts were stolen from heaven through the Sathra Effect. Survey the histories of all human cultures and you will find a ban against them — even the Vuldrok fear what may come of Sathraism. Although we know not what the Vau think about them, it is best for now to believe the prejudices against them.

Likewise those accused of Antinomy. I know not what sort of dark powers exist to fuel their crimes, but they have proven inimicable to humanity on many occasions. Here, too, it is best to follow the Church's lead in condemnation.



The Favyana

The Favyana are in a time of flux. A minority of members want to declare themselves before the Emperor, whom they see as a helper on the path towards a universal utopia. The majority, however, desire to remain hidden, believing that humanity is not evolved enough to handle the sudden admission of secret psychics from their ranks. Nonetheless, the Favyana have a better reputation than their psychic rivals in the shadowy Invisible Path. From time to time, its members have worked in conjunction with certain intelligence agencies, as the need arose. Individual members of the Favyana aided Stigmata against the Symbiots; it is rumored that Emperor Alexius first became aware of them when he reinforced the world during the Emperor Wars.

The coven is currently obsessed with finding a legendary lost world called Kun Lun, renewing its contacts with the Obun, and reintegrating a renegade group known as the Seraphim, bent on a holy war against the Invisible Path.

History

The documentation and history of the Favyana seems fairly clear. During the Second Republic, Dr. Darius Phavian, the second son of a wealthy mercantile family, used his share of the family fortune to establish the Phavian Institute, dedicated to his abiding interest in paranormal and psychic studies. The Phavian Institute conducted many highly successful scientific experiments of the paranormal, but was shut down after the Fall (the exact date is disputed). When Hawkwood troops came to occupy the Phavian Institute, they found its grounds empty, all personnel and high-tech equipment missing.

The Favyana coven claims descent from the Phavians, although this claim is dubious at best. Undoubtedly, a small group of psychically trained personnel dispersed across the Known World, but the modern Favyana did not appear until 4720 (at least according to the records of the Mahayanist Church historian Shan Su, author of *A True History of Heretical Sects, and How to Convert Them to the Omega Gospels*, privately published in 4815). By even their own early accounts, they seem to have merely modeled themselves after the Phavian Institute's ethical code and philosophy.

During the Emperor Wars, they battled the Invisible Path coven during over a rare preadamite relic on Criticorum. The Favyana leader Kamadeva Zarek met her death in this shadowy war. Her successor and current ruler of the Favyana, Kamadeva Seppanen ("The Hidden Empress," or "the Moon Queen"), soon gained the upper hand against her rivals, causing the Invisible Path to sue for peace. She is currently believed to reside on Leminkainen.

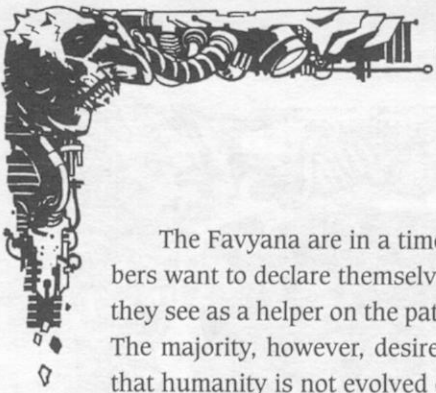
Kamadeva Seppanen has sent out feelers to the Imperial Eye and the Emperor's representatives, and a few meetings of a highly sensitive nature have occurred, with more possibly to follow. The Favyana representatives did not share information on their whereabouts in the Known Worlds, but they are known to have presences on Artemis, Leminkainen, Byzantium Secundus, Criticorum, Pentateuch, Cadavus, Istakhr, Gwynneth, and Velisimil. The representatives warned the Imperial Eye of a possible Invisible Path attempt on Duke Alvarex's life, although the motives remain unclear.

Recently, a Favyana splinter group called the Seraphim rebelled against the top Favyana leadership on Criticorum (interestingly, this information was not reported by the Favyana to the Imperial Eye). This breakaway movement intends to wipe out the Favyana's traditional enemies, notably the elusive psychic terrorist organization already referred to as the Invisible Path. Kamadeva Seppanen has ostracized this violent cadre. The Seraphim, however, maintain that they are loyal followers of the Favyana. Another psychic war may be in the works.

Observations

Three Favyana members on Ravenna uncovered the Invisible Path plot to kill Duke Alvarex Hawkwood, the Emperor's brother. The Favyana leaders were all in agreement to contact the Imperial Eye and the Rooks about it. This information is new, and it is presented here within hours of its reception by Rook and Imperial Eye contacts on Ravenna and Byzantium Secundus, respectively. The first reports indicate a plan to assassinate the duke while he is hunting on Gwynneth.

Field reports indicate that the Favyana is attempting to communicate with a lost world known as Kun Lun. There are even rumors among the membership that the coven was founded by a group of scouts sent from that world to explore the Human Space; subsequently separated from their homeworld, they banded together for support. Many within the Favyana believe that the Phavian Institute moved itself to the world of Kun Lun, producing there the enlightened society that was Dr. Phavian's dream, where psychic abilities engineered a better world. There is hope that Kun Lun's enlightened philosophy will spread to the Known Worlds, lifting humanity out of the darkness. Kun Lun is said to now be an empire of several worlds, connected by hidden jumpgates, and also the homeland of the Third Republic, ruled by the "Ascended." Indeed, the Favyana hierarchy are even said to be in contact with the Ascended, governing with their principles. It is unclear whether the Ascended are Annunaki or Empyrean angels dwelling nearer to the Cele-



tial Sun. These beings hold a powerful grip on the Favyana's imaginations.

The Ascended are allegedly attempting to awaken psychic potential within humanity, gently pushing the evolutionary ascension of the younger, sentient races, so that they may partake in the conscious governance of the Pancreator's universe, instead of remaining in the sleep-state that most sentients currently inhabit. According to the Favyana, the Ascended have been accelerating the evolutionary potential of humanity at swifter and swifter rates. The process began around the time of Zebulon the Prophet.

A real fear among the Favyana is that the Invisible Path will actively pollute Kun Lun with their ideas. The Favyana are now concentrating members on Criticorum. There are rumors of another psychic war, not with the Invisible Path this time but within the Favyana's own ranks.

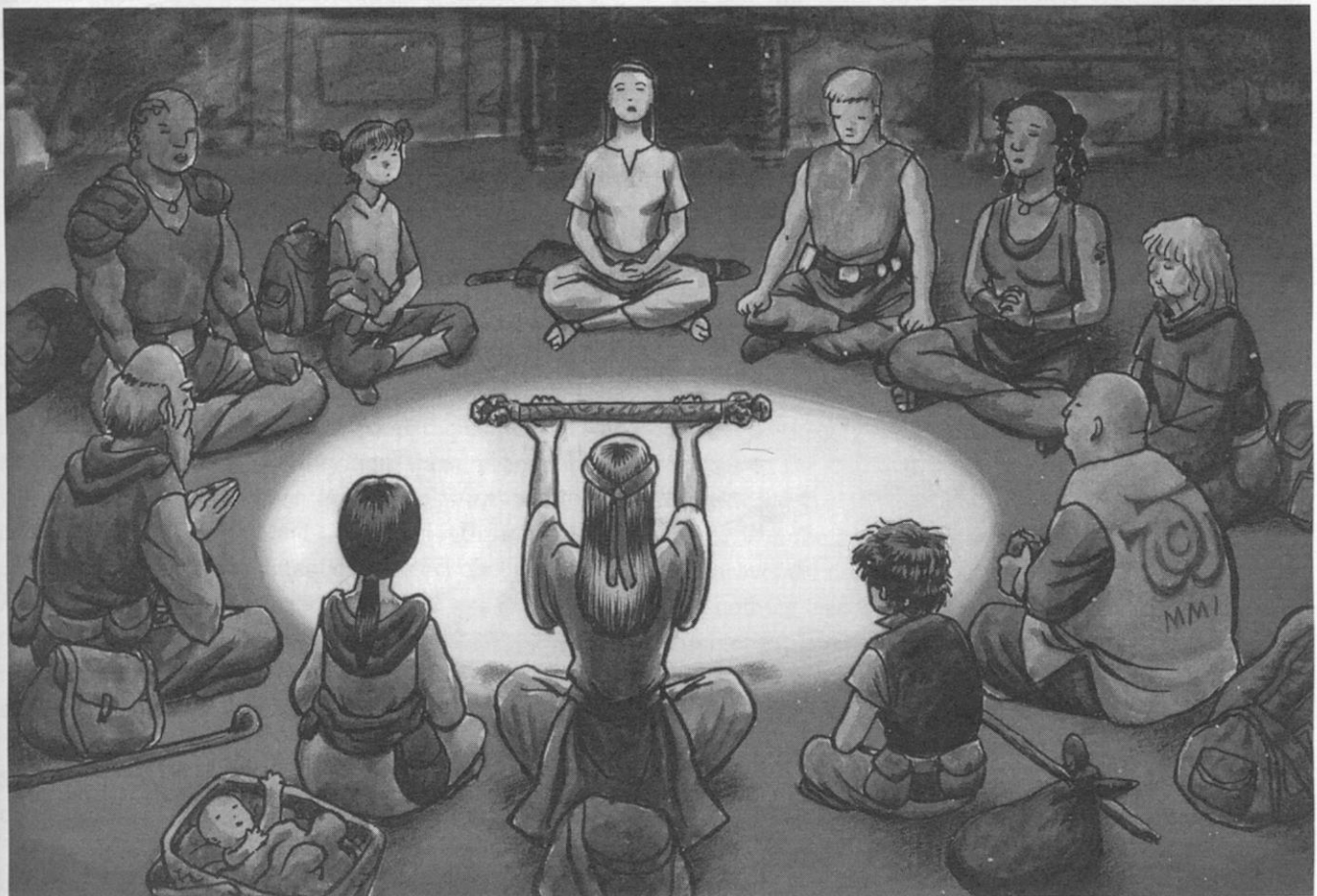
The Invisible Path are correct when they say that the Favyana tend to ignore the darker side of their psyches, discounting its manifestations as something that only happens to "bad" psychics. Indeed, since the Favyana consciously see themselves as doing the work of the forces of light, they fail to recognize those aspects of their personalities that harbor any darkness. Many feel that they do not need to fear this, since they are holy soldiers and have been cleansed of any such unenlightened thoughts. Yet more and more Favyana members are succumbing to their darker natures

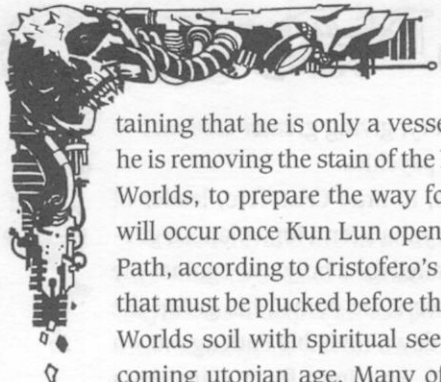
than at any time in their history, giving greater credence to the Church's warnings about psychics.

As seeming proof of this, Konrad Cristofero, leader of the Criticorum Senate (the Favyana's term for a planet's governing committee), recently called for a holy war against the Invisible Path. With 12 followers, he named his group the Seraphim and began hunting down Invisible Path agents on Criticorum. Despite repeated warnings from Kamadeva Seppanen to desist, they continued their hunt. Finally, Seppanen, in council with her advisors, sent a group of loyal followers to stop them — even if it means eliminating them.

The dangers of a renewed psychic war are hard to predict, although it is likely that many innocent people will be affected. Neither the Favyana nor the Invisible Path are averse to using people when the need takes them — subtle influences "suggested" to those in leadership positions can have disastrous consequences. As of yet, the al-Malik authorities are unaware of any psychic war on Criticorum. Due to the hidden nature of these wars, which appear at best like two rival city gangs battling over territory, it is unlikely that the authorities would even recognize it as such.

It remains to be seen if the Favyana will contact the Invisible Path about the matter, and possibly ally with them to bring the renegades down. Surely the Invisible Path is not unaware of what is occurring on Criticorum. Konrad Cristofero has declared his loyalty to the Favyana, main-





taining that he is only a vessel of the Ascended. He claims he is removing the stain of the Invisible Path from the Known Worlds, to prepare the way for the evolutionary uplift that will occur once Kun Lun opens its jumpgates. The Invisible Path, according to Cristofero's Seraphim followers, is a weed that must be plucked before the Ascended can renew Known Worlds soil with spiritual seeds, which will flourish in the coming utopian age. Many of the Criticorum Favyana, remembering the last vicious war with the Invisible Path, have joined the Seraphim. While their numbers appear small — in terms of secret societies — they still represent a sizable psychic force. Most of the Favyana, however, seem to stand behind the current leadership, opposing the Seraphim.

In response to this serious incident, the Favyana leadership has accelerated plans to cement contacts with the Ur-Obun. Kamedeva Sepannen is seeking Obun methods of mental control against the darker aspects of sentient nature. Once again, it seems that the Favyana seek the "good" Ur psychics, rather than the darker Ur-Ukar. The Ukari have methods of dealing with psychic moodiness, but the Favyana tend to believe them too tainted, posing too great a risk. Ironically, it is the Ur-Obun who are hesitant to meet with the Favyana, fearing taint from human psychics. One Favyana member, believing that the real secret of Anunnaki contact might lie with the pre-Bintaru, "primitive" Obun called the Xho-velisamilun, journeyed to their remote mountain environment to communicate with them. She has not returned.

Ideally, Velisimil would provide an ideal ground for Favyana recruitment, as it is (like Pentateuch) one of the worlds most open to broad ideas and new philosophies. However, it is also one of the more closed worlds to human-Obun contacts of this kind, for the Hawkwoods are leery of Obun-trained human psychics. Such contact remains a fantasy of the Favyana.

Known Agents

- **Konrad Cristofero of Criticorum:** A highly charismatic man, Konrad joined the Favyana on Leagueheim when he was 15. He was trained in the Reeves guild as a banker, and accepted a position that took him to Criticorum. He quickly built up a large clientele, including some of Criticorum's wealthiest nobles, but money was not his true passion: he became obsessed with advancing within the Favyana's ranks. By age 29, he was the head of Criticorum's Favyana Senate, an unusual post for one so young, and began using his wealth to consolidate his long-term plan of psychic cleansing.

His elevation to such a high position of authority was mainly due to two factors: Much of the older generation of Criticorum's Favyana had perished in the Emperor Wars, and Cristofero's charisma borders on the supernatural. At age 33, he created his Seraphim followers, claiming that he had been personally in touch with the Ascended.

The Seraphim are believed to have slain seven members of the Invisible Path in a single night. Konrad maintains that he is still a member of the Favyana, and has sent out his followers to recruit other Favyana and psychics to his cause. He has found success among Byzantium Secundus's Favyana members, who remember the Invisible Path with a fierce hatred, and among ex-Hazat Dervishes.

Tall, blonde, and powerfully built, he is often compared to royalty. Cristofero is very wealthy and operated out of various Reeve offices before recently going into hiding (as far as the Reeves suspect, he is on an extended sabbatical). Already, loyal Favyana and Invisible Path agents are hunting him, but he has the home advantage on Criticorum.

Konrad is dangerous and must be approached with extreme caution.



The Invisible Path

The Invisible Path is moving aggressively towards its fanatic goal of universal conquest. Its recent victory in Mohenjo on Manitou emboldened its leadership to pursue three goals: First, ignite several incidents to spark a Hawkwood-Decados war, primarily aimed at the killing of highly placed Decados and Hawkwood personnel; second, consolidate the victory on Manitou (reports indicate, however, that their high leadership is on another as-yet-undetermined world); and third, explore the reopened jumpgates to lost worlds, to investigate rumors of a world or federation of psychics called Kun Lun.

While the Invisible Path membership is small, and the idea of Known Worlds conquest by the coven seems ludicrous, they have an amazingly high success rate. The current political situation is so volatile that the removal of a few highly placed individuals in houses Hawkwood and Decados could start a massive conflict, hurling these houses back into the abyss of unending war.

The Invisible Path is composed of fanatics believing themselves to be the natural rulers of humanity. They refer to themselves as the Elohim, or the Pancreator's favored, and the rest of humanity (those not gifted with psi) as Agricolos, or serfs, who are only fit to labor for the higher caste (if not, as some claim, be totally supplanted by the Elohim). It is rumored that the top leadership wants to restart the Emperor Wars through these assassinations, although this view is hopelessly naïve. It is the fanatical belief in this conflict that fuels the Invisible Path's followers.

History

After this agent's successful penetration of a small cell on Manitou, I was present when Pathmate Layan York was injured by shrapnel from the Mohenjo police, and I administered medicine to her as she died. She confessed to me that my cover would soon be blown, that two other Pathmates knew I worked for a shadowy advisor to the Emperor (I was able to block your exact identity from them, if not entirely your role). They would soon attempt to "turn" me to the correct path. Since Layan and I had been intimate and had established an emotional link, I queried her about the Path. As people rioted in the streets outside, all was quiet inside the abandoned petrol station. I believe what she passed on to me opens new insight into their origins that have been speculative, at best, up till now.

"We were created as the Inari in the time before the Second Republic by Prince Leonardo Li Halan, a psychic secret police force," her mental voice communicated to me. "The small town of Ojika on Kish was then home to numerous psychics, and the prince formed them into his secret

intelligence-gathering network. After his death, and an attempt on the Li Halan throne, the Inari scattered but members held onto their elite bond. During the Second Republic, our leader was Sorhab, who devised most of our philosophical foundations."

I questioned her as to who their leaders were now, but received nothing. Then, her mind spoke to me again, her voice echoing in my head. "I would not tell you if I knew. I gave you one secret out of love, but never give a lover two secrets. Now, you have to do something for me."

Before she died, she extracted a promise from me to move certain funds into an account for her daughter. This I did, fulfilling her dying wish. I then moved myself offworld, for my cover had indeed been blown. My future use as an "I.P." mole has been compromised. I need to collect my funds and disappear for a while. I shall contact you again soon; I might be able to help in a remote post, near Symbiot or Vuldrok space.

Before leaving Manitou, I left psychic traces of my own death by shrapnel bombing in the minds of some highly placed members of the Manitou Alliance. Hopefully, this will find its way to the other Invisible Path agents who knew of my connection to the Emperor's "shadowy advisor," and thus free myself from any pursuit. Since a good psychic can read patterns, maybe you could choose a hiding place for me that I do not secretly harbor in my thoughts? I worked in a cell of seven; of the remaining five, I believe Rio, who once spied on the Rooks on Ravenna, may have also gleaned my secret.

The entire history of the Invisible Path is patchy, but it is believed that at one time they took over the Knights of the Empyrean Star, a brotherhood of noble warriors located on Malignatius, which was discovered and successfully attacked by the Brother Battle order in 4682-4. A few Invisible Path members survived the general ruin, to reenter history in 4889 during a bombing campaign against various noble ambassadors to the Patriarch's Court on Holy Terra (again, the Hawkwood and Decados families were singled out). Recently, a war with the Favyana on Criticorum led the Imperial Eye to uncover the name "Mavoc" as the coven's possible leader, but nothing else is known about this Mavoc. Sir Rafello, a counter-espionage expert in the Imperial Eye, was slain by Invisible Path agents on Ravenna in 4998, and they might have infiltrated the Eye organization or (more likely) performed psychic eavesdropping on unsuspecting members.

In 4999-5000, they expanded their base on Manitou, using an "Agricola front" organization, the Manitou Alliance, to violently take over the city of Mohenjo. It was relatively easy to overthrow the inept, minor guild-run govern-





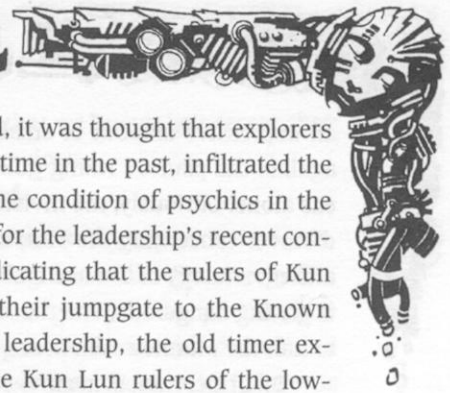
ment, recently ravaged by political factionalism and chaos following the death of Mohenjo's self proclaimed poet-Princess Bianca (assassinated by the Invisible Path in a fake accident). Their revolution succeeded, and now the Invisible Path sits in control of a city government, with armed retainers and plotting the seizure of the rest of the planet. The new "Maximum Leader" of Mohenjo is an Invisible Path member named Rochek, who takes orders from Blane (a.k.a. "The Undertaker" or "Typhoon"), the highest-placed Invisible Path member known to both the Imperial Eye and the Jakovian Agency, as well as myself. From a few hints dropped to me, I believe there is a smaller presence of Invisible Path cells on that cesspool of intrigue, Criticorum.

Observations

Generally, the Hidden Path operates locally in cells of 3-20 members. Each cell is run by a captain, called an Alari. The captains receive their orders from the Chrysocomes, or the Lions of Apollo, who compose the leadership on various worlds. Above this High Command is a shadowy leadership, either composed of an individual or group going by the honorary title "Apollo Astrophorus." Cell members and captains don't know who the grand leader is. The name "Mavoc" was revealed on Criticorum, but whether he is the leader, a former leader, or part of the shadowy Invisible Path leadership council, is unknown. "The Golden Chain" is the term used to refer to the hierarchy of command, for the Invisible Path uses light as a metaphor. Enemy psychics are referred to a Luna Mori, or "Dead Moons," since they reflect psychic light instead of radiating it. The symbology of an ancient solar-god, Apollo, denotes an ideology where the light-bearers (psychics in the Invisible Path) battle darkness (enemy Favayana or house intelligence psychics who are ruled by Agricolos).

Quite by fortunate accident, I discovered that the Invisible Path leader on Rampart is named Zaneta, and she seems to be building a following. Her front is a nursery in Avancier, although I do not know its name. Our cell was informed not to take orders emanating from Rampart. A power struggle of some magnitude is going on in the Path leadership, or at least as concerns Rampart. The Favayana on Criticorum believe that an Invisible Path woman named Zaneta possesses a moderate voice of reason within the Path, and she was allegedly involved in negotiations that halted the Favayana-Invisible Path war on Criticorum. Undoubtedly, this Zaneta is the same person.

Manitou is a safe-haven for many groups, the Invisible Path included. Aside from Manitou, the coven has presences on Criticorum and Rampart. It is widely rumored that Aylon and Kordeth possess Pathmates in Ukari cells. The Invisible Path seems divided about the position of Obun and Ukari psychics in society. The majority seem to have come to the



decision to invite them into the ranks, as psychics in any sentient race display a great gift in common spanning the differences between the individual races. There are Ukari members in the Path — the exploits of Baal oj Ak, a noted psychic terrorist, are recounted for stimulating morale. A Vorox member, known as Zartch, acts as an enforcer for the leadership. I witnessed Zartch rip apart a member of another cell on grounds that he was “sympathetic to heresies emanating from Rampart.”

It is also rumored that cells exist in the Merchant League. Since Hawkwood and Imperial intelligence agencies have been breached, there is obviously a cell or at least a strategically placed member or two in Hawkwood space. Since there is a renewed interest in assassinating Decados nobility, there are undoubtedly agents at work in Decados space. Although allied with the Decados in the recent past (the Decados provided Pathmates from Li Halan space safe havens during the Emperor Wars), the Path seems to have been using the Jakovian Agency for its own ends — a refreshing change.

About two years ago, the Invisible Path leadership heard rumors of a world or federation of worlds known as Kun Lun. Contacting Kun Lun — a world allegedly ruled by psychics — has become a primary concern of the Path leadership. Fearing that the Favyana might discover it first, three Pathmates have been sent to Leminkainen to prepare for a trip beyond the Known Worlds. A recent attack by the Favyana on an Invisible Path cell on Criticorum has alerted the leadership to the possibility of another psychic war with their old enemy. Nonetheless, those Invisible Path members I spoke with had no idea of the actual location of Kun Lun. Some see it as a star-faring empire that will conquer the Known Worlds and liberate their psychic brethren. Obviously, a world ruled by psychics where the rumored “Apollonians” place the Agricolos at the bottom rungs of society mirrors the Invisible Path’s own philosophical conception of how humanity should be governed. Since so many rumors circulate about the discovery of their missing kindred, a sort of religious fervor possesses the Invisible Path members who mention it. Fact gets swallowed in rumor, and the hopes of these secretive psychics take on grandiose dreams of apocalyptic proportions.

It is easy to dismiss Kun Lun as just a rumor, with no basis in fact, except that definitive orders came down the chain of command alerting all Invisible Path members to be on the lookout for a supposed Kun Lun native who has become lost in Known Worlds space. A description of this individual, named Abald Greer, was flashed into our minds. Greer was last spotted in Hawkwood space.

One of my wiser Invisible Path contacts, an older man named Cicero, was not taken in by the sudden Kun Lun enthusiasm. He told me that the Invisible Path leadership had been aware of Kun Lun before the recent Questing

Knights explorations. Indeed, it was thought that explorers from Kun Lun had, at some time in the past, infiltrated the Invisible Path, to discover the condition of psychics in the Known Worlds. The reason for the leadership’s recent concern is new information indicating that the rulers of Kun Lun are debating opening their jumpgate to the Known Worlds. The Invisible Path leadership, the old timer explained, wants to inform the Kun Lun rulers of the low-evolutionary state of humanity in the Known Worlds, and urge them to prepare for war if they choose to open the jumpgate. Kun Lun’s other option is to remain hidden but welcome psychic refugees from the Known Worlds. Cicero, who was on close terms with Blane, informed me that the Invisible Path would help Kun Lun, in case of war, and is willing to give the Kun Lun leadership anything it needs in the way of intelligence about the Known Worlds.

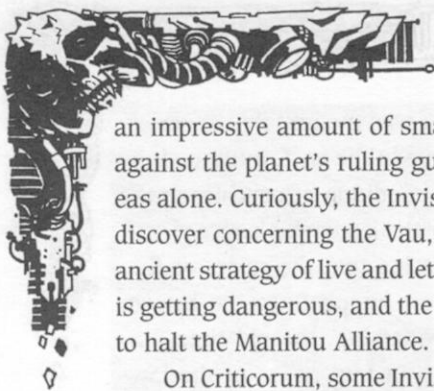
Known Schemes

The Invisible Path is actively planning to assassinate high nobles in houses Decados and Hawkwood, including Prince Hiram Decados’ son and heir. These attempts will happen once the leadership gives the signal. On the Hawkwood side, Duke Alverex, the Emperor’s brother, needs to take precautions. It is believed that these assassinations will occur after more consolidation on Manitou, perhaps after another six months. The Path wishes to throw the Known Worlds into further chaos while their foothold on Manitou builds. Hopefully, contact with Kun Lun will produce a strong ally who can then sweep over the decimated worlds in conquest, or at the very least, provide a strong arm pressuring the Empire to accept psychic rulership.

There is yet another reason for restarting the conflict: People with latent psychic abilities often discover their talents in times of extreme stress and crisis. By producing extremely volatile environments, the Invisible Path hopes to awaken more psychics. There are already plans to discover and recruit these new talents once the Decados and Hawkwoods go to war. Needless to say, the Decados assassinations will “look” like a Hawkwood plot, and the Hawkwood assassinations will have all the signs of the Jakovian Agency. While these people are clever, I doubt they can pull this last bit off, even if the assassins succeed. They are getting bold and careless.

On Manitou, the next phase involves building a human army. This is actively occurring. The humans in the Manitou Alliance do not know that they are the pawns and foot soldiers of the Invisible Path. The Manitou Alliance’s goal is the reuniting of all Manitou’s factions into one proud, world government. The Invisible Path recognizes that it needs talented humans to move the masses, and some will be rewarded. Already, several aircraft and one spaceship have fallen into the New Manitou Army’s possession, along with





an impressive amount of small arms. The plan is to move against the planet's ruling guild, while leaving the Vau areas alone. Curiously, the Invisible Path has no plans I could discover concerning the Vau, except perhaps to pursue the ancient strategy of live and let live. The situation on Manitou is getting dangerous, and the local guilds may need support to halt the Manitou Alliance.

On Criticorum, some Invisible Path members have been slain by Favyana agents. It is believed that the Invisible Path

leadership has sent some members to Criticorum to aid their local cells and discover what the Favyana are up too.

One emblem Path uses is the sign of a half sun rising over a flat line, symbolizing the coming dawn of Invisible Path rule. This is the only graffiti indicating meeting places on Manitou that I was aware of. Members usually get psychic instructions on where to meet. On Manitou, they can be more open, but on Criticorum I heard some say they met in members' apartments, or in the old ruins outside Acheon.

Hazat Dervishes

The dervish rebellion took the Hazat leaders by surprise. As the Emperor Wars wound down, the Hazat shifted more of its resources to the Kurgan front. As new troops arrived on Hira, they heard rumors of Hazat, and especially dervishes, fraternizing with the enemy. Things came to a head after Countess Matera Crux Castenda de Saline took command of the planet's dervishes. With the aid of Hazat Archons and associated Decados intelligence agents, she uncovered a heretical society within the dervishes. When she caught wind of a massive gathering near Fort Omala, she moved to stop them before they could start a coup.

The attack turned into a long, grueling campaign of extermination. The dervishes, though hopelessly outnumbered, managed to use their skill and familiarity with Hira to stay in the field. They tried to carve out their own lands, sought aid from local leaders, and managed to keep the fight going for almost a year. Matera had to call in uncorrupted dervishes from Vera Cruz, Hazat Archons, and even Decados Kossacks to finally break their strength. The action took place far from civilization, leaving most people unaware that anything was wrong. In the end, the surviving heretical dervishes dispersed, and the Archons hunt them still.

Not all Hazat dervishes are heretics, nor are all heretical dervishes Hazat. Dervishes from Sutek and Vera Cruz proved instrumental in hunting down those on Hira. Since the rebellion, similar heretics have been observed in Hawkwood and al-Malik psychic warriors, and have provided impetus to calls to reduce these forces.

History

Excerpts from the combat diary of Lieutenant Jose Acote, recovered after Hazat Archons slew him.

September 27, 4994

It seems that those hopes for R&R that I wrote about yesterday will not be fulfilled. Instead of heading to Vera Cruz for a prolonged leave, my regiment will merely stay at the spaceport there until transport can be arranged — transport to Kurga! I can hardly believe it. Captain Rifai mindspoke

with me after the announcement to say that this was the opportunity of a lifetime. He wouldn't say why, but he promised to fill me in on Vera Cruz.

October 3, 4994

We arrived at the Vera Cruz spaceport yesterday, and the regiment received a day's leave. Corporal Emanuel invited me to join a number of the dervishes in a visit to Madame Turenta's House of Arrant Pleasure, but I stayed behind to talk to Captain Rifai. I'm glad that I did. According to the captain, previous excursions to Kurga had uncovered treasure troves of data on psychic abilities. The Kurgan barbarians had been making use of these techniques for generations, and they offered us the chance to refine our abilities as never before. Captain Rifai did not say just how much these would improve me, just that they would "introduce me to powers I never thought I would experience."

October 19, 4994

The regiment has finally recovered from yesterday's arrival on Kurga, as well as from the Kurgan frigate that did such damage to our assault lander. We move to the front tomorrow. Captain Rifai took advantage of our day's recuperation to introduce me and two others from the regiment to several veterans of the Kurgan front, including Captain Mataz de Kadiri. Mataz is one of our longest-serving dervishes on Kurga, having come here with the ill-fated expedition of 4978. I had heard whispered tales of this legendary figure, but they did little to prepare me for the real thing.

Mataz has the kind of presence you only read about in ancient leaders, and that we rarely see today. Just being around him makes you feel grateful that he deigns to notice you, empowering you by his very aura. Corporal Pablo Sanchera also noticed this, or so he told me later. He pointed out that Captain Rifai was especially quiet while Mataz was around, and even the other Kurgan veterans seemed to feel inferior around Mataz.

Mataz spoke quietly, but I could tell that this planet had stirred his passions. He told stories of his first incredible encounters with the Kurgan Blessed, the Caliphate's own



mystic warriors. In hushed tones, he described their utter tranquility in the midst of the most frenzied battles. This complete sense of peace seemed to elevate them above the fray. While our dervishes bled and cursed and screamed, the Blessed merely fought, never concerned with the events unfolding before them and never seeming to make mistakes. Defeating them required that our dervishes be at the height of their skills — and have a significant numerical advantage.

When the dervishes and their associated troops finally managed to meet up with the Hazat forces around Andalus, their battles had reduced them to a fraction of their starting strength. Instead of providing relief for Andalus' forces, they had to be rescued by the very troops they were supposed to lead into battle. The Blessed had proved too much for them.

Dealing with the Blessed became a primary goal, and Mataz led our intelligence efforts. That the Blessed had developed amazing abilities similar to those of psychics and theurgists went without saying. How they developed their detachment and concentration, however, confounded our dervishes. Mataz's quest took him to House Shelit, into forgotten valleys and to the very poles of Hira. Finally, in the ancient ruins of a pre-Zebulon temple, Mataz managed to witness a secret Blessed ritual — and much fell into place.

Mataz promised to show us these powerful techniques, but we must consider our training of the greatest secrecy.

Should the Kurgans find out that we know their secret, they will spare no effort to hunt us down.

October 20, 4994

My hands shake with power as I try to pen these words. I can barely stay still long enough to write. What energy fills me! It as if holy fire burns through my limbs, pouring into my heart and mind. We began at dawn with chants and prayers, very similar to those of Pater Foster, the Eskatonic who aided my early training. At noon, our awareness now at a heightened state, we began a series of exercises that seems more like dance than anything else. We began the motions while chanting, but I soon noticed that my fellows were growing silent. Soon the only chant I could hear was that of Mataz, and slowly that grew distant.

I lost all awareness of hunger or exhaustion. I continued to dance, moving as Mataz had shown. I kept my right hand high above my head, my left lowered and pointing to the earth, and turned constantly, with my right foot always on the Omega Gospels. Though no one told me to close my eyes, I did so, and soon the most fantastic visions appeared to me. I do not remember them ever beginning or ending, only that at some point they were there. Vivid lights, colors and images flashed before me — fantastic beasts, marvelous structures, and more. It seemed that these sights lasted no longer than a few seconds each, but I do not know for sure. Some images seemed to stay with me longer than oth-



ers, but I am not even sure of that.

At some point the images disappeared, and an almost indescribable feeling descended upon me. It was not contentment, it was not peace, it was not ecstasy. It was a combination of all these and more. My ego dissolved, and I felt myself resonating with the universe. I was far beyond Hira, wrapping the entire universe in my being. This feeling seemed everlasting, and I lost all awareness of my surroundings — apparently for hours. The sun was going down when Mataz's chanting intruded again on my consciousness. When we finished the movements and chanting, I became aware of the energies pouring through my mind and body.

March 6, 4995

War against the Kurgans has been like none I have known before. I serve as part of a Kalenderis — a long-range patrol dedicated to gathering information and disrupting Kurgan operations. While our conventional forces fight just as they did during the Emperor Wars, our own battles have been like nothing I could imagine. We spend our days in the most beautiful of exercises and our nights hunting the Kurgan Blessed — and being hunted by them. Our battles are also entirely new affairs, as deadly as ever but even more uncertain. The more I see of their abilities, the more impressed I become... and the more sure that we follow similar paths.

It is hard to describe our encounters, because they seem as much loving rendezvous as deadly struggles. Two days ago, Captain Rifai led us into battle against a squad of Blessed who had just destroyed one of our assault landers. We finally caught them in some grim woods shortly after midnight. We closed with them quickly, but then the fight took the turn it often does, and moved too quickly for any of us to keep track of it. It became a swirling melee, with pairs of us clashing in the dark, only to break free when someone else came near. At times our concentration became absolute, and I was aware of nothing save my next move and that of my foe. At other times I felt my awareness expand so that it seemed to take in the entire universe. We finally broke off the attack, though not before slaying several of them, and made our way back to our bivouac.

March 8, 4995

Yesterday I hesitatingly mentioned my feelings of affinity with the Blessed to Mataz, and to my surprise, he did not accuse me of treason. He mentioned that these feelings were not uncommon, and today introduced me to Bey Turakina, the leader of the same Blessed with whom we had just fought! That the two knew each other surprised me quite enough, but their friendship shocked me. Our meeting did not last long, but I left it even more sure that I am mentally and spiritually closer to the Blessed than I am to most Hazat.

May 3, 4995

Countess Matera Crux Castenda de Saline arrived today to replace Marquis Criton Tasar Bursandra as commander of the dervishes on Hira. I know little of Matera, save that she was a primary commander in our failed assault on Byzantium Secundus. As for yesterday's exercises, they went very well, and I feel I am close to a breakthrough. Most of the regiment now practices Mataz's movements.

May 28, 4995

Somehow Matera knows about our special training and is mobilizing troops to move against us! Mataz has called a dawn meeting of all dervishes in this sector to deal with this new threat.

May 29, 4995

I have five minutes to rest. This morning, a flight of Aragonian Claw flitters strafed our camp as we gathered, followed by an attack force consisting of two battalions of Sutekian assault troops. As we prepared to deal with this treachery, Mataz told us to scatter rather than to fight back. We will rendezvous in one week by the Sea of Tsulu.

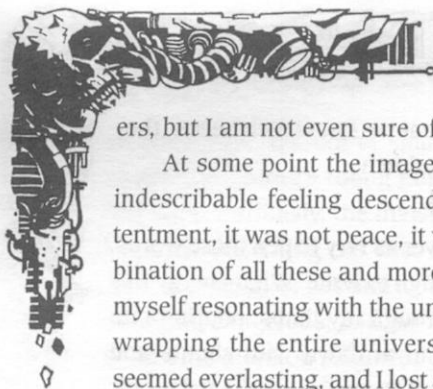
July 3, 4995

House Shelit has refused to give us sanctuary. Many dervishes plan to fight our old leaders and have recruited locals to help them. Others want to join the Kurgans. Mataz recommended that we leave Hira and try to find a planet where we can revive our practices. I will follow this advice, and hope to meet my Kalenderis on some brave new world.

Observations

The dervish rebellion left many unanswered questions. At the time, we thought Countess Matera would use the opportunity to rebuild the dervishes to her liking. After it ended, however, she slowly reduced her involvement with these psychic warriors and is now serving as an ambassador to House Decados. The Hazat still track down these heretics, and they are not the only ones on the prowl. The dervish heresy alarmed the Church once it caught wind of it. Even some low-ranking Brother Battles got caught up in it, and died at Avestite hands. Since then, the Brothers have made a point of policing their order for signs of this heresy, and those who go to Hira are constantly warned against it.

We are not sure just what the dervishes planned. Matera claimed that they intended to seize Hira for their own, and they did garner a fair amount of native support during their rebellion. Most of this seems to have been formed after the rebellion began, and it does not appear that it preceded the rebellion at all. We doubt that they had a real alliance with the Kurgans, and up until the revolution, they seemed some of the house's most effective weapons against the Caliphate.



Some have theorized that the dervish heresy would attract Church scrutiny and threaten efforts to call a crusade against the Kurgans. The highest-ranking dervishes either escaped or died in battle, and the lower-level ones swore that they followed a belief system that in no way contradicted that of the Church. In fact, they insisted that their exercises were putting them in touch with the Empyrean Intelligences, a heretical claim that helped seal their doom. Some captured documents indicated that they believed they were on the brink of understanding why the suns were fading. These appeared after the revolution and may well have been planted.

Codes

The dervishes have a wealth of ways to recognize each other, especially useful since many of those who escaped have radically changed their appearance. First, most of them served with each other and knew one another well. Second, as elite commandos, they had an entire language of hand signals and gestures to help them stay quiet in battle. Finally, they boasted some of the most powerful psychics outside of the covens, augmented by a number of philosopher stones that have not been recovered. They helped the dervishes stay in contact in battle against the Kurgans, and may serve the same role today.

At least one dervish has been found since the rebellion, teaching his practices to non-dervishes. We believe that he may have been facilitating communications between their renegades, but we have not been able to track down many more. Several thousand rebellious dervishes are unaccounted for, and while many of these must be dead, we know that this does not mean all.

Known Heretics

This is one of the few heresies for which we know all the original members, having obtained the Hazat's battle rolls for Hira shortly after the rebellion began. We have no idea who survived, however, or who they may have recruited since then. These warriors were experts at battlefield stealth, and this expertise seems to have served them well ever since.

- **Captain Mataz de Kadiri:** Believed to be one of the ringleaders, Mataz had been one of the Hazat's most talented dervishes, responsible for many of their training and combat procedures. He disappeared shortly after the rebellion began, and rumors have placed him everywhere from Hira to Stigmata to Vau. He once made contact with Eye agents on Tethys, and later helped some Rooks destroy a Decados intelligence cell on Criticorum that had proven a

serious problem for House Hawkwood. We also believe that he has had dealing with Sathraists living in space, and they may well provide him with interstellar transport. In fact, we only seem to get word of him when he makes contact with people we already have under observation.

Mataz may well be one of the most powerful psychics and most talented special forces operatives in the Known Worlds. We believe that he has the Lastigus Cowl, a philosopher's stone that allows him to temporarily give others psychic powers like his. He is extremely charismatic, and can form lasting alliances with people he has just met. We have no reason to believe that he poses a danger to us or the Emperor, but until we know his true motives, we cannot say for sure.

- **Captain Haterus Rifai:** A leader in the fighting against the Hazat, Muster analysis of his tactics leads us to believe that he primarily fought a delaying action. He appears to have kept the Hazat from capturing dervish ringleaders while making it appear that he was threatening key positions and installations. He disappeared when the rebellion sputtered out, but we believe that he still lives on Hira. Spies within the Caliphate have placed him in the company of some Blessed, and in 5001, satellites around the planet located him in Shelit territory.

- **Don Marchenko Catilla Arronto Justus:** Countess Matera called in Don Marchenko to help crush the rebellion, because he had trained many of the heretical dervishes. He was one of those who adapted the teachings of the Grail mystic Zegai for use by the psychic warriors. Don Marchenko proved very effective at hunting down his old students, accurately predicting the heretic's movements and battle plans. He is included in this section of our report because of his actions since moving to Pandemonium. Our operatives there have placed him in the company of a number of dervishes since then, including Mataz. Marchenko has made no secret of his interest in Iver, and we have told our few agents there to look out for dervishes appearing on that once-lost world.

- **The Zikr Cell:** Named for a dervish ceremony conducted over their fallen, this cell has remained very active on Hira, sabotaging Hazat war efforts and assassinating house leaders. They have done limited damage to the Hazat, but the house has cracked down heavily to try to capture them. This has created a great deal of friction with native leaders and hampered local cooperation. This may well be the cell's main goal — to create a local movement against the Hazat — and we know it has received some support from the Caliphate.



Zodiacs

Good sir, as you know, many houses utilized special psychic forces during the Emperor Wars. The populace remains largely ignorant of the extent to which these forces were fielded. While the dilemma of the Hazat Dervishes is becoming known to most houses and will soon surely be known to the common folk at large, their fellow star-faring brethren are as yet still secret. I speak here of the Zodiacs, the special psychic corps trained to wield their powers aboard starships, sending their wills across the vast distances of space through the aid of the mysterious Focus Rings, relics left to us by the Second Republic. It is said that even the directors of the Phavian Institute did not know to what ends the secret military R&D branches were putting their research, but Emperor Vladimir knew.

It was he who rediscovered the Focus Rings, strange amalgams of Anunnaki Soul Shards and Second Republic high technology. Unispatial Field Physics was among the many theoretical sciences that made breakthroughs just before the Fall, although most records of these advanced, expensive and often secret programs are now lost. Project Zodiac saw the creation of the Focus Rings, items that allowed psychics to radically boost their powers when used away from planetary gravity wells. Placed upon special starships, these Rings promised to give the Republican military supreme space power – but it was already too late. They could not be mass produced, for they required Soul Shards in their construction, and their invention came only a scant few years before the Rogue Worlds took Byzantium Secundus and brought night down on us all.

The few ships fitted with these experimental devices disappeared when the Ten took power and sought to control the remnants of the Republican navy. Unknown and unseen, their very existence was forgotten. Until Vladimir.

How, where and just when he found the *Bellerophon* is still unknown. This small stealth ship was equipped with a Focus Ring, one that allowed its psychics to seek out the other ships in the fleet. Soon, Vladimir had three such ships. He did not use them, however, in his campaign against the barbarians. Even before attaining victory there, he turned these ships upon his allies and rivals, spying out their positions and tactics, preparing for his inevitable bid for power. He had the *Bellerophon's* Focus Ring removed and placed on his flagship. It now resides as scattered atoms in the stellar void around Byzantium Secundus's sun, fallen into that fiery body when the houses turned on Vladimir's fleet following his own fiery death under that damned crown.

Various houses soon seized the other ships; the Decados gained one of them (the *Morpheus*) while the al-Malik had the other (the *Prometheus*). It took centuries, but the Har-

bingers of the Engineers guild eventually unlocked the Rings' technological secrets during the Emperor Wars. The Focus Rings could be recreated with other Soul Shards and special manufacturing techniques, utilizing rare compounds and elements. The guild then began offering such technology to other houses in an attempt not only at détente, but to make a small fortune. Soon, most houses had at least one ship with a Focus Ring. Some had more.

We are not exactly sure just how many of these items exist today. Some of the ships bearing them suffered irreparable battle damage, but a number survived the Emperor Wars. The Decados have at least five such Rings, although they make it a habit to refit them into different ships so that rivals cannot guess where they are at any one time. The Hazat have nearly as many, as do the al-Malik. The Li Halan have fewer, for they prefer to rely on Seraphic Alembics (see below) to counter the Rings. House Hawkwood has the least, for its Rings were appropriated by Alexius, who now has the most. Or I should more correctly state, the Imperial Navy has at least seven Rings.

Our efforts to snoop into Engineer affairs concerning the manufacture of such Rings have gone badly. Our agent was discovered and neutralized. He now recovers in an Oublette cell from a terrible brain toxin. We cannot know if they are still able to manufacture these, and even discovering who among the guild knows the technology is proving difficult. It appears that the Grand Didact places the utmost secrecy on this issue; the guild protects this asset as one of its most valued properties.

Shipboard Psychics

Even if Focus Rings became more readily available, their use still requires specialized training. To focus their powers through such relics, psychics must practically learn them anew. It is the difference between carving wood and sculpting stone — both activities produce a desired product, but the process used behind each is vastly different. However, if one knows the principles of sculpting, one can still apply it to both.

Vladimir called his trained psychic corps the Zodiacs, after the Second Republic project that had created the Focus Rings. The name has stuck, although it is rarely used, for each house has kept the existence of its space psychics secret from all but the other factions' intelligence services. Their use came late in the Emperor Wars, and so most common folk have yet to hear of their exploits. Indeed, they would be just as nervous of them as they are the rumors of Dervishes.

Decommissioned Zodiacs have less freedom than decommissioned Dervishes; they are kept in distant estates,

maintained comfortably but unable to communicate with the public. They are expected to train new generations of Zodiacs. Once their existence becomes known, the Church will surely make an issue of it, demanding their release into Penitency. While I suspect this will provide them more freedom to travel, they will still be watched — this time by those who do not necessarily respect their skills. While there are many Zodiacs who were first trained as Dervishes, it is rare to see the reverse, for shipboard life does not lend itself well to the physical regimens required of the Dervish warrior.

The Seraphic Alembic

In response to the obvious threat of the Focus Rings, which not only give houses an immense imbalance of space power but allows them to justify the training of psychics, the Church formulated its own version of such a device, but one built on sacred principles and geometries rather than technology.

In fact, it was a near-heretical member of the Eskatonic Order, Philosophus Ehrlak Monar, who devised the Seraphic Alembic. Initially working in secret without Church knowledge, aided by a small fleet of ships manned by faithful merchants and free traders, Monar built the first Alembic using a Soul Shard taken from an Anunnaki ruin. He had somehow gained a close look at the workings of a Focus Ring (perhaps with Preceptor aid) and used some of its basic principles. But he veered away in the material components and their ordering.

However, the Alembic is not a technological device but a thing of faith. It is manufactured and given its power by a theurgic ritual performed during construction. I cannot begin to fathom such things. I recommend that you choose an agent who is more familiar with such miracles and set him on the mission of discerning more clearly what these things do and how they work. Regardless, the Church accepted the device as a hallmark of faith, freeing Monar from some of the charges he was bound to face for his previous heterodox ways. He now works in a secret location to perfect the Alembic. I have reason to believe he is on Holy Terra, or within its system.

The Alembic allowed the Church fleet a new line of defense during the end of the Emperor Wars. Suffering from the same lack of materials (this time theurgic know-how more than material components), Alembics are as yet more rare than Focus Rings. House Li Halan has at least three in its fleet, but we suspect its shipyards are building more.

(Note: More information on Zodiacs can be found in the forthcoming Noble Armada Expanded Edition rulebook.)



Sathraists

This pseudo-religious coven — its beliefs lack the integrity even heresies possess — has threatened the established order since the time of the First Republic. That the people of that prereflective time recognized the grave danger Sathraism posed is yet further proof that its suppression should remain a high priority for the Known Worlds. To allow Sathraism a moment's respite would be to court disaster at a time when the Empire can ill afford such a misstep. Beware: this coven has not survived for millennia because of its benevolence — quite the contrary, as we shall show.

Current Schemes

The history of Sathraism is too well known to dwell upon here. Those unfamiliar with its unsavory origins should consult Father Ayubi Bayo's magisterial work *Banned from God* or Bishop Hieronymus San-Chih Li Halan's equally weighty *Sathra: Whispers of Evil*. Of greater interest to our concerns are the coven's schemes in the Known Worlds, for it is its present activities rather than its past misdeeds that might upset the precarious balance we've enjoyed since the end of the Emperor Wars.

An excellent example of Sathraism's infiltration of our society can be seen in the following, an excerpt from a private correspondence between Enri Galant and Caja Kitoow, two agents within the Imperial Eye:

We have nothing to fear, certainly not from Oelestre and her coterie of sycophants. They believe that it is they who control this agency. How little they understand our true history! How little they realize that it is we hold the reins of power here. Imperial Eye. It would make me laugh if I did not know that illusion is a useful tool, especially in an organization such as this. Illusion is what has preserved us for so long. Illusion is what has kept our ancient faith secret from the ignorant masses who would destroy us and prevent us from achieving our true destiny.

You may not believe it, but the time is coming when we can emerge from the shadows and reveal ourselves. Those fools who adore Alexius — his Questing Knights — will be our salvation. You doubt me? Remember that they seek out Lost Worlds as surely as they breathe. Whether they realize it or not, they will prove the instruments of our day of glory. For one day soon, they will find fabled Byway and Bastion and, like Sathra's Boon before them, they will become a beacon for those who share our goals.

And if the Knights do not, others will! We truly

live in a golden age, although not for the reasons some believe. In their zeal to convert the heathen or to conquer new fiefdoms, they will find our brothers and sisters — and we shall be avenged.

Since intercepting this missive, Kitoow has been captured and interrogated. She revealed little of the coven's plans — she is a minor member of the group — but Galant is now on the run, presumably in League space, where Sathraism has long held a fascination for Charioteers and Scravers in particular. Even so, what information we did glean from Kitoow led us to other conclusions, including the identities of other prominent Sathraists.

As Galant states in his correspondence, the Sathraists are extremely interested — some might say obsessed — with the belief that their cult survives and prospers on as yet undiscovered Lost Worlds. We have no records of the worlds Byway or Bastion, but we presume they warred against the First Republic before closing off their jumpgates forever. If these worlds have survived on their own for millennia, it's understandable why the Sathraists wish to re-contact them — and why they pose such a threat to the Known Worlds.

More disturbing is the possibility that these Sathraist strongholds may be found somewhere in barbarian space. As the next excerpt shows (a transcript from the interrogation of Doran Frawley), Sathraists within the bosom of House Hawkwood have been pushing for a crusade against the Vuldrok because they believe it provides a cover for their own agenda:

Interrogator 1: What do you expect to gain from such a foolhardy plan?

Frawley: Foolhardy? Isn't it in House Hawkwood's best interest to oppose the Vuldrok before they become too bold and threaten us further?

Interrogator 2: Just answer the question.

Frawley: I just did.

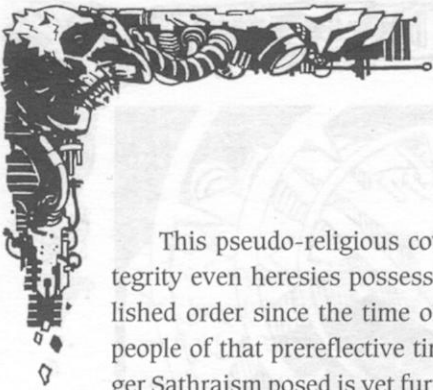
Interrogator 2: You know what I mean, Doran. Why does your kind want the Hawkwoods in Vuldrok space? You're not looking out for the safety of the house.

Frawley: We want the same as the Emperor himself: to find Lost Worlds, to reconnect with our lost heritage.

Interrogator 1: With other Sathraist strongholds?

Interrogator 2: Or with barbarians who share your religion?

Frawley: You two really are narrow-minded, aren't you? Must you conceive of everything in terms of power games and politics? Isn't it possible we have other rea-





sons for seeking out our brethren?

Interrogator 1: Such as?

Frawley: *The improvement of humanity! It's not a coincidence, you know, that psychic powers developed at the same time we discovered the jumpgates. Neither is it surprising that those same gates opened us up to new possibilities, new horizons we'd never experienced before. We're on the verge of a great leap in human evolution. Don't you see it? Why do you oppose it? It's available to anyone who's willing to partake of it — even you.*

It's clear that the Sathraists share with other groups a belief that humankind is on the brink of a great change, a transformation about which they possess a uniquely enlightened perspective. They likewise share the belief that this change is available to any who accept them and their way of life. Indeed, Sathraists have little regard for distinctions of class and station. Like less-mystical Republican groups, these cultists seek to overthrow the established regime of the Known Worlds and replace it with one in which all beings are equal on the road to the great change they anticipate.

Consequently, Sathraists often participate in more traditional political terrorism, or cooperate with groups that practice such actions. A good example of this was the Farlov Bombing on Grail in 4999, in which Sathraists and Republicans attempted to assassinate Count Gaius Decados. Many

similar instances can be cited throughout the Known Worlds, highlighting the covenant's willingness to use violence to strike back against its enemies — real or imagined.

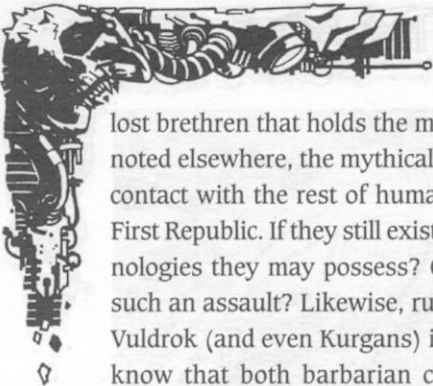
Observations

The Sathraists possess little in the way of an overarching organization, yet it would be a mistake to assume this mitigates the danger they pose. First of all, many of their number make use of unusual psychic powers, the likes of which we've never seen before. They believe these powers derive from their advancement along the next stage of human evolution, one they wish all humankind to share. Thus, they'll worm their way onto starship crews — or simply hijack them — to "show others the light" by removing the Sathra Damper and taking unprotected beings through a jumpgate. Many of their converts come from such bold maneuvers, as evidenced by incidents in the Aylon and Cadiz systems just this year.

Their belief in the equality of all beings gives Sathraists many allies among other revolutionary and terrorist groups. Indeed, this covenant frequently uses Republicans as shields against discovery. When the Inquisition is hunting down members of the Third Era, they often fail to notice the Sathraists hidden within their midst — a gambit that frequently pays off for the covenant.

However, it is the Sathraists' obsession with finding their





lost brethren that holds the most danger for the Empire. As noted elsewhere, the mythical Sathraist worlds have had no contact with the rest of human space since the time of the First Republic. If they still exist, who knows what weird technologies they may possess? Could the Empire stand up to such an assault? Likewise, rumors of Sathraists among the Vuldrok (and even Kurgans) is cause for much concern. We know that both barbarian cultures have taboos against Sathraism much as we do. Yet can we rely on them to keep this coven in check? Can we be sure that they will not find the Sathraists a useful tool to use against us — even if it ultimately results in their own destruction?

There is no guarantee that some ambitious Vuldrok chieftain or Kurgan khan will not sponsor the Sathraists, believing them an ally in their disputes with the Empire. For this reason, we recommend opening a dialog with both groups — subtly at first — to ensure that such an event does not happen. If this means sharing intelligence with our foes, so be it. We cannot take the chance that the barbarians might see the Sathraists as the lesser of two evils. From past experience, we know the coven has already infiltrated our own society. Is there any reason to assume they have not done the same elsewhere?

Finally, the Sathraists must not be allowed to pervert the Emperor's noble quest to find Lost Worlds. If these cultists succeed, they may stir up within the Church sentiment against exploration. Many priests are already uncomfortable with the pace at which re-contact occurs. The last thing the Empire needs is a coven of twisted evolutionists finding a high-tech Lost World of their own kind. That would put back the cause of the Questing Knights for years to come — and with good reason. Thus, we urge an immediate investigation into the Sathraist threat, lest it come out into the open and spoil all for which we have worked so hard since the conclusion of the Emperor Wars.

Codes

Because Sathraism possesses no centralized structure, ascertaining its codes and passwords is a difficult endeavor. Surreptitious greetings and identifiers vary from region to region, making a precise catalog impossible. Nevertheless, we have observed several codes that could prove useful to anyone seeking to infiltrate (or spy upon) the coven.

Regardless of locality, many Sathraists use high-tech

redemption terminology to identify one another as fellow initiates. Because an understanding of starship engineering is so rare outside of certain circles, encountering someone who can converse at length about the topic often provides an opening to a deeper conversation in a hidden locale. Likewise, names and places associated with the history of Sathraism (like Byway or Wezniak) are common codes in the coven.

More bizarrely, Sathraists have begun to use nonsensical words (such as *havrag* and *ootza*) as codes. The meanings of these words are unknown, but several xenolinguists have detected similarities to words in many alien languages, including Vau, which leads to the disturbing conclusion that the cultists may be in contact with the same dark powers that once wrought havoc throughout the universe during the time of the Anunnaki.

Known Members

Because Sathraism has been persecuted for so long, it's a rare individual who admits to his involvement with the coven. Nevertheless, there are a handful of people who work toward its ends in one fashion or another.

- **Enri Galant:** Until recently an Imperial Eye agent on Sutek, Galant was unmasked as an important Sathraist in 5000. Conflicting reports place him on either Madoc or Leagueheim, where he continues to support the coven's goals. He's believed to have friends in the Charioteers, whom he encourages to seek out lost Sathraist worlds.

- **Sir Lowell Hawkwood:** The identity of this Sathraist has been known since 4997, but we have chosen not to reveal him publicly as yet. To date, Sir Lowell has taken numerous trips into Vuldrok space, where he's met with barbarian cultists in an effort to find Byway and Bastion, among other Lost Worlds. Although a nobleman, he's not as influential among the Sathraists, in part because of their egalitarian beliefs. Nevertheless, Sir Lowell has proven an invaluable resource, since he is not nearly as skilled at knavery as he should be, making him easy to shadow.

- **Jogvan Restorff:** This Vuldrok pirate has terrorized the Leminakainen system since 4996. Until recently, we believed his actions were purely predatory. Now, it seems he is operating an "underground jumproad" for persecuted Sathraists from the Known Worlds, whom he ferries back to Vuldrok space.

Antinomists

Those who act against the Pancreator are many and varied, but those who name themselves in direct opposition to the One True Name of the Celestial Sun share a common body of dark lore and are united in allegiance to the very darkness that threatens to engulf the suns of the Empire. Their method is to seek converse with those false intelligences of the Realms Infernal, or else with ghosts called up from the grave, or any manner of pagan hedge-haunts, and their aim is to accumulate the knowledge and power necessary to secure their dominion over the ruin they plan to wreak upon the Known Worlds.

Antinomian doctrine — not to be confused with the antinomial equations supposedly used by guild Charioteers in calculating jumpcode pulses — derives from a perverse misinterpretation of III Chroniculae 6:17, where the Prophet's act of kissing the ground before the dragon is seen as an abasement to appease the Great Beast that coils in the deepest Infernal pit. Antinomists likewise pledge their souls to the Draco Tenebris, the "Dragon of the Dark," sealing elaborate blood-pacts in exchange for unearthly power. The repository of Antinomian lore is the accursed Draco Codex, several confiscated editions of which are sealed in the vaults of the Inquisitorial Synod, to be viewed only under the closest supervision of specially trained priests and theurges.

Therefore it is extremely difficult to place reliable agents within the Draconian Order and solid data must be gathered at a distance, through intermediary sources. House Li Halan reports frequent peasant uprisings on Rampart, which it blames on the demonic activities of an old degenerate branch of the family that has been hiding out on the Voroxian homeworld since before Cardano's time. The Reeves guild has, since the end of the Emperor Wars, noted the frequency with which vaults long since closed and considered inaccessible have been reopened — using lost passwords and keycodes that could only have been retrieved by conversation with the dead. It would seem a relatively simple matter to collate reports of supernatural anomalies such as rains of toads, deformed births, husk plagues and apparitions, so as to track Antinomian activity (if not individual Antinomists), but the chief recipient of such reports, the Universal Church, is unwilling to make use of think machines which could accomplish this.

Current Schemes

Here follow certain notable reports:

(Town Criers' public dispatch, 17 July 5001)

Mysterious and vile, the secret society known as the Phantasmagoricon has declared that the ongoing defacement of iconic statuary on the Cathe-

dral of Saint Maya and the Library of Horace is being perpetrated in retaliation for Archbishop Palamon's pronouncement of last month which ascribed the cause of Gasperah's strange weather over the past year to a faulty terraforming engine. The Phantasmagoricon, it will be remembered, claimed that the past season's rains of mangled fish had been invoked as punishment for unnamed offenses by certain magic lantern moguls.

Fortunately, a band of the sacrilegious vandalizers was apprehended as a result of the increased vigilance that followed this boast; young Sir Marcutio Van Gelder was captured with his retinue using a laser drill to 'deflower' the statue of Saint Virginia of Artemis on the roof of Maya's Cathedral. When Sir Marcutio, who has quite a reputation as a duelist, was publicly stripped for beating, it became clear to all present that his vaunted facility with the rapier was the result of an illegal cybernetical arm. His penance, subsequently compounded, will be followed by public execution.

What the Town Criers Guild wisely chose not to reveal was the result of young Van Gelder's interrogation, in which he implicated another Antinomist called "Makron" and a shadowy figure known only as "Nero Crick-Toes." Makron's activities are now under surveillance, but no clues have emerged as to the identity of Crick-Toes. It is currently believed that this name, which has recurred in other unrelated investigations, belongs to a wholly fictitious personage and is used as kind of scapegoat for various criminal organizations.

(from the records of the Inquisitorial Synod, August 2, 5001)

Much to the surprise of the attendant Inquisitors, the Duchess Salandra Decados did, in fact, appear, with her retinue, as requested at the time and place appointed. Before the details of her case could be dealt with, however, she made an impassioned plea to the agents of the Inquisition, claiming that she had recently become aware that Antinomy most foul was being perpetrated within her own household.

Using evidence supplied by the duchess and her most loyal retainers, the Inquisitors were able to identify, isolate and prosecute a handful of ladies-in-waiting, as well as some female servants. These evil women were found guilty of calling upon Infernal intelligence, of negotiating pacts in exchange for personal power and unnatural abilities, and of using





said power and abilities to the detriment of the Empire and humankind. Additionally, they confessed to having engaged in sexual perversions too numerous to mention and to sapping the libidinal energies of various members of the Imperial Court. In this they were aided by their demonic patrons, who conferred upon them supernatural capacities for debauchery including total loss of social inhibitions, inhuman endurance, the unerring ability to sexually excite any humanoid in their presence and metamorphic anatomical distortions that not only accentuate their natural feminine characteristics but even render them compatible with aliens (physically, if not genetically.) Furthermore, at least one of the seductresses has been positively categorized as one of the Changed.

In the course of questioning, many claimed that they were not an isolated coven, but part of a much larger group that spanned the Known Worlds. Some referred to themselves as 'Vesicae Iniquitates,' a phrase from Maya 17:4 which translates as 'Vessels of Iniquity' and was used by Blessed Saint Maya to describe the legendary Whores of Nineveh. Even as their vile bodies were consumed by flame, they continued to issue threats of retaliation for their treatment at the hands of both the duchess and the Inquisition, and all unanimously averred that the Empire would inevitably be swallowed by the darkness eating away at our suns.

In view of her cooperation with the Synod and the exemplary manner in which she offered up a number of her own people to justice rather than attempting to conceal the evil flourishing in her own household, it is recommended that the charge of fashion morals violation currently pending against Duchess Salandra Decados be dismissed. For now.

Because her actions were an obvious ploy to get the Inquisition off her back, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the duchess may be in league with these "Vesicae Iniquitates" herself. Her proximity to the person of the Emperor, however, means that the investigation of this possibility must be handled as delicately as possible.

(from *The Rolls*, a Muster guild broadsheet, undated)

Let glory and honor be heaped upon the brow of our own Sergeant Cletus, a Grimson soldier who had distinguished himself in the recent wars of Imperial succession! Not content with serving as a humble soldier of fortune, Cletus opted to remain within the ranks of the Muster once peace descended upon the Known Worlds, and in a few short years rose to the rank of sergeant (seldom seen among

those of his 'birth') in the 66th Heavy Infantry Division. Here he was called upon to perform an even greater service in answer to a higher authority than our valiant guild's chain of command.

The sergeant's proximity to the command staff of the 66th allowed him to observe certain suspect behaviors among the upper echelons, including dishonorable conduct unbecoming to officers, a cavalier disregard for the lives and well-being of both the civilians under their protection and the soldiers under their command, and a tendency toward blasphemy and sacrilege above and beyond that usually tolerated among those who follow our profession of slaughter. Rather than turn a blind eye to these lapses in the conduct of his superiors, as so often happens, Sergeant Cletus strove to befriend these corrupt officers, even to the point of making himself indispensable to certain of their schemes — acts for which he has since fervently sought the forgiveness of the Pancreator, let it be noted.

In time he was invited to join their inner circle, learning that they called themselves 'The Obsidian Legion' and secretly enacted dark rituals to collectively affirm their allegiance to demonic forces of destruction. When he first attended such a rite, Cletus witnessed with his own eyes not only excesses of inebriation and perverse debauchery, but was even subjected to the sight of a series of blood sacrifices (the victims consisting of both captured soldiers and noncombatants) by means of which a foul demon of violence and rage — which the Kalinthis has identified by the name Phuragojak — was summoned. When ordered to abase himself before an idol of malignance, the sergeant chose instead to flee the vile scene, but not before smashing up the chamber with all its furnishings and teaching the crazed henchmen of evil the true meaning of rage and violence at the business end of his rock-hard, mallet-like fists.

All remaining members of the 66th Heavy Infantry, officers and troops alike, were subjected to rigorous examination by an Inquisitorial team comprised of Brother Battle, Avestite and Kalinthis agents before their beating, quartering and immolation, but any other minions of this Obsidian Legion fled like the cowards they undoubtedly are. Cletus Grimson retired from the Muster with full honors and now pursues a public career as a professional gladiator with the Carnivalers guild. Any soldier who suspects a messmate — or even a commanding officer — of engaging in demon worship or dark sorcery is

herby ordered to report all such suspicions to their battle-chaplain immediately.

The case of Sergeant Cletus Grimson brings up one of the primary difficulties in investigating Antinomian activity, namely, that such cults are ever on guard against infiltration and have strong precautions in place to protect their secrecy. Cletus, as an unsuspecting recruit, was allowed into the inner circle precisely because he had no hidden agenda in his heart and was keeping no secrets from the Obsidian Legion. Furthermore, he was able to survive his encounter with bald-faced evil thanks to the superhuman strength and resilience with which all Grimsons were created. Lastly, once the Legion knew that its cover had been blown, the survivors scattered to undoubtedly join up with any other military organization with potential for corruption. It cannot be estimated how many local militiae, household security forces or the standing armies of large fiefs are already harboring demon-worshipping Legionnaires willing to hide a Muster-trained confederate, nor how easy it would be for a fleeing Antinomist to hide his past and gain employment in some local army or another. The natural target for Obsidian Legion infiltration would be House Hazat, always in need of strong arms for the Kurga Crusade; indeed, some Legionnaires declared under torture that their true leader resided within that house, though they could not or would not identify him directly. Brother Battle, though far less likely for obvious reasons, cannot be discounted either. Unfortunately, investigating these possibilities without an overwhelming amount of hard evidence would be to insult both the honor of the Hazat and the faith of Brother Battle.

Observations

Our own agents have made some headway in infiltrating the core Antinomian cults, enough so that some of the inner contours of the demonic conspiracy can be delineated with a degree of certainty. The careers of these agents have been brief and tragic since most ended up as sacrificial victims when their true motives were discovered. While their names cannot be made public, in order to protect their loved ones, we may take comfort in the fact that the Pancreator surely recognizes the self-sacrifice they have all made on behalf of the good folk of the Empire.

At the center of all Antinomy is the Ordo Draconis Tenebris, or the Order of the Dragon of Darkness, founded when the Draco Codex was produced during the terrible reign of the pre-Cardanite Li Halan. The Ordo attributes authorship of the Codex to one Evandros of Cadavus, a servant of Ustirin the Unspeakable. The Ordo's primary task is to propagate the practice of demonolatry, the worship of Infernal intelligences, and to teach all the arts attendant thereunto, including the negotiating of pacts, divination, poisoning, the casting of curses and malevolent spells, and eroding the



general populace's faith in the Word of the Prophet and the Universal Church.

The Ordo recruits from all levels of society and all walks of life, but the majority of its minions never rise above the status of "worm" or underling. Those who manage to excel in thaumaturgic practice or the study of Antinomian lore are granted the title of "Serpent" and may even be allowed some autonomy of action, but only if their allegiance to the Order is beyond question. "Serpents" generally tend to be corrupt priests, guildsmen, lesser nobles or freemen of some standing, those who have the advantage of breeding, education and/or professional training. Natural leaders within the cult eventually attain to the status of "Dragon," acknowledged as the masters of their own covens, and are privy to the working of the Ordo's inner circle. The rank held by "Dragons" is usually mirrored in their public lives as well, and landed nobles of baronial title or higher from minor houses tend to predominate. Demonolaters are notoriously aggressive and ambitious in the sociopolitical arena, and thus pose a direct threat to any power structure they come into contact with.

The Ordo Draconis Tenebris has two branches that appear to operate independently of the Order itself and even seem to engage in some sort of internecine rivalry. The foremost of these two is the College of Necromantism, which specializes in conversing with the spirits of the deceased, reanimating corpses and reincorporating dead individuals into living bodies. This College coalesced from various traditions of necromancy stretching back to the prehistory of Holy Terra, incorporating analogous traditions from alien cultures, and may be connected to the rites of ancestor worship rumored to exist in some noble houses. Necromancers have been especially active since the onset of the Emperor Wars, as otherwise faithful people have been driven by grief or greed to settle unfinished business with those who perished in the fighting. While demons may disclose esoteric secrets and grant obscene powers in exchange for worship, the dead possess a vast amount of hard data regarding history and human affairs; consequently the College of Necromantism has become very rich through blackmail and information brokering. Because of this, the College may pose an even greater threat to the throne itself than the demonolaters.

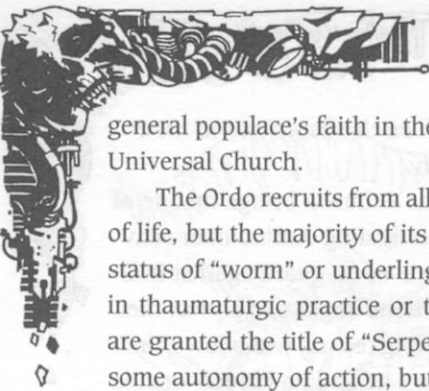
Far less affluent or invasive than the College of Necromantism is the College of Horuspication, a loosely confederated network of diviners and hedgewitches existing amid the most inaccessible backwater holdouts of rural paganism. They may be distinguished from common pagans by their practice of a particularly vile manner of divination in which knowledge may be gained through the careful inspection of the entrails of a ritually slaughtered animal or person. Their choice of sacrificial victim is based upon the type of information they wish to divine; certain animals

strongly associated with certain subjects, guildsmen for matters of commerce, nobles for political intelligence, et cetera. Labeled "eviscerati," or eviscerators, by the Universal Church, they trace this art — which they call a science — to an ancient Urthish tyrant named Mendes who is said to have read the entire future history of the human race in the intestines of his children. Investigators should be alerted by murders in which dismemberment or disembowelment was carefully and methodically conducted, as was the case with a number of cases the Kalinthis recently discovered. Due to this College's reputation for unerring accuracy, their clientele base has expanded from ignorant peasants to occasionally include misguided members of civilized society. Despite the great power they could conceivably wield, eviscerati seem to have no interest in the worlds at large and are not considered an immediate threat at this time.

As the documents reproduced above have evinced, the Ordo Draconis Tenebris has other branches to do its dirty work in society. The Obsidian Legion is plainly the Order's military arm, protecting its secrets and enforcing its will through force of arms. The Vessels of Iniquity serve as the Order's espionage branch, subtly insinuating themselves into the power structure to gather information and affect policy by seduction and intrigue. The Phantasmagoricon may be likened to the "public relation" departments of the godless corporations of the Second Republic, molding the thoughts of the general populace by open displays of sacrilege and manipulation of the mass media.

Codes

Communication between the various arms of the Ordo is couched in the arcane symbology of the Draco Codex to maintain secrecy. Serpentine imagery predominates in all visual depictions, while verbal texts employ some inversion of the pure Latin of the Omega Gospels, usually by reversing word order or even spelling. Later editions of the Codex give a cipher-alphabet in which the "Lingua Serpentis," or Serpent's Tongue, is to be written; supposedly the common language of the Infernal Realms, the Lingua Serpentis is an abbreviated form of inverted Latin, its letter forms apparently derived from Kurgan script. Colors favored by Antinomists are blood-red, deep violet hues which approximate the "black light" of the Inferno — invisible to human eyes, and black to represent the Dark between the stars. Cultists may identify each other by distinctive gestures and postures as well: certain writhing sinuous movements paradoxically known as the "Serpent's Fist" may be incorporated into both dance and martial maneuvers, while another type of fist, in which the index and little finger are extended, is intended to represent the horns of the Dragon of Darkness.



Known Heretics

Antinomian covens which have become known to authorities are immediately disbanded, their ritual sites destroyed and all members hunted down and eliminated. Few Antinomists are able to convincingly renounce their evil ways, and those who manage to stave off summary execution are useless as double agents since they lose all credibility within the Ordo. A more effective method than trying to create double agents is to keep a talented dilettante under surveillance at a discreet distance and note when he is invited to join the Order proper.

One such is a native of Byzantium Secundus, Joseph Hauges, who performs "dark miracles and weird wonders" under the name "Makron" for audiences of decadent nobles and other rich, easily duped socialites. Some years ago, Makron somehow came into possession of actual demonic lore and began to enact true Antinomian rites for his unsuspecting audiences. He has since been approached by persons believed to represent the Phantasmagoricon, among them the celebrated eroticist and pornographer Earl Ferencz-Fiore Copula. Earl Copula achieved notoriety some years back for his flamboyant depiction of ancient pre-reflective orgiastic blood-rites in his disjointed hallucinatory epic "Apokalypso!" The earl derives the bombastic style of his magic lantern productions from the banned works of Milius Glorokus, who lived over a century ago and is now thought to be one of the founding members of the Phantasmagoricon.

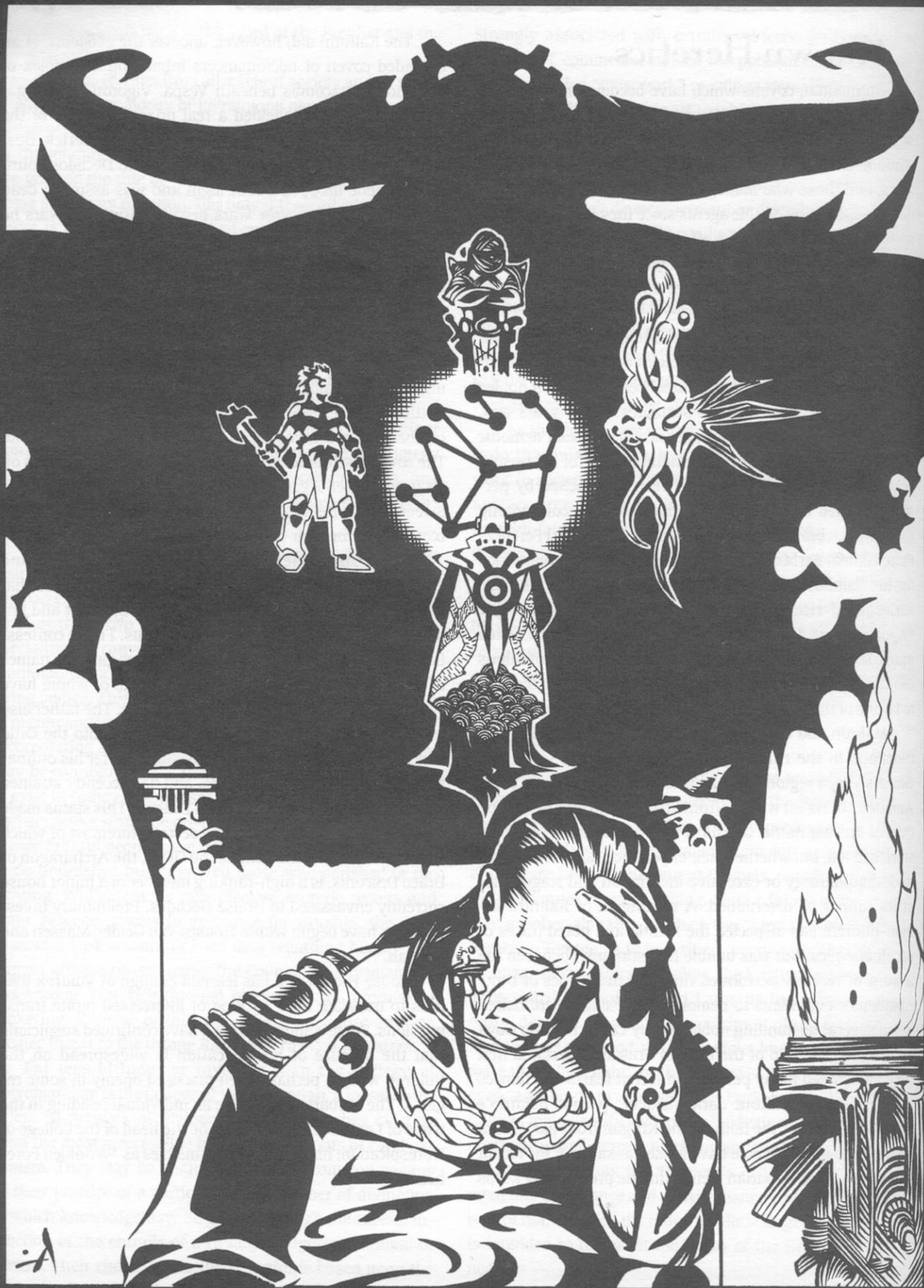
Makron and Copula hold their most extravagant social functions in the ruins of the Palatio Amadeo, located in Ghastr's Vespa region on Byzantium Secundus, where Duke Amadeus Li Halan was confronted and destroyed by Bishop Odel of Brother Battle. Guests of the Palatio return with wild stories to tell, but whether their experiences are the result of dark thaumaturgy or excessive inebriation and staged theatrics cannot be determined. A contingent of Kalinthis demon-hunters has inspected the Palatio and noted traces of occult energies, but was unable to distinguish between the residue of recently performed rites and the echoes of Duke Amadeus's evil. Plans to demolish the Palatio were halted when several upstanding nobles led by Count Belardo Goya de Aragon, the hero of the Kurgan Crusades, declared that they had staged many perfectly innocent feasts and dances on the location without dark incident. (Count Belardo's staunch defense of the faith on the Kurgan front places him above reproach, but some have looked askance at his recent dalliance with a barbarian wench that he presumably keeps as a pet.)

The Kalinthis did, however, uncover the existence of an extended coven of necromancers inhabiting a complex of cavernous catacombs beneath Vespa. Vigorous interrogation of the captives yielded a real prize: the name of the head of the College of Necromantism, one Aerlek Dost Rhoene. Once the Royal Chirurgeon to the Decados court, Dost Rhoene dropped out of sight and was assumed dead by the time the Emperor Wars began. During the Wars he amassed a sizable fortune exploiting the grief of the survivors and has since planted spies on Byzantium Secundus and the Hawkwood worlds, seeking some manner of leverage to use upon Emperor Alexius. The Vespan coven placed Dost Rhoene's lair in the southern polar regions of Malignatus, and initial assault forces (formed through an unprecedented alliance between House Decados and Brother Battle) were repelled by an army of husks, hardened for combat and preserved against decay by the freezing cold. The coven also disclosed the names of two necromancers on Shaprut, Chief Agatha deLantz and Associate Mehmet Sweege of the Reeves, who seek to purchase an intact Symbiot carcass for their own unspeakable purposes.

Last year, Father Lucius Metzger was arrested and brought before the Inquisition when it was discovered that he was preaching heretical doctrine to his ignorant and impoverished parish in the slums of Cadavus. Freely confessing his sins to the Inquisitors, Father Lucius gave the names of other corrupt preachers on the planet, all of whom have since gone underground to escape their fate. The father also revealed that he himself had been inducted into the Ordo Draconis Tenebris many years ago, shortly after his ordination and assignment to Cadavus, and had recently attained the rank of Draco Minor, or Lesser Dragon. This status made him privy to some of the Order's secrets, foremost of which was the rumor that the head of the Order, the Archdragon or Draco Draconis, is a high-ranking member of a minor house currently envassaled to House Decados. Preliminary investigations have begun within Houses Van Gelder, Masseri and Keddah.

House Hawkwood has learned enough of Vuldrok dialects to translate their backlog of intercepted pirate transmissions. Some communications have confirmed suspicions that the practice of horuspication is widespread on the Vuldrok worlds, perhaps even practiced openly in some regions. The barbarians describe an individual residing in the wilds of Leminkainen who may be the head of the College of Horuspication; his or her name translates as "Wrinkled Forehead."





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Outsiders (Foreign Threats)

Your ability to deal with foreign threats must be unequaled by all else within the Known Worlds, for here the purview of your office is unrivaled and unquestioned. While the Church may quibble about their jurisdiction over societal affairs and the nobles argue over land rights, none can gainsay the Emperor's role in governing the Empire's intercourse with foreign nations. Herein lies the throne's true power, the basis of its right to marshal the resources of noble houses, League guilds and Church orders.

Pray do not misuse this power, for if the other institutions believe that you play games with their fealty, you risk insurrection. Others have tried this, for each regent was sorely tested with the power given to him and many failed to use it wisely, focusing it instead on partisan plots and petty vengeance. As Emperor, you must be above such personal concerns.

Your father's reign shall surely prove long — Pancreator willing! — and there is no telling how large the Empire will grow by the time you receive the reigns of power, but a thorough understanding of history, both past and present, will give you the necessary basis for future diplomacy. Who is to

say how long the Vuldrok Star-Nation will remain fragmented? Will it become necessary to ordain the Hazat's desire for a crusade against the Kurgan Caliph? And what of the Vau? There are secrets here vital to your rule, and I can only pray that more shall be revealed before your time has come.

While the Symbiots are kept at bay for now, we know not where that conflict shall lead us. We can but pray for a cure to their terrible disease. If those who have suffered conversion cannot be reclaimed, we can perhaps hope for a day when no more new victims will succumb to their flesh-warping tortures.

Beyond all these known (if mysterious) threats there lurk still more, only hinted at as yet. Intelligence points to powers that remain hidden. While I doubt these are as dramatic as many of my agents believe — some whisper that the Ukari gods are indeed returning! — you must nonetheless be on your guard, lest some new threat catch us all unawares and finally snuff out the stars that you would one day rule.



Kurgan Spies

[Note: Pray, My Lord, excuse the partisan tone of this report; its author is a highly decorated hero of the Kurgan Crusade, with strong opinions upon the subject. Be that as it may, he is nonetheless the Empire's foremost authority on the Kurga problem.]

As one who has spent his life on the frontlines of the Crusade, I can declare beyond doubt that the so-called Caliphate of Kurga is surely the greatest threat to the Phoenix throne that exists within human space. This is no rash declaration: the Vau, even if they were responsible for the demise of the Prophet, never aggressed upon human territory; the Symbiots have been held at bay by our resolute faith and the grace of the Pancreator; and if we have scattered bands of Vuldrok pirates mounting regular incursions into our jumproutes, then surely that is the failing of the Royal House which shares their border. My own house has held the line against the Kurgan infidels — with only minimal support from the rest of the Empire, may I add— since the time of Vladimir.

History

The facts I shall present clearly demonstrate that the nation of Kurga is entirely populated by deluded fanatics bent on conquering the Known Worlds and enslaving its good folk in the name of their perversely false theocracy. Those few captives we have managed to break under questioning assert that the Prophet Zebulon founded their religion when he visited their worlds in his travels, and that he personally created the office of the Caliph to maintain the "purity" of their "faith." So tenaciously do they cling to these delusions that, even after my house secured the world which we know as "Kurga" (and which they call "Hira") for the Empire, droves of unarmed noncombatants continue to pour through the jumpgate claiming they have a divine right to pursue some obscure pilgrimage. Though many of these "pilgrims" arrive in large groups with armed escorts and attempt to negotiate some manner of peaceful passage with our forces, many more — women, children and the elderly — come in small private ships, poorly equipped and maintained, and express dumbfounded shock to find that they are considered enemies intruding upon hostile territory.

Those that achieve planetfall do so on the northern continent, the last stronghold of the Caliphate on that world. Once landed, they tour the continent, visiting sites they consider holy; our spies have observed that this is primarily a commercial venture, as the economy of every city and village is geared towards the selling of cheap trinkets which are revered as holy relics. If there is any greater significance to this tour, our spies risk revealing themselves by asking

what it is. The only insurgent of ours to succeed in joining a group of pilgrims and traveling beyond the Hiran gate subsequently dropped out of communication for a year before finally sending word back that he had converted to the Kurgan religion and declared his loyalty to the Caliph. He claimed that he made this choice of his own free will, without coercion, brainwashing or any form of occult mind control; while this statement should naturally be discounted, as I can personally vouch for the fierce loyalty and unyielding willpower of this agent, let it underscore the terrifying personal power and psychological influence that this Caliph wields.

Observations

What little intelligence we have been able to gather regarding the worlds beyond Hira's jumpgate indicates that the Caliph's political control is not as complete as my previous statement might suggest. Adjacent to Hira is legendary Khayyam, an ancient world whose history up to the Fall is not entirely unknown to us. All Kurgans believe that Khayyam was the birthplace of Saint Horace, and I am told that some of our own scholars have evidence that may tentatively support this. A recent wave of refugees from this planet informs us that much of the population has renounced its allegiance to the Caliphate, and may be receptive to an alliance with our forces. Khayyam has by tradition been strongly isolationist, however, so any overtures in this direction must be cloaked in caution. Also, there is talk of another planet nearby that has never fully accepted the Caliph's authority because many of its people favor their own pretender to that office. At present we have no idea just how many worlds are encompassed by the Caliphate, but news like this is certainly encouraging to our cause.

Meanwhile, the treachery of those Kurgans who have penetrated our borders defies comparison. A sect of assassins known as the "Sihr" has made many attempts upon my own life and the lives of my officers. They have sown lies and even planted evidence suggesting that my forces gain our victories through traffic with demons. (I have been given to believe that demonolatry is a common folk practice throughout Kurga, albeit cloaked in hypocritical euphemism.) Agents of the Sihr are highly trained, extremely well equipped and fanatically motivated, being only too glad to sacrifice their lives in the service of the Caliphate. On Kurga it is said that they can kill a strong man with a mere paper-cut, or destroy his soul in an instant with a few whispered words. Experts of obfuscation and infiltration, they have greater access to our culture than we have to theirs — for what have we to hide from the universe at large? — so we cannot

even begin to speculate just how many Sihr insurgents might currently be roaming free throughout the Empire.

Current Schemes

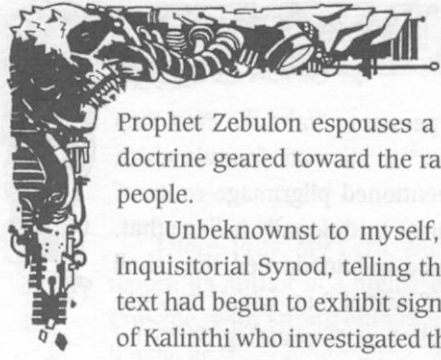
As M'Lord is well aware, I was recently called upon to help translate portions of a letter which I was told had been delivered to the Emperor's office through certain suspect channels. This letter was addressed directly to the person of the Phoenix Emperor and purported to have been written by the hand of the Caliph himself. Though written in stiff, imperfectly formal Urthish, the text contained a number of terms and brief passages employing the Kurgan vocabulary and idiomatic phrases. The author expresses a desire for peace between the Empire and the Caliphate, claiming that an alliance of the two greatest powers in human space is the only way to hold back the darkness that is causing the suns to fade.

While this sentiment even warms and softens a heart as cold and hard as mine, and uplifts a soul as burdened with worry and woe as my own, the true motive of the author becomes shamefacedly apparent in the letter's final paragraph. After extolling the virtues of his own culture and claiming that the Caliphate has a vast store of vaguely hinted-at spiritual treasures to share with our people, the Caliph (if indeed it is he) invites Emperor Alexius to see with his own eyes the "true splendor of the Kurgan faith." He requests

that the Emperor join him in person to "take the First Step upon the Path of Righteousness," an idiomatic formula which I take to refer to the aforementioned pilgrimage route of northern Hira. (Pilgrims of Kurga traditionally believe that, if they follow this route unarmed and unadorned, they shall be shown a true vision of the Celestial Sun, which they heretically call the "Mongke Yildiz" or Everlasting Star.) By brazenly inviting an enemy ruler to travel unprotected into hostile territory, the author reveals himself as either a deluded madman devoid of the merest notion of reality, or else the stupidest person who ever lived. Or both. The Caliph is no fool, surely, and hence I find reason to doubt that he is the real author of this missive.

The perfidy does not end here, however. Inset within the letter is a long passage of dense text printed in Urthish characters. I consulted expert linguists from the Church who declared it to be written in a highly technical Latinate derivative used in legal and business documentation during the Second Republic. As these priests were unable to clearly translate its meaning, I turned then to Guild Reeve, knowing them to be the most knowledgeable historians of Republican jurisprudence. (I also briefly considered engaging scholars from House al-Malik before being reminded that their line probably originated in the same ancient Holy Terran region as Kurga.) The Reeves claimed that the text was an apocryphal version of the Omega Gospels in which the





Prophet Zebulon espouses a debased parody of Orthodox doctrine geared toward the racial superiority of the Kurgan people.

Unbeknownst to myself, the guild also contacted the Inquisitorial Synod, telling them that the translator of this text had begun to exhibit signs of possession. A deputation of Kalinithi who investigated the case concluded that the text contained some form of thaumaturgic glamour designed to corrupt all who read it. They recommended that the text be deleted from the letter and all data related to its translation purged from the guild's think machines. Guild Reeve immediately complied. The translator himself did not survive his exorcism.

While I do not think it beneath any Kurgan to employ foul Antinomy in this fashion, I must inform My Lord of another side to this case. My own spies, placed within Guild Reeve back during the Emperor Wars for certain reasons, tell me that the now-irretrievable text was, in fact, a relatively mundane Republican statement of copyright terms. (If you will recall history, "copyright" referred to a set of laws during the Second Republic which were devised to enable the godless corporate tyrants to claim ownership of ideas, images and other intangible lore as "conceptual property," and hence illegal to use in any medium without their authorization.) This statement grants to the Kurga Nationalist Party, as represented by Sata Natura (a disreputable actress who propped herself up as Queen of Kurga during the Fall), the full rights to any depiction of a temporal or spiritual ruler (such as a king, emperor, archpriest or prophet) whose primary emblem of office is a mythical or semi-mythical bird or other flying creature (such as an eagle, peacock, great galactic rhodanberi or even — take note, M'Lord — a phoenix!) in any media. Certain antique non-human figures like the Etyri pantheon or the extinct Ungavoroxian Zumotch were specifically excluded, although this qualification appears to be a later addition. Nevertheless, it seems that the letter-writer's intent in presenting this document is to claim some twisted kind of "intellectual ownership" of the Phoenix Throne itself!

I must admit that I was initially perplexed by all this. Since this information came into my possession I have been harassed without good cause by the Inquisition and the Kalinithi. I now suspect that Guild Reeve deliberately withheld the true nature of the legal statement from the Empire, in order to — as the Scravers say — "hedge their bets" in the event that the Caliphate succeeds in overrunning the Empire. They duped the Church into destroying the evidence and silencing the translator (who was perhaps made to simulate a state of demonic possession through drugs and/or psychic attacks) in a manner which would not arouse suspicion. And now they seek to silence me, or else the demon-hunters have realized their mistake and somehow think that

I was involved. There is clearly treason against the throne here, but I shall not recommend action in a situation that falls beyond the scope of this report.

Veracity Warning!

[On this point it must be noted that our author seems to have fallen prey to a hoax entirely unrelated to the Kurga problem. That ignorant barbarians like the Kurgans would have any knowledge of Republican law (which they apparently resisted throughout the span of the Second Republic) is just as ridiculous as the notion that the Reeves would risk charges of treason to protect some arcane legal code that no longer holds universality (no matter how much they might wish it to!). Compounding this absurdity by introducing the name of a second-rate entertainer renowned for her decadent ways, the true authors may have betrayed their real motives and affiliation — this is clearly an intricate piece of subterfuge that could only have originated in the twisted minds of Mercurian pranksters. Its intent was clearly to disrupt the smooth interaction of nobility, Church and League upon which our society depends.]

Codes

It should be mentioned in passing that we may know the source of the Caliphate's proprietary interest in bird emblems. Infiltrators on Hira relate that Kurgans are fond of a story in which the first Caliph (either their false Zebulon or his immediate successor) hunts down and kills the last of a species of gigantic bird called a "rukh" or roc — possibly a relative of our own urroc. The wings and tail of this bird can be seen framing a stylized jumpgate on the standard seal of the Caliphate. Some tales hint that the skull of this roc was brought to Hira by the aforementioned Sata Natura to be used as a barbaric rallying-totem for the Kurgan Nationalists during the Fall. If we could seize this primitive fetish the Caliphate would be substantially demoralized, but my agents have yet to ascertain its whereabouts.

The speech of the Kurgans may be recognized by its jabbering rhythms and guttural intonations; their written script, however, looks refined and elegant, a flowing cursive squiggle. It seems to bear little or no direct relation to our solid Urthish alphabet, and is extremely difficult for outsiders to learn to read fluently. The various calligraphic styles used throughout Kurga compound this difficulty by deforming the words and letters with gaudy ornamentation and pictographic flourishes. As a result, Kurgan writing can disguise itself in such a way as to go virtually unnoticed except by natives reared to recognize it. Knotted cords, kinked wires, hemline stitching and even what seem to be aimlessly scrawled doodles in the margins of written pages could all easily contain hidden Kurgan script. Our agents would require extensive education in order to identify secret messages concealed in this manner.



Known Spies

For years our primary source of information concerning the Caliphate was an ambassador named Ali ben-Havizz, who was presented to my house during the final decade of the Emperor Wars, when the jumpgate at Hira reactivated and initiated the present phase of the Kurga Conflict. He is truly a wretched specimen, a cringing spineless simpering coward with only a minimum of diplomatic training. Before long it became clear to us that ben-Havizz held no status of any import whatsoever in his native court, as all our entreaties for truce that he relayed to his leaders received only glib flippant replies that contained no meaningful response to our proposals. While he seemed to speak honestly to us about his homelands and culture, we soon ascertained that he was not very well-traveled, only having visited Hira and his native planet of Khayyam. His knowledge of Kurgan politics was limited to the local affairs of those two worlds, and precious little even of that. (Indeed, he seemed as genuinely surprised as we to learn of the revolt of Khayyam.) He has no understanding of military affairs or technology, and is incapable of conveying any strategically useful information at all.

Nevertheless, we know that Ali ben-Havizz has been including, in his long boring letters home to a family of academics that seem to have forgotten him, reports written between the lines in invisible ink. As we have restricted his access to important matters and personages, the only information he has to send concerns the frivolous escapades of lesser courtiers with no real knowledge of the details of the Crusade. For a while we fed him tidbits of misinformation so as to mislead our enemies, but since no infidel fish ever took the bait, we gather that even these carefully concealed reports went unread by his superiors.

Once the full extent of his uselessness was apparent, it was decided that deep telepathic interrogation could be conducted upon him without repercussion. (Whatever his other failings, Ali ben-Havizz possesses some theurgic — or rather, thaumaturgic — ability, and was at some point trained against mental intrusions.) Our dervishes plumbed the depths of his weak heretical soul, and found little that we did not already know. When probed for the meaning of “the First Step upon the Path of Righteousness,” Ali’s mind yielded images of the northern Hiran pilgrimage, with particular emphasis on some small island where stood an ancient crumbling observatory. Through the main telescope could be seen a tiny distant nebula (a common feature of most skies, which Republican scientists claimed to be nothing more than interstellar gas and dust, and which superstitious peasants believe to be the breath of demons that lurk in the outer dark) somehow important to the Kurgan national identity. Ben-Havizz himself does not fully understand

the cultural significance of this image, and this is a source of great shame to him. Apparently he planned to embark on an interstellar quest to remedy this, but was interrupted by his diplomatic assignment.

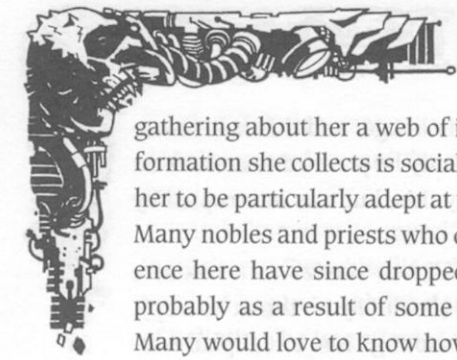
Having fully exhausted Ali ben-Havizz as a resource and concluding that he posed absolutely no threat as a spy, we told him that we were “promoting” him to Caliphal Ambassador to the Phoenix Court, and turned him over to the Imperial Eye. Whether they wish to continue his diplomatic charade — or simply let their own psychics lay his brain bare — is of no consequence to us. We simply tire of even the minimal cost required to feed and house him.

In stark contrast to that pathetic specimen, there stands the stunning courtesan many nobles and notables have come to know by the name Zulaykha Turakina. She presented herself to the Phoenix Court several years ago, telling everyone that she had been recently exiled from the court of the Caliph for some social indiscretion. While she has never been allowed closer to the person of the Emperor than a brief and distant formal introduction, she has succeeded in insinuating herself into many of the highest social circles on Byzantium Secundus and other major worlds. It must be noted that she is occasionally found in the company of Salandra Decados, and rumors have circulated hinting of a dalliance between these two. Anyone who has ever been in her presence cannot help but be struck by Zulaykha’s exquisite beauty, vivacious charm, refined style and a certain raw animal sensuality that inspires outbursts of lust or jealousy. Or both.

Lady Turakina has provided us with a wealth of data about Kurgan culture in general, while remaining reticent with regard to certain matters. She affects to despise the current Caliph who exiled her and freely discusses the politics of his court, although, in truth, her words amount to nothing more than vindictive gossip with little or no political value. She knows nothing of military concerns, but will casually declare, if asked, that the fall of the Caliphate to the might of the Phoenix Empire is inevitable. (Depending upon who comprises her audience, the phrase “the might of the Phoenix Empire” may be replaced with “the might of House Hazat.”) When questioned about the exact size of the Kurga Caliphate, Zulaykha waxes vague, saying that the Kurgan worlds are “as numerous as grains of sand in the desert.” She speaks derisively of the Hiran pilgrimage but it is unclear whether she has actually even visited that planet; if asked about “the First Step upon the Path of Righteousness,” she will fall silent, pleading that the subject is too intensely personal to discuss.

Regardless of Zulaykha’s personal feelings toward the present Caliph, it is clear that she is still as fanatically devoted to her birth-nation as any other Kurgan. In her travels throughout the Empire she has been making contacts and





gathering about her a web of informants. (Although the information she collects is social rather than military, I believe her to be particularly adept at that side of the political game. Many nobles and priests who originally challenged her presence here have since dropped their suits without a word, probably as a result of some masterfully played extortion. Many would love to know how she evaded the wrath of the Church when, after agreeing to be baptized as an Orthodox convert, she refused to renounce the Kurgan faith, claiming to find no contradiction between the "most important parts" of the two creeds.) So far, if she has somehow conveyed any of the information she has gathered back to the Caliph, we cannot determine what it was or by what means it was transmitted.

Nevertheless, Zulaykha Turakina is, in all likelihood, a very dangerous person, if not to the throne directly, then certainly to some of the Empire's most prominent citizens. Reports have reached my ears that place her in or near the Pandemonium system at the same time that several attempts were made upon the life of my kinsman Don Marchenko Catilla Arronto Justus. Marital strife frequently erupts in her vicinity, and some of our finest young warriors have been maimed or killed while dueling over her favor. Despite her elegant appearance and refined demeanor, within her bosom lurks the soul of some wild untamed beast, one that must be kept on a very tight leash. Toward this end, I arranged to have myself introduced to Zulaykha, engaged her in various dalliances and have contrived to appear as her consort with increasing frequency. As I become more acquainted with her vulnerabilities, I feel confident that, armed with my considerable experience in the arts of courtly love, my discipline as a soldier, my faith in the Pancreator and the innate honor which has been bred into my line for generations, I shall ultimately tame this savage beast.

Meanwhile, the Kurgans are learning more about us than we are about them. Intermingling of native populations and occupation forces on Hira might account for some of this, but the Caliphate has shown awareness of tactical, political and social situations within the Empire, beyond anything that can be gleaned from a drunken trooper's boast and blather. I cannot help but admit the failing of my house in allowing sensitive information to leak through our worlds into the waiting ears of the infidels. Fortunately we have found the leak. Ever since the jumproute from Vera Cruz reopened and contact was resumed with Andalus, our old fief on Hira, there has been a steady flow of trade in local artifacts. Relics of the Hazat heroes who fought to establish Andalus, curious high-tech devices of Shelit manufacture and cheap silly trinkets taken from Kurgan pilgrims, not to mention exotic herbs, spices, livestock and gaudy textiles, all helped the economy of Vera Cruz to flourish. Logic suggested that information could be delivered back along the

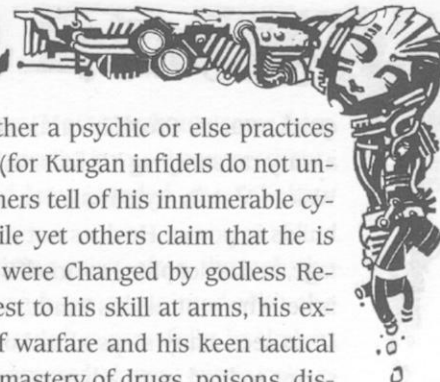
same channels of trade.

Merchants who dealt in goods from Hira were targeted; agents visited their shops to disseminate misinformation — bragging to the serving-wenchs, griping about officers and assignments, "accidentally" leaving scraps of orders and reports behind when currency was exchanged, and the like. Extreme care was taken to track which bit of misinformation was left with which merchant. As each "package" of false data primarily concerned large-scale troop movements that demanded a definitive response from the enemy forces, corresponding changes in the strategic placements of the infidels were noted. (At this point I must commend those agents — whose identities must remain protected — for maintaining the precision of this delicate operation while playing the part of slovenly ill-disciplined louts with apparent relish and gusto. I should also honor the memory of those valiant troops who had to be sacrificed to keep the Kurgans from suspecting that they were being misinformed.)

By tracing the flow of false data in this wise, we were able to determine that the spy we sought was a man by the name of Joao Alves, a dealer in relics and antiquities from Sutek who relocated to Vera Cruz so as to prosper from the newly accessible Kurgan sources. Besides traitorously handing over vital information to the Caliphate, Alves also facilitated the covert entry of Kurgan spies into the jumproute of the Empire. At first we shuddered to think of what leverage the distant barbarian ruler could have applied to cause this native son to risk so much in betraying his house and Emperor to outlanders. Investigations into his background on Sutek, however, yielded very little of substance, and now we begin to suspect that Joao Alves is in actuality a native Kurgan passing himself off as an Imperial citizen. At present he does not appear to suspect that we have discerned his true nature, and we allow him to stay in business while we control his access to sensitive information and monitor all business that passes through his shop. (Zulaykha Turakina has had some dealings with his operation through lesser intermediaries; we now watch all their transactions closely and carefully inspect all her shipments of perfume, cosmetics and clothing. Zulaykha has never met Alves in person and seems unaware that he is working for her people. Ali ben-Havizz was once seen to enter his shop a few years ago, but was instantly ejected and publicly berated as a "filthy infidel" by a common stock-clerk.)

As I write this, I have just been told of another Kurgan presently at large within our borders. A lieutenant of mine, who had taken leave to pursue a personal quest to Nowhere, returned with disturbing news of a face he recognized in the crowded marketplace of Criticorum. It was a notorious agent of the Sihr known to have plagued my own division and many others on the Kurgan front with trickery and sabotage. (I hold him personally responsible for the planting of





Antinomian evidence in my camp, and the travails I have had to endure subsequently.) Though he styled himself a servant of the Caliph and a protector of pilgrims, he seemed a lone autonomous operative who did not coordinate his efforts with the Kurgan military command. He acted as though the war were his personal affair, and, like the barbarian champions of old, often issued direct challenges to individual opponents. So flagrant was he in pursuit of this custom that his face is as familiar to my troops as his name: al-Badaz ibn Mu'taphaqir.

So notorious is this Mu'taphaqir that even the other Kurgans we captured could only whisper his name in fearful awe. He is a powerful theurge, some of them say, which

I take to mean that he is either a psychic or else practices their heretical thaumaturgy (for Kurgan infidels do not understand the difference). Others tell of his innumerable cybernetic enhancements, while yet others claim that he is descended from those who were Changed by godless Republican geneticists. All attest to his skill at arms, his expertise in driving engines of warfare and his keen tactical insight, and none doubt his mastery of drugs, poisons, disguises, stealth, burglary and all other aspects of the assassin's craft. Having heard that he is now in al-Malik space, I shudder to think of what he could become if he makes his way as far as the Symbiot front.

Vuldrok Infiltrators

My dear Mazarin, this is a highly sensitive report, meant for your eyes only. You asked me to report on Vuldrok intelligence gathering techniques, and I complied, wearing my usual guise. The dance of life has taught me to emulate my father's people at the drop of an eyelash, and I spent two years gathering this material before returning to civilized space, my mother's home, where, surrounded by literature, I might return to my life as a man of letters. How different from the oral proverbs and heroic epics of the Vuldrok nations! I can already sense a trend among the vulgar for the sort of neo-paganism the Vuldrok practice, a longing for swift swords and action to replace undue contemplation and aestheticism. This trend will soon, no doubt, find its way into the popular entertainment, while I, who grew up hearing Vuldrok tales from my father, shall retreat further into such lost topics as Second Republic philosophy and literary criticism. But enough of my ruminations; let me continue.

The Vuldrok Nations are far more sophisticated at information gathering than previously thought, and to label them "uncultured barbarians from beyond the borders," as some in the Hawkwood Rooks have, lessens the seriousness of their threat. None of the three "official" agents sent to the Vuldrok worlds returned, and only my non-official guise (a free trader) and my upbringing in the Gjarti faith prevented my being discovered.

There is a power struggle going on deep within Vuldrok space. If exploited carefully, it can benefit the Emperor and the Known Worlds. Greolf the Grim, Warlord of Frost, is contending with Warlord Wakan Mato ("Great Bear") of Wolf's Lament for the reunification of the Vuldrok worlds under a single warlord. The struggle is lining lesser leaders into opposing camps. Of the two, Greolf the Grim is clearly the more dangerous individual. Upon meeting me, along with other prominent traders, he said, "Hemmed in on Hargard/ by the

blades of the Hawkwyrd/ Come let us seek council/In your kinsmen's halls."

He questioned me much about Known Worlдер dealings on the borders. His chief feature is a deep, suspicious intelligence and a great hatred for all non-Vuldrok worlds. Wakan Mato is more balanced, but is heavily influenced by his advisor, Jarl Halga the Brave, who urges Vuldrok reunification by violent means. I only saw him from a distance, and my reports come from several men and women who serve under him as warriors. At the moment, Wolf's Lament has the upper hand in the alliances dividing Vuldrok space, but Wakan Mato has called for an alliance with Greolf the Grim in view of what he sees as Known Worlds influence suddenly spreading into Vuldrok space.

Both warlords knew that Questing Knights came to gather information on the political situation in Vuldrok space. "The scouts of the Hawk Kings soared o'er our worlds, brave Unferth followed them, from my father's halls," Greolf said, indicating that his spies were at work. He drank mead with a great number of merchants, but did not drain his cup, instead watching as we drained ours, listening to the wagging of our tongues. In this he shows wisdom, for "mead oft loosens a tongue men should keep still," as my father's proverb goes.

It might become necessary to stir up war between the two warlords to prevent a united front against any expansion on our Emperor's part, or otherwise covertly support Greolf until Wakan Mato's power is lessened. Greolf is not immune to calls for Vuldrok unity against what he sees as excursions from "Hawkwyrd" space. It may be that the matter will be decided with little outside influence. Greolf the Grim is calling his forces to a general moot. If the two warlords were compared to chess players, Greolf's style would be brilliant but erratic, suddenly capturing opponent's pieces with



quick attacks. Greolf is cautious and superstitious, but, like a wary cat studying his foes, will leap when the time is right. Wakan Mato's style is slower, more cautious, but gradually builds in power. He does not retreat once he has an advantage, and is not prone to Greolf's hot temper. "Wise and weary is he, who controls his words," my father would say. Wakan Mato sees many steps ahead of his opponents, and always seems to land in an advantageous position.

Even with the century-long balance of power played between Wolf's Lament and Frost, the Vuldrok have successfully been able to surprise Known World space, invade with impunity at strategic locations, and strike in unexpected places. How? Clearly the Vuldrok know more about us than we know about them.

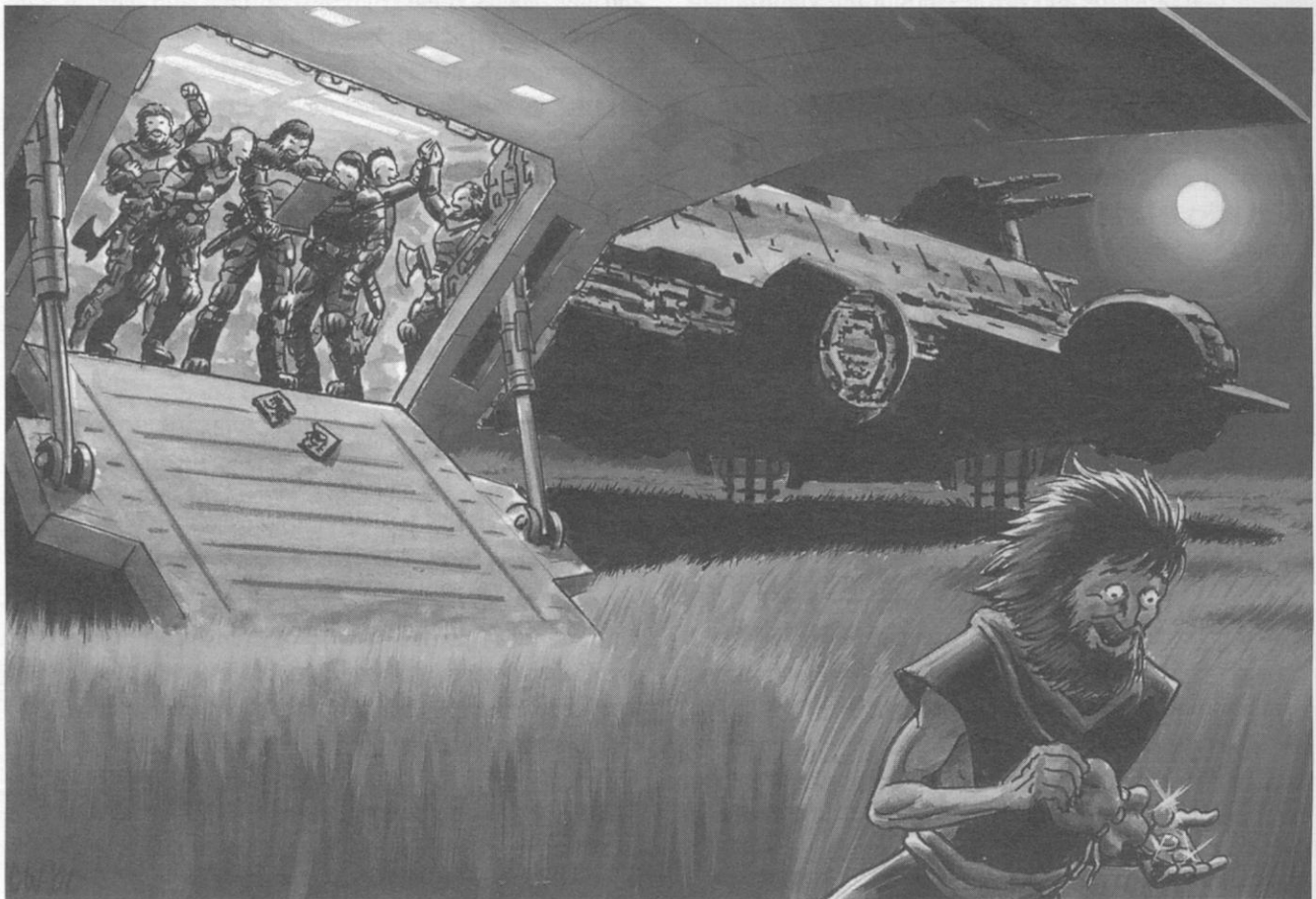
History

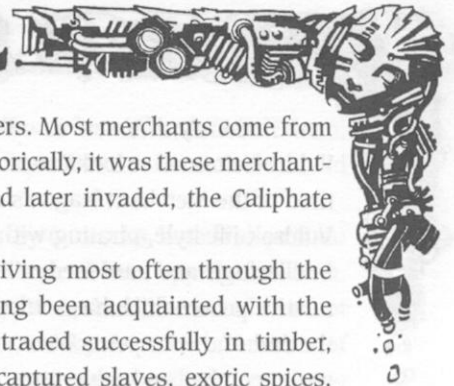
A long history of Vuldrok intelligence gathering will do us little service, but a brief overview will allow some understanding of Vuldrok feelings concerning the non-Vuldrok worlds. The ancestors of the Vuldrok turned back Admiral Morgan's Second Republic invasion fleet when these worlds declared their independence from the Second Republic, as recorded in Drenjar song and tales. The Vuldrok forebears were then, as they are today, composed of secret brotherhoods that looked askance at outside authority. I could not find many historical documents, but listened to many sagas

and tales.

The Rekgold Nation and Maghtaw Nation, combining wealthy merchants and science-priests, had the best monopoly on spying in the earlier days. The Rekgold merchants were the ones who traded with other worlds and returned with rich information. This was sold to various chiefs, and by Vladimir Alecto's time (as best as I can figure from their lore) the Vuldrok invasions, following the trade routes, controlled space as far as the Kurgan worlds, who united in throwing them off. This bit of information I gleaned from three Kurgan traders, men of strange heritage. According to these men of refinement and aesthetic temperament (an oasis in Vuldrok space), King Froljir the Ill-fated, the only king to unite all the Vuldrok Star Nations, swept his massive armada far into the Known Worlds while his daughter attempted to take Kurgan worlds. Only the resistance of our Emperor Vladimir Alecto defeated him. If not for the unifying tactics of Vladimir, much of the Known Worlds would be ruled by Vuldrok thanes. Their name for Vladimir is Vladisla the Tiger.

Ironically, it was only after King Froljir was slain that Vuldrok culture consolidated, and many of their customs underwent a renewal — or so I read in a book; "weighty were its words," as my father's friend Gunnar would say when pondering a written document. Battles with the Skey (who were later admitted as one of the Six Great Nations of





the Vuldrok Star-Nation), and later the Symbiots, kept most of the Vuldrok too preoccupied with war to turn their full attention again to our Known Worlds. Yet the Hawkwood worlds received repeated invasions from adventurous warlords, and at one point Vuldrok ships harried as far as al-Malik space. How? Where did the Vuldrok get the information to successfully slip by space monitoring platforms? Even disunited, the attacks by individual thanes and pirate captains kept our Known Worlds repeatedly on the defensive, thus keeping the Vuldrok worlds largely inviolate from retribution.

The last great Vuldrok invasion, lead by Redmark the Bald and launched from Hargard, occurred in 4992, and was defeated by Hawkwood and Imperial forces. The Rooks discovered that the Jakovians had fed Redmark the Bald information on Gwyneth's defenses (and yes, I have spoken with Decados agents in my younger days who boasted of such things). Clearly, the Decados, in the last desperate days of the Emperor Wars, saw the advantages of using the Vuldrok to harry Hawkwood space. For over a generation the Javokian Agency has been active on Hargard, hatching plots against the Hawkwoods and the Emperor. Hargard is not united, but falls under the rule of several powerful thanes, including Sigfaddir Firestorm of Ostmark, Eldrid the Wise of Jyandhom, and a pre-Vuldrok dynasty now confined to the southern continent of Vijayanagar, ruled by Queen Sura Ramakrishna.

Networks

An overview of the Vuldrok intelligence gathering services into various spy-networks and methods is necessary for understanding their capabilities. Breaking these down into broad categories, we find that merchants, renegade Known Worlders and Vuldrok priests lead the list. The War College of Kurmda's Might also deserves mention, as well as particular emphasis on the spy brotherhoods of Greolf the Grim and Wakan Mato. Finally, a word on the Ramakrishna intelligence services is necessary, for the Ramakrishna fief sits in Vuldrok space, an island of nobility in an ocean of thanes and warlords.

Merchants and Renegade Known Worlders

The best spies for the Vuldrok Star-Nations are their merchants, who often leave the Vuldrok core worlds to trade with the independent worlds, the Caliphate, or our Known Worlds. Since knowledge possesses value, they often sell their information on various planets to powerful warlords, or agree to aid them for a share in their plunder. A merchant and a pirate captain are often indistinguishable; since pirating is an honored profession in Vuldrok culture, it does not possess the odious stain the shipment of illegal or stolen

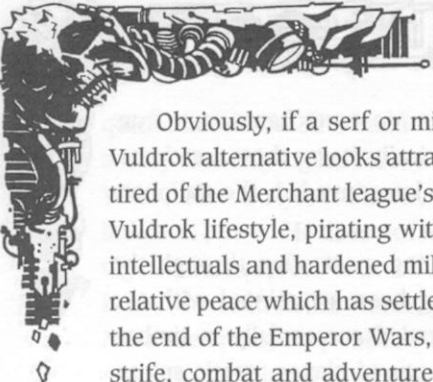
goods does to Known Worlders. Most merchants come from the Rekgold Nation, and historically, it was these merchant-pirates who first traded, and later invaded, the Caliphate worlds in Kurgan space.

Vuldrok merchants, arriving most often through the Hargard jumpgate, have long been acquainted with the Known Worlds. They have traded successfully in timber, metals, ores, animal pelts, captured slaves, exotic spices, foodstuffs, and even rare gems. Often, they gather information by asking questions at visited locations, and through bribery. As recently as three years ago, Imperial Eye agents found Eldgrim the Golden, a merchant from Hargard, buying drinks for off-duty military personnel near the Novgorod Shipyards on Byzantium Secundus. If these Vuldrok merchants have a hard time extracting information, they will pay gold for it. "Don't show them your back, lest they plunge a blade into it," as the old Vuldrok proverb has it. It means "don't show them your weak side."

Peasants and Leminkainen freemen have sold information in the past. Such people are given safe-conduct passes in the form of rune tattoos or runes carved into their homes. The Vuldrok largely honor this practice, although people who boast too freely about this favor are apt to run into retribution from neighbors who have had houses and lands plundered instead. The Vuldrok have also allied with nobles who see fit to join with them, sometimes for plunder, sometimes for revenge against a rival who has slighted them.

Perhaps the weakest link in the entire Known Worlds' defenses is the threat the Vuldrok represent by their very example: They are freemen, beholden to no royalty, who live by their wits and luck. This has a strong appeal to many serfs. Indeed, many escaped serfs, mistreated by our nobility, have joined their ranks, passing on valuable information. Fear of such treachery caused the Hawkwoods to treat their subjects well. Still, the number of escaped serfs, prisoners, Known Worlds pirates, and even more disturbingly, AWOL military personnel, who have joined the Vuldrok is not inconsiderable. I met some of the latter on Raven, now living with Vuldrok husbands and wives. They often rise to positions of power, and are the deadliest enemies of the Known Worlds, for they lead Vuldrok forces into the weak points of the very safety perimeters they use to man. From these people, the Vuldrok have obtained detailed maps of the Known Worlds. It is said that the Maghtaw still possess ancient Second Republic holomaps of numerous worlds, from which they glean the location of jumpgates to Kurgan and Known Worlds space and beyond. I have not seen any of these, but two former Hawkwood captains, Captain Jack Hallow and Captain Therresa Sung, have given me verbal descriptions. Incidentally, both these captains fought well in the Emperor Wars but joined the Vuldrok out of the boredom that peace brings to hardened military types.






Obviously, if a serf or military man is mistreated, the Vuldrok alternative looks attractive. Some League members, tired of the Merchant league's regulations, have chosen the Vuldrok lifestyle, pirating with impunity. Even over-weary intellectuals and hardened military captains, bored with the relative peace which has settled on the Known Worlds since the end of the Emperor Wars, have gone off to join a life of strife, combat and adventure. I counted many old Known World soldiers on Hargard serving various thanes. As for the serfs, "one's home is best, though a hut it may be, there the owner is master and lord of his domain," as the proverb has it — give a person a place that is his, and not owned by a lord, and they will fight to defend it.

Priests

The Vuldrok priests and priestesses of various nations, especially the vitki, or rune-casters, are able to gather information by mysterious theurgic means. Many Erdgheist priests have been able to decipher an enemy's plan of battle, but I could not discern their methods, for I have never encountered anything like it. Certain Zetol priests can speak with dead enemy soldiers, utilizing a sort of spell, and question them about enemy strength and weaknesses. This I witnessed twice, but again, I cannot explain it, save to say it was a long ritual. Known World psychics and Eskatonic priests have offered some defense from these arcane tactics in the past, but their true capabilities remain uncharted. The Vuldrok peoples refer to their priests and priestesses with awe. Clearly, this matter needs additional study. I do not know how often they are used in war; my belief is not terribly often, for often the information a seer gives is obscure, and not understood until after the event has taken place.

The War-College of Kurmda's Might



The closest thing to a military academy in Vuldrok space is the War College of Kurmda's Might, on the continent of Myrkfell on Fingisvold. According to legend, it was established by Ufi and Hafdan, the sons of King Froljir, as a place of Vuldrok unification and training in warfare. It survived the downfall of King Froljir and his sons, and is still looked upon as an essential place of training warlords and their thanes. Espionage is also taught here, along with tactics. Kurmda's Might produced some excellent spies, training them to physically and psychologically fit unnoticed into an enemy's camp. Some graduates are sent in secret to the Kurgan Worlds, and some to the Known Worlds. The information gathered is delivered back to Kurmda's Might, or to the student's thane. I visited the small town near the War College and bought drinks for students. This is the most impressive intelligence I gathered about the Vuldrok, for my father and his friends rarely spoke of Kurmda's Might. Spy-

ing to the Vuldrok is an end in itself, and highly esteemed.

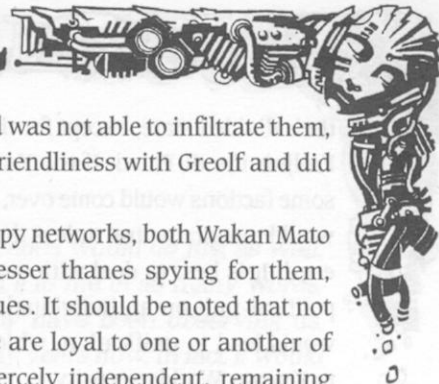
Kurmda's Might is so valuable to the entire Vuldrok Star-Nation that it is declared off-limits in times of war, as students from all Vuldrok space, serving numerous thanes and chieftains, attend it. Financially, all the Nation's support it. Along with the Great Althing on Raven, it stands as a monument to the long-cherished idea of Vuldrok unity. The map collection here is said to be unrivaled in human space, although this is surely an exaggeration. As a side note, geography and ecology are studied seriously here, and cartography, combined with mathematics, is highly praised. These studies have paid off. During the Emperor Wars, Vuldrok attacking from Hargard knew to break the water reservoirs on Leminkainen during the hot, dry summer of 4887, thus depriving the defending troops of a secure water supply. This I had from the lips of Hymir Half-Helm, a teacher there, recounting his war adventures.

Each warlord and thane has his own spies and information-gathering secrets. Indeed, the fierce competition of so many chieftains has produced spies of great quality and imaginative skill. Clans often exchange information, as do the six Vuldrok nations. The Lakol have a highly efficient spying service; their young warriors often become scouts and gain social status by bringing back needed knowledge on enemies. The Zetol and Drenjar also attach great importance to accurate information, although the Zetol, similar to the al-Malik, often hide information in plain sight by use of a coded tongue.

The Skey, the most mysterious of the Vuldrok peoples and the hardest to obtain information on, seem to rely on clan shamans. I hear that they talk with mysterious powers, and I found myself shunning them, for fear of demonic influence. I think many of their customs are strange and their gods odd, and I took an instant dislike to the Skey. Many other Vuldrok gave them space; they are both a people within the broad Vuldrok nation and apart from it.

The Maghtaw, the most technically proficient nation, rely on the aid of "machine spirits" to gather information, although they have impenetrable codes they use for passing it on. I suspect these so-called spirits are but ancient Republican sentient think machines capable of existing across vast networks, and thus give the impression of bodiless spirits — but then, I cannot say this for sure.

The Vuldrok are a highly literate people, and take delight in creating clan, family, friend and secret brotherhood codes, all of which leads to considerable bewilderment for outsiders. Deciphering these takes a mastery of linguistics, mathematics, codes, and a degree of cultural training. Generally, the poets and bards that accompany all Vuldrok raiding parties probably hold the best information on the locations and strengths of the defenders: they have great memories and can speak clearly or hide their information in sym-



bols used in song. Their poetry is infectious and direct, only their proverbs seem to have a reflective quality. While I no longer consider their creative skills below ours, it is on a different level of taste, and I found myself missing our Church theologians and philosophers.

Warlord Greolf the Grim

Greolf came to his position as Warlord of Frost after slaying his brother Raynor the Red in battle. Greolf centralized his power by increased taxation and by spreading fears of a Known Worlds invasion, causing many of the lesser thanes close to Hawkwood space to cement alliances with him. He already possesses the seeds of a more mature government apparatus than many Vuldrok political entities, and has a spy service named the *Blodearn*, lead by Thorson Three Eyes. The *Blodearn*, many of them trained at Kurmda's Might, have begun a systematic gathering of all knowledge on the Known Worlds and Greolf's rival, Wakan Mato.

I have seen their reports, which are amazingly sophisticated, listing such things as the psychological history of our Emperor's brother. The *Blodearn* spread propaganda, keep an eye on Greolf's allies, and study the methodologies of their warlord's rivals. They knew about the Questing Knights before any arrived, and they mistrust Known Worlds merchants. Posing as one from Hargard, I gained some of their trust, and my familiarity with the Known Worlds allowed me into the first level of what seems to be a seven-level system, with Greolf on top. The *Blodearn* is a secret society, but one of its signs is a three-eyed eagle gripping a man in its talons.

Warlord Wakan Mato (Great Bear)

Wakan Mato's spies were created, at Halga the Brave's urging, to counteract Greolf the Grim's *Blodearn*. He reluctantly agreed to this, as he did the establishment of a defense tax to augment his forces against any attack from Greolf or the Known Worlds. Named the *Wakinyan Cetan*, or the Thunder Hawk, this service, lead by Chief Sunkmanitou and Halga the Brave, combines Drenjar and Lakol spying techniques. This, also, is a secret brotherhood, with its own oaths, signs and meeting places. The Soaring Hawk, painted on a rock, is their most obvious sign, but they tend to use natural landscape posts for meeting places. For example, they will meet under an old pine that has twice been struck by lightning, with the appropriate runes carved on rocks leading to the location. The *Wakinyan Cetan* is more concerned with Vuldrok space, but a few of their spies have entered the Known Worlds. The appearance of the Lakol Hehaka recently on Ravenna is a sign that they are studying the frontier and attempting to guess the Emperor's intentions, as well as those of House Hawkwood. I learned most about

them from their enemies, and was not able to infiltrate them, as they rightly guessed my friendliness with Greolf and did not fully trust me.

In addition to their own spy networks, both Wakan Mato and Greolf the Grim have lesser thanes spying for them, using their own spy techniques. It should be noted that not all factions in Vuldrok space are loyal to one or another of these warlords; some are fiercely independent, remaining neutral, while some are not friendly to either faction, and are not even Vuldrok at all.

Ramakrishna Spies

The Hargard Ramakrishna noble family is descended from the ancient Ramakrishna rulers of Shaprut. They once ruled all of Hargard, but repeated Vuldrok invasions pushed them into the southern island continent of Vijayanagar. The current queen, Sura Ramakrishna, fears that any Hawkwood victory might bring in the Universal Church, which would curtail their native Tertha religion. The Ramakrishna spy agency, Vimanas, is run more like a traditional Known World one, except that various yogic and contortionist skills are learned, thus giving their agents extreme flexibility — if you can forgive my pun. They are experts at hiding and disguise, and they most resemble the Mutasih in outlook and techniques. The Vimanas have for centuries gathered intelligence on the Hargard Vuldrok. Traditionally, Vijayanagar, for its own defense, has allied with weaker thanes against greater ones, keeping a precarious balance of power on Hargard.

Observations

There are very recent signs that the two warlords might be coming to some accord. False information presented to the Vuldrok from Hargard by the Decados mentions a massive Imperial/Hawkwood invasion of Vuldrok space scheduled to begin within a year. Incidentally, Decados spies are not very careful on Vuldrok space; they seem to be more visible and arrogant. That the Emperor and the Hawkwoods have truly been fortifying the borders and sending people into Vuldrok space lends credence to these rumors. The Althing of the Vuldrok Nation is calling for unity, and Greolf, suspicious by nature, believes the report. Wakan Mato is more cautious, but cannot discount the recent defensive build up in Hawkwood space. An independent thane, Hulda the Spear-Maid, has called for a confederation with Wakan Mato as supreme Vuldrok thane, with Greolf the Grim as his second-in-command and his successor. Amazingly, Greolf is studying the matter with his thanes. There is a considerable war cry to unite and invade the Known Worlds before it is too late. Our Emperor gains advantage from their disunity.

The main thing we have working for us is the traditional Vuldrok distaste for centralized authority and their extreme value of individual freedom. This has always led to



their divided state, except for the brief interlude under King Froljnir the Ill-Fated. If the Known Worlds were to invade, some factions would come over, some would resist, and some would remain neutral unless they saw their freedoms threatened. It is best to deal with each Vuldrok nation, thane, or political-unit on an individual basis. Attacking all of them would lead to unification, which could only be detrimental to Known Worlds security.

Known Schemes

It is known that Greolf is extending his power onto Hargard, and that Sigfaddir Firestorm has allied with him with the intention of invading Hawkwood space. The schedule for this invasion has been pushed forward, to ensure that the Vuldrok attack first, before the imagined Imperial invasion. It is believed that Greolf may use a war with the Hawkwood to cement his rule and his position as rightful Warlord of the Vuldrok. A first strike would give him a great propaganda victory, but conversely, so would an Imperial/Hawkwood attack on Hargard.

Wakan Mato seems content to watch, but he is slowly drawing a lot of power to himself. It has not been lost on him that a weakening of Greolf's power in a war would strengthen his forces, and he could choose the moment to enter the war, saving Greolf or his forces and emerging as the Vuldrok unifier. Although this is not certain, speculation by some of his thanes is that he is planning to create war between Greolf and the Hawkwood. Knowing Greolf's suspicious nature, this would not be hard to instigate.

One known Vuldrok sign of impending attack is the image of Voki, which appears in places where the Vuldrok will soon land and plunder. Voki is a crude depiction of a Vuldrok warrior with an enlarged head, holding an energy battleaxe and driving a miniature spacecraft with booty and captured women hanging off of it. A slogan, often a slang joke in runes, accompanies these crude cartoons and is often found on a public building just hours before an attack. It loosely translates as "Plunderin's my Job," or "Eat my Battleaxe." The challenge is to send an artist down undetected who can draw Voki before the attackers arrive.

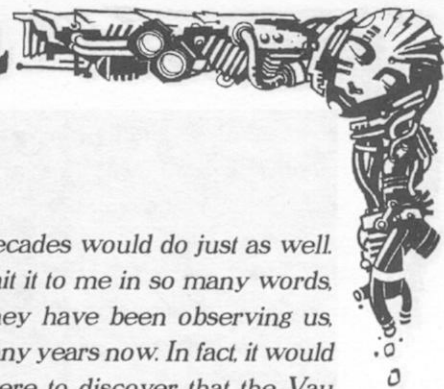
Anyone who spots a new Voki drawing should inform the authorities at once and head for cover, as the area is surely due to suffer a Vuldrok invasion. The image of Voki is old, going back to the Vuldrok's ancestral forefathers, the free-raiders of the Second Republic. Often depicted on starships, Voki is a sort of minor good-luck deity. He has a sister, Vikki, who is often similarly depicted, sometimes grabbing a sturdy male peasant under one arm along with other plunder.

A Noted Weakness

When the Vuldrok first settled on Leminkainen, they often aided their star-faring kinsmen in raids against their Hawkwood neighbors. After several generations, the Vuldrok seemed to "go native," and often would not ally with the Hargard raiding parties against the Hawkwood fiefs, with whom they had formed closer political, economic and family ties over several generations. On distant Antioch, a planet between the Vuldrok and Kurgan worlds, settled Vuldrok ultimately proved the best defense against their raiding kinsmen, becoming over the generations Antioch's best warriors and defenders, thanks largely to noble patronage. This I learned from Caliphate merchants. Clearly, many of the best fighters in the Hawkwood forces against the Vuldrok have been settled descendants of Vuldrok raiders. The imperial forces recruit heavily from areas of Vuldrok settlement. Often, a native of Vuldrok descent will warn the authorities of a planned Vuldrok attack. Sometimes, however, the natives of the frontier worlds lump all Vuldrok — settled or not — into one category, and the older Vuldrok settlements sometimes look to their star-faring kin as protectors against hostile neighbors.

It is hard, you see, to be brought up by a Vuldrok Drenjar father and a Hawkwood-educated, but nonetheless Gjartin, mother. There is little space between the two cultures for art and sonnets, angels and arias, or for men of refinement and culture like ourselves. All around I see only the light of twinkling cities and vanishing stars, and the coming wave of darkness crashing against the small lamps we huddle about, mouthing silently our childhood prayers in fear of the night

Vau Watchers



The Vau are without question the most enigmatic of the intelligent species humanity has encountered since it gained access to the stars millennia ago. They are also the one intelligent species to make humanity feel small and inconsequential, for their society is ancient and their technology advanced. Indeed, many of the greatest developments in human technology are in fact reverse-engineered copies of Vau technology acquired some time in the past. That the Vau present themselves and all their achievements as nothing compared to the glories of their Progenitors — whom we call the Anunnaki or Ur races — only compounds the inferiority complex humankind has in their presence.

Thus, the prospect that the Vau have long watched humanity and still do so fills most people with dread. What could they possibly want from us? What could they learn that they do not already know? Human arrogance rarely shows itself before the Vau. They are the one species that has always bested humankind in every field of endeavor. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the very thought of these aliens spying upon us is viewed in the most sinister light. Since humanity surely cannot teach them anything, can their intelligence gathering have any motives beyond conquest? Yet, if it is conquest they seek, why have they not embarked upon it? Why do they continue to watch from afar?

History

There are no simple answers to any of humankind's questions about the Vau. At present, what the Empire knows about them is limited and of dubious value. Much of it stems from the time of the groundbreaking work of the Diasporan diplomat Benjamin Verden. Verden was one of a small number of humans ever invited to step foot on a world within the Vau Hegemony. He was also one of the few humans to gain anything close to an understanding of these aliens and their ancient society and culture. While there is little doubt that Verden lacked a complete picture of the Vau, he came closer than anyone had ever done before — or since.

Consequently, the Empire regularly turns to Verden's notes and memoirs for hints about the actions and motivations of these aliens. It was Verden who first recognized that the Vau are natural intelligence gatherers — spies in everything but name. In his long lost *Reflections on the Vau* (a copy of which is in Imperial possession), he wrote:

The Vau take an extremely long view of things. To them, it would be foolish to do otherwise, for they see the consequences of every action almost as clearly as they do the actions themselves. They are a deliberative people, who never take weeks or months to make a

decision when years or decades would do just as well. Although they did not admit it to me in so many words, I cannot help but think they have been observing us, observing humanity, for many years now. In fact, it would hardly surprise me if I were to discover that the Vau have known of our existence since we first learned to operate the jumpgates and spread out among the stars.

Although Verden's words are doubtlessly melodramatic, there is clearly truth to them. The Justinian ambassador saw firsthand the slow pace with which Vau society moves. He recognized in them a thoughtfulness that might appear stagnant to human eyes but which revealed their willingness to put aside easy solutions and quick victories in exchange for a greater control over the unfolding of events. The Vau are not so much stagnant as they are obsessed with ensuring the best possible outcome for all their endeavors. To act quickly or without proper intelligence, even if it takes decades or centuries to acquire, is folly to them. Elsewhere, Verden goes on to say:

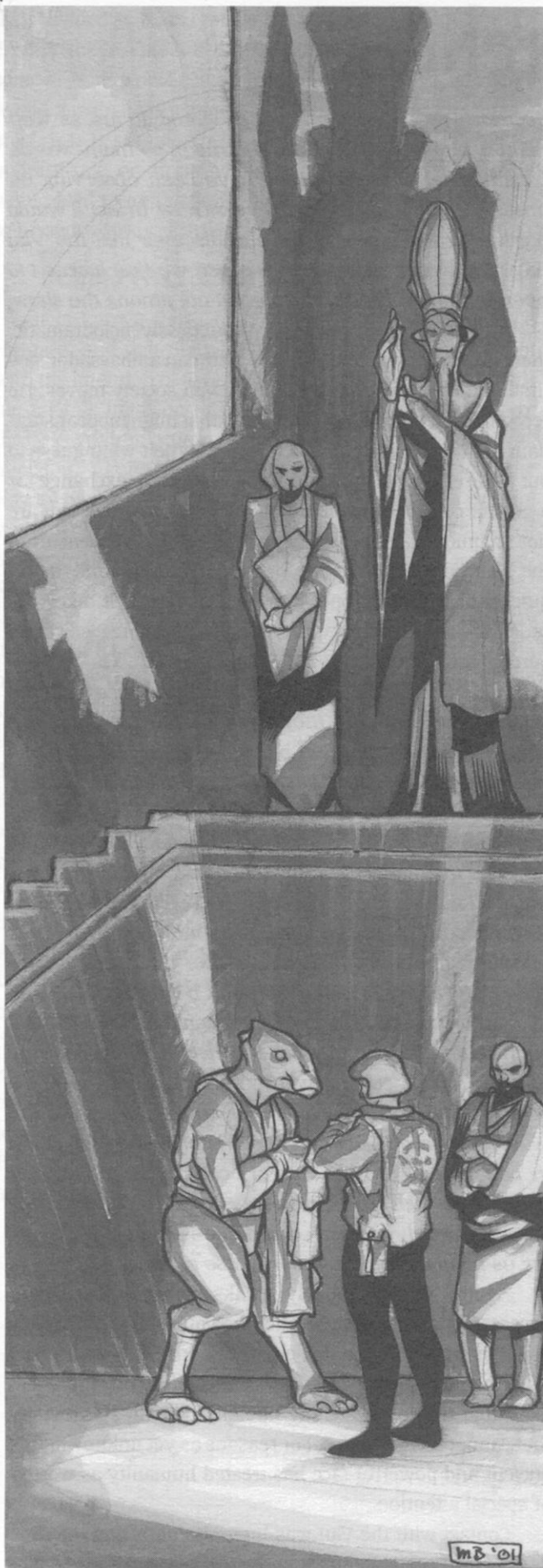
Although extremely well-informed about events beyond their Hegemony, they are not omniscient, and this seems to frighten them. I am not exaggerating when I say that the Vau see their own mortal limitations as cause for concern. Where a human would gather as much information as possible before making a decision and then act, after inevitably realizing that no amount of information will guarantee the outcome he seeks, a Vau would never accept that he has insufficient information. Instead, he will continue to gather and gather until he achieves something approximating certainty before acting.

Unfortunately, the universe seems to work against such an approach. I fully believe that the Vau's decision to open formal contact with humanity at this time is a rare example of these aliens' throwing caution to the wind. They are frightened of something and they seem to believe that the benefits of acting contrary to their nature outweigh all the usual worries and concerns they see. We clearly live in a momentous time, not merely for us but perhaps for the universe as a whole.

Again, Verden probably speaks more poetically than necessary, but his point is valid: the Vau have taken an unusual interest in humanity, one that transcends their racial caution and reserve. Thus, it should come as no surprise to learn that they are watching humankind with an intensity that cannot escape notice. For reasons as yet unknown, this ancient and powerful race has treated humanity as worthy of special attention.

Contact with the Vau was intermittent during the final days of the Second Republic and after the Divestiture. Never





again did these aliens allow a human being such access to their society and never again did they show such an obvious interest in human affairs. There is little question that the Vau remained intrigued by humankind. For from time to time, a Vau mandarin and his entourage would make inexplicable forays out of the Hegemony and into the Known Worlds. One such foray occurred in the dying days of the Second Republic, shortly after the fading of the suns was first recognized. Another happened after the assassination of Vladimir. Even so, none of these forays showed any signs of having the official sanction of the Hegemony. Instead, they appeared to be the work of individual mandarins hoping to keep tabs on humanity during a key event in their history. Yet, was that appearance a lie?

Verden, although long dead before these forays occurred, mentions something that seems pertinent to this discussion:

My hosts spoke enigmatically of concepts and events that eluded my limited grasp of their tongue. Among these was kyari, which I at first thought meant simply 'wind over water,' a metaphor for the will. However, I overheard one mandarin speaking to another in which he indicated that humanity had 'come to kyari,' a phrase whose meaning was unclear. From the context of the overheard conversation, I can only presume it means something akin to 'maturity,' but my hosts would not confirm this interpretation for reasons at which I can only guess.

Verden seems to have inadvertently hit upon a hidden truth, one that the Vau have never revealed to humanity, even after centuries of intermittent contact: Humankind has reached a certain stage in its existence and become important to the Vau's plans, whatever they may be. Yet, because humanity possesses characteristics that defy easy prediction, these aliens have no choice but to watch us closely and carefully, lest their ultimate goals go awry.

What are these goals? That question has no answer at present but, again, there are ways to piece together sufficient clues to arrive at a working hypothesis. It has already been noted that the Vau have never initiated a concerted effort to exchange information with human beings. Nevertheless, they remain fascinated by human society, culture and beliefs. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Vau have employed — and continue to employ — agents to obtain the information they seek. Indeed, there is much evidence to support this contention.

Who better to use as agents than human beings? Though suspected by some for many years, we now know that the Hegemony contains within its borders populations of humans who have lived under Vau rule for centuries. Thoroughly indoctrinated into Vau society and culture, these humans, whom the Vau call *gwindor*, are near-perfect agents, having the ability to move freely through the Known Worlds

without attracting the attention of the Empire. Unfortunately, they are only near-perfect agents, for these *gwindor* possess many of the same problems as the Vau themselves, chiefly their inability to understand "normal" human beings without great effort. This does not mean the *gwindor* are not human. Rather, it is simply a recognition of how successful the Vau have been in culturally assimilating the humans within the Hegemony.

Unsurprisingly, then, the Vau likely employ Known Worlders as their agents, albeit unwitting ones who believe they actually serve another master entirely. Once more, Verden provides us with much needed insights:

Among the Vau, one rarely gets a direct answer.

Such things are alien and unnatural to them. 'proof that humanity is a naive species for expecting it.

These aliens are fond of circumlocutions and lofty language that distance themselves from the events they are describing. In fact, such constructions even filter down into their interpersonal relationships where servants often do not speak of their masters directly and sometimes appear not to know who it is they serve. Or so it appeared to me.

While Verden's central premise may or may not be correct, he clearly recognized the Vau's preference to deal through unknowing intermediaries. When one couples this with their obvious tendency to gather information before acting, it should come as no surprise that many of their agents in the Empire do not in fact realize whom they truly serve.

Evidence in support of this thesis abounds, such as the discovery of a supposed Jakovian Agency operation within the court of Patriarch Hezekiah that House Decados publicly disavowed in 4998. What is remarkable is not that the Decados disavowed it but that they did so publicly, an unusual practice for a house so steeped in the traditions of subterfuge. Then there was the arrest last year of Scrauers attempting to steal jumpcodes from Charioteers on Leagueheim at the behest of a House Li Halan contact whose existence could not be verified. Many similarly anomalous actions can be found if one has access to Imperial intelligence briefings. While none points to a Vau master plan, their oddity is apparent when examined in detail. In every instance, there is a group or groups — usually an espionage agency — acting in a fashion that defies its typical operating procedure for no obvious reason. In a few rare cases, the presence of advanced technology pointed to either the Vau or the discovery of a cache of Second Republic technology, with the former seeming far more likely.

Complicating matters are the "Vau Emulators," a pathetic cult of Known Worlders who see the Vau as all-powerful servants of the Anunnaki. These Emulators frequently spy "for" the Vau, which is to say they involve themselves

in Known Worlds business that they should not in the hope that their Vau "patrons" will reward them for their actions. To date, the Emulators are most common on worlds close to Vau space like Pandemonium and Cadiz. Until recently, it was a simple matter of writing them off as crackpots, but evidence has surfaced that even they may have some connection to the Vau. The arrest of an Emulator cell on Midian in 4999 uncovered genuine Vau technology, including smart robes. While there is no direct evidence that the Emulators spied for the Vau (despite the insistence of its leader), such a possibility cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Such is the murky world of Vau espionage and the limits of the Empire's understanding of it.

Observations

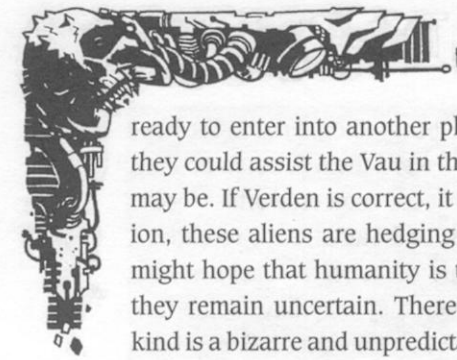
Because so little is known of the Vau's intentions, it is vital that the Empire learn more. Thus far, we have gained only a limited understanding of their worldview and how they see humanity's place within it. In many ways, human's knowledge has not increased significantly since the days of Benjamin Verden — and that must change. As noted earlier, it seems unlikely the Vau intend to conquer the Known Worlds. They could easily have done that centuries ago. Indeed, they likely could do it even now. Consequently, their espionage activities likely have another purpose. What could that be?

Imperial dealings with the Vau suggest that these aliens have several concerns, all of which involve humanity in some fashion or other. The first is the fading suns phenomenon, which affects the Hegemony as much as it does the Known Worlds. From snippets of conversation, the Vau appear to believe that the darkening of the stars has an understandable cause, one with a possible solution. Unfortunately, there is no way to verify this and the Vau are unwilling to offer further details to clarify this presumption.

The Vau are likewise interested in the Anunnaki, whom they call the Progenitors. As do many races, the Vau view the Anunnaki as their own former masters, who left this plane of existence after the cessation of a great war — the War in the Heavens spoken of in Vau mythology. These aliens believe that that War was not so much ended as it was put in abeyance. The Vau fully expect the War to begin anew. Some even think that it has already done so. One possible sign of the War's resumption is the Symbiot War. The Vau are profoundly disturbed by the Symbiot menace and have taken great interest in the Empire's ability to hold off these other alien beings.

This, of course, brings this report back to the question of why the Vau spy upon humanity. Verden believed that the Vau saw great potential in humankind, the ability to do things and go places that the Vau could do not. He also believed the Vau had come to conclusion that humanity was





ready to enter into another phase of existence, one where they could assist the Vau in their own plans, whatever they may be. If Verden is correct, it could be that, in typical fashion, these aliens are hedging their bets. As much as they might hope that humanity is the answer to their concerns, they remain uncertain. There is no question that humankind is a bizarre and unpredictable species. That is undoubtedly our greatest weakness and strength. Could it be that this is precisely the quality that both brings humanity to the Vau's attention — and fills them with such apprehension?

The Empire would do well to find out more about the Vau, for while there is little doubt that these aliens wish humanity no ill will, exactly what they want with humankind and how it will ultimately play out remain issues about which the Known Worlds have far too little information. Consequently, we should pay careful attention to the recent appearance of Vau "heralds" inviting groups of Known Worlders to a meeting on Vrill-Ya. Early reports suggest that the Vau may at last be opening up their borders to us and, if so, it represents a great opportunity to fill in the blanks we've inherited since Benjamin Verden's time. The Vau observe us without compunction; there is no reason we should not do the same.

Codes

One of the many maddening things about Vau espionage is that it does not follow human patterns of activity. This is to be expected, of course, but it makes the Empire's efforts to learn more extremely frustrating. Nowhere is this truer than in the area of codes, where the Vau do not employ any uniform system — at least none that human beings have been able to detect. The fact that Vau agents regularly do not know that they serve the Vau makes it all the more difficult.

Thus, the definition of "codes" must be expanded to include "patterns of action." In this area, humanity still lacks perfect knowledge but it does possess some information. The would-be observer of Vau espionage must look for seemingly insignificant actions that make little sense: guildsmen selling out bits of their own monopolies, nobles consorting with peasants, Churchmen with an unnatural interest in alien religions. In themselves, these activities mean nothing; they happen without Vau interference — and that is precisely the point.

The Vau do not involve themselves in anything that is completely beyond the pale. Instead, they insert themselves furtively into activities that are at the edges of human perception. They attach significance to events that humankind does not see as important. Thus, any observer of them must realize this fact and look for it. Examine reports of inexplicable espionage activities and their presence can be seen. Read briefings about odd occurrences on major planets of the Empire. These are the Vau "codes," the means by which

they communicate their presence. The Empire need only open its eyes and ears to see that it is being watched and possibly manipulated, although to what end no one yet knows.

Known Agents

The term "Vau agents" is perhaps a misnomer for, in most cases, those who work for the Vau do not realize they do so. Instead, they go about their business, spying for House al-Malik or the Syneculla as they always have, passing the information on to their superiors, who do the same. Somewhere along the line that information makes its way to the Vau, who work through a vast array of dupes and intermediaries, none of whom realizes that the slightly unusual report they have just received is actually of great significance to the future of an alien empire. Thus, the following individuals are — mostly — unwitting operatives of the Vau and would certainly be surprised to learn whom they ultimately serve.

- **Freddie Pinheiro:** A Scraver operating on Leagueheim, Pinheiro has a keen interest in the reclamation of Anunnaki artifacts — from other guildsmembers' possession. Since 4996, he's been involved in no less than three-dozen thefts, most of them from the Charioteers and Engineers. Pinheiro believes he's stealing for various noblemen and clerics but an examination of the artifacts' trail leads them eventually to a small Manitou community of human Vau admirers, a sure sign of Vau involvement.

- **Arkat jo Maarna:** An Ukar from Aylon, this individual serves the underground Manja cult by providing its adherents with "more authentic" information about the religion's Ukar origins. In doing so, she has established contact with more Manja cells than almost any intelligence agency. She makes frequent visits to Vrill-Ya, where she obtains Vau technology for their use, but there is suspicion the Vau have a hand in providing the technology Arkat believes she obtains illegally.

- **Marco Hazbarad:** Hazbarad is a clerk in the court of Archbishop Marcion Li Halan and an expert in the development of theurgic rites. He has written numerous public treatises on the subject and does Church-funded research into the matter. Since 4997, he has regularly had his private notes stolen, despite Brother Battle guards assigned to his protection. Nevertheless, Hazbarad soldiers on with his work, beginning anew each time his work goes missing.

- **Dyanna Liddle:** Liddle is a Vau Emulator on Cadiz. Of little importance except as a focus of crackpot devotion, she has recently become more significant. In 5000, a Church raid on her home found evidence of genuine Vau tech, including a type of smart robe never before seen. Liddle claims she obtained it from her Vau "patrons" for past services. While no one ever gave her much thought before this point, the presence of such unusual Vau technology does suggest she may well be worth watching.



Symbiot Insurgents

Although the Known Worlds have had contact — most of it violent — with the Symbiots for just over a century, these bizarre beings have existed for far longer. As if the Church needed further evidence of the Second Republic's blasphemies, the Symbiots provide it. They are yet another example of how humanity's hubris results in punishments far worse than anything true outsiders, like the Vau, can visit upon us. What makes the Symbiot threat so unsettling is not its potential to wreak havoc upon the Empire — although it has already done so — but that it owes its origin to humankind's own foolishness.

History

Unlettered peasants, as well as many priests, nobles and guildsmen, do not truly understand the nature of the Symbiot menace. They believe these beings to be just another race of aliens, albeit a particularly unpleasant and inimical one. To these ignorant souls, the Symbiots are no different than the Ukari, requiring nothing more than a concerted military effort to eliminate the threat they pose to the Empire once and for all.

Would that it were that simple!

Unfortunately for the Known Worlds, the Symbiots are not “mere” aliens. Though not as technologically sophisticated as the Vau — they eschew much of what we would recognize as technology — they pose a far more insidious threat. Where the Vau possess a wholly alien physiology and mindset, the Symbiots do not. True, they differ from us greatly; their ability to reshape their bodies alone is proof of that. Nevertheless, the Symbiots have an understanding of humanity that the Vau or any other alien threat does not share — for the Symbiots were once human beings like ourselves!

This truth — and truth it is — is not widely recognized, even among those who fight against the Symbiots on a regular basis. Many a Brother Battle or Imperial legionnaire believes that the Symbiots have the ability to “absorb” or otherwise “take over” human “hosts,” forcing these poor unfortunate souls to fight against their own species. It's a convenient falsehood that the Stigmata Garrison's commanders allow to gain a measure of credence among their troops. After all, isn't it easier to convince one's men to fight against the enemy if they don't believe they have anything in common with them?

Of course, this isn't to say the Symbiots *are* human beings. In this respect, the falsehood has an element of truth. The beings against which we fight, the beings who threaten the stability of the Empire, are no longer human beings, at least not according to any definition that would be accepted

by Church or state. Yet that doesn't change the reality that the Symbiots *were once* members of our own species. That's a fact of which we should never lose sight, lest we fall into an unhealthy complacency — with disastrous results.

The true origins of the Symbiots are unknown to us. However, we have gleaned important details from a recently discovered think machine aboard a derelict Second Republic starship found in the outer Daishan system. According to its records, this vessel, the *Calypso*, was registered to Massimo Masseri, a scientist who worked for a consortium called the Eco Green Organization, or EGO. Masseri and EGO were at the forefront of battling against a rival group called the United Wild Worlders, which opposed the terraforming of alien worlds for human habitation, including Daishan.

The *Calypso's* think machine was not fully functional; portions of its data crystals were damaged beyond repair. However, we learned that EGO — and later the Second Republic military — had encountered beings very much like the Symbiots in the Chernobog system. Whereas EGO had expected only a human guerrilla movement against their terraforming operations, they were met with a bizarre force consisting of biologically enhanced creatures that combined elements of human, plant and animal in equal measures. What makes the story especially fascinating is that these events took place more than a millennium ago, long before the Known Worlds had any evidence of the Symbiot threat.

The *Calypso's* think machine records are quite clear: neither EGO nor the Second Republic expected to encounter alien beings on Chernobog. In fact, the initial colonization reports make no mention of there being non-human intelligent life on the planet. If they were correct, the only possible explanation — and the one Masseri favored — was that *something* on Chernobog had changed the United World Worlders into the beings they encountered. Masseri theorized about what that something might be, but rejected all of notions because he lacked sufficient data. Unfortunately, the Republic decided to seal off the jumpgate permanently. Neither Masseri nor any other scientists had the chance to determine the true origin of these mysterious beings.

And so it remained for over a thousand years, until the Symbiots entered the Absolution system and announced themselves to the Known Worlds once more. In the century since we've been at war with them, we've learned enough to recognize that the Symbiots *need* us and other intelligent beings. They require new biological forms to pass on the symbiosis that is the hallmark of their weird kind. In the truest sense, they must “expand or die.” Or so it seems, based on our limited understanding of their reproduction.

Even more horrifying, they understand us. They know



what drives us, what makes us tick. That's a very valuable insight that could well prove our undoing if we do not guard against it. We would be fools to presume the Symbiots are so alien that they have forgotten what it means to be human. That assumption may indeed be true, but it brings with it risks that we should not be willing to take.

Which brings us to the threat they pose to the Known Worlds. The noble houses, the military and Brother Battle all take great pride in the Stigmata Garrison. They believe that our control of this "chokepoint" system has turned the tide of the Symbiot War in our favor. They believe that as long as we hold on to Stigmata, we have nothing to fear.

They're wrong — dead wrong.

The fact is that the Symbiots can and do enter the Known Worlds by other means. Stigmata isn't the only way into our space; it's simply the most direct. If you have access to the latest jump maps, you'll notice that it's possible to follow a rather circuitous route from Symbiot space through Vuldrok Space and back into the Empire. This isn't an easy journey by any means. It's certainly not the kind of thing that a huge Symbiot battle fleet would be able to achieve without difficulty. Whatever Imperial military strategists think of the barbarians, they aren't going to let a large force of Symbiot starships through their territory without harassing them at least a little. Consequently, this back door into the Known Worlds is unlikely to be used for a major assault.

But it makes the perfect route for insurgents and infiltrators.

Small teams of Symbiots have been operating in the Empire for almost as long as we've had contact with them — maybe longer. Collected data from interrogations, battles and unexplained incidents have enable us to piece together a rough and ready idea of what the Symbiots are up to and where they're most active. It's also given us some insight into the internal politics of this enemy, which may prove invaluable in the future.

Symbiot insurgents are most commonly found in two areas: those closest to jumpgates leading to their territory or on worlds with significant non-human populations. The first area is obvious, since even infiltrators find it simpler to set up shop on worlds nearest their home space. Mind you, "nearest" can be pretty far in some cases, such as Leminkainen for example, which isn't obviously close to Symbiot territory. Rather, Leminkainen borders Vuldrok space and insurgents often use that particular back door to enter the Empire. Other popular spots for infiltration are al-Malik worlds, like Shaprut and Istakhr.

The second area is less apparent and requires some explanation. We've long guessed that there are divisions within Symbiot society, the equivalent to political or religious factions. While all Symbiots believe in their right to exist and spread their kind throughout the universe, they don't all

agree on the proper method to do so. In fact, it seems as if there are some pretty major disagreements within the Symbiot culture about just this very point. We don't have any insight into the nature of these "factions" or how they originated. What we do know is that the violent, expansionistic faction that is pushing for war with the Empire through Stigmata isn't the only one, although it's clearly the most influential.

In any event, one — perhaps more — of these factions seeks to open up contact with the Known Worlds through other fronts, in this case aliens. We assume they recognize that non-humans don't have the same level of influence in the Empire as do humans, perhaps seeing them as kindred spirits in their own battles with the more violent Symbiots. By opening up a dialog with, say, the Shantor or the Etyri, they seem to believe they'll be able to influence the Known Worlds in unexpected — and possibly non-violent — ways.

Again, this is all speculation. The "alien friendly" Symbiots appear to be much smaller in number than their counterparts elsewhere. Likewise, it'd be wrong to believe that only these Symbiots have penetrated deep into the Empire. For that matter, it'd be wrong to believe the "alien lovers" have only benevolent goals. We simply lack the data to make a final determination, even if our limited information points in that direction.

Indeed, there's plenty of evidence to the contrary. Evidence of a Symbiot insurgency has been found on worlds as diverse as Criticorum, Kish and Grail. In the case of Criticorum, the insurgency was not only violent — taking the lives of many peasants and soldiers — but sufficiently public to draw the attention of the Inquisition. There are also innumerable stories of unexplained events and atrocities, many of which suggest Symbiot activity within the Empire. There was the series of disembowelings of farmers on Kish in 4996, the brain thefts on Cadiz a year later, and, more recently, the kidnapping of house pets on Pandemonium. Initial investigations were inconclusive in every case, but circumstantial evidence strongly implicates the Symbiots and their allies. At the same time, local nobles or Churchmen will use "evidence" of a Symbiot incursion to garner sympathy and support for their own private causes, which is why we must be careful when investigating such matters.

At the same time, there are examples of inexplicable kindness — if such is the word — by Symbiot infiltrators, such as an occurrence recorded on Leminkainen in 4999. The infiltrator's identity was revealed by a local villager, who had summoned a posse under the command of Sir Stefan Hawkwood to deal with the problem. The arrival of the posse spooked the village's herd of lanzalacos, which then came bearing down on a group of young children, who could not escape the rampaging beasts. The Symbiot chose, rather than flee, to risk its own life to save the children, an act for which

it paid dearly — the posse shot it dead moments after it released the last child it had rescued. After a year in isolation, there was no evidence the children had been affected by the Symbiot, which only adds to the mystery.

Whatever their nature, there's no question that Symbiot insurgencies have risen in number in the last two years. The opening of so many new jumpgates into barbarian space — never mind the search for Lost Worlds — has made it easier to enter the Empire than ever before. Moreover, the laxity with which both Church and state have handled certain heresies and paganism, such as Gjarti for example, adds to the likelihood of our being invaded by these creatures, whatever their ultimate intentions.

Observations

The Symbiot insurgency is a frustrating puzzle from our perspective. For one, we have so little hard evidence about Symbiot society that the observed actions of the insurgents make little sense to us. Thus far, they have done little except gather information and make contact with Known Worlders who may be sympathetic to their cause. In general, these sympathizers consist of aliens, or else human Gjartin or eco-terrorists of one stripe or another. Given the lack of obvious connection between these groups — beyond a broad-based respect for the environment — it's impossible to determine just what the Symbiots hope to gain.

At the same time, we have gathered plenty of evidence to suggest a frightening connection between the Symbiots and humanity. Something occurred during the time of the Second Republic, something so terrifying that even the technologically advanced people of that era decided to close off Chernobog's jumpgate rather than face it. If only we could do the same! Unfortunately, nothing would be gained by such an action, including any further understanding about the Symbiots' origins and long-term goals.

Nevertheless, there are many observers, some of them within the Eskatonic and Amalthean orders of the Church, who see glimmerings of commonality between the Symbiots' actions and those of our ancestors. Indeed, the Amaltheans have pointed out distant similarities between the putative Symbiot notion of the connectedness of all things and some of the more outré aspects of Second Republic Pan-Physics. Likewise, the aforementioned presence of supposed Anunnaki root words within the Symbiot language adds a further level of oddity to this matter. In the end, we are left with more questions than with answers, which is never a good situation in our line of work.

For that reason, we recommend that more resources be exerted in this area. Both the Eskatonics and the Amaltheans have shown a willingness to assist us in this matter, although their true motivations for doing so remain unclear. We know, for instance, that Symbiots are particularly sus-



ceptible to theurgy, which may well explain the Eskatonic interest in the matter. As for the Amaltheans, who can say? They may simply wish to further interstellar peace, which is a commendable goal even where the Symbiots are involved.

Yet, we shall require more than scattered ecclesiastical assistance to deal with this threat. Even if the Symbiots — or a faction thereof — wish us well and seek peaceful co-existence, we cannot enter into such an arrangement without more information. As things stand now, we are woefully ignorant of the Symbiots. They seem to understand us far more than we understand them. Until that situation is reversed, or at least equalized, we are vulnerable and we cannot recommend treating the Symbiots as anything other than enemies. That is the only prudent course of action, especially in light of the growing reports that these beings have found allies among our own people.

Another possible avenue of investigation is the reputed immunity to symbiosis possessed by the Gannok species. For years, we've heard rumors that suggest that the Symbiots cannot convert the Gannok, but that's all they've been — rumors. Gannok rarely come into contact with the Symbiots; even the incursion on Bannockburn in 4997 did little to confirm or deny this legend. However, the Amalthean researcher Evod DeFreitas recently tested samples of Gannok cells by exposing them to Symbiot spores under controlled conditions. DeFreitas believes he's now proven the truth of the reputed immunity, which is why I recommend the immediate recruitment and training of Gannok operatives for use against the Symbiots.

As the Prophet himself counseled, "One cannot face the Dark without first knowing the Light." Where the Symbiots are concerned, we are nowhere near to knowing the Light and must do whatever we can to overcome this deficiency.

Codes

Although we've made a point of stressing that Symbiots are not truly aliens in the sense that the Vau or the Oro'ym are aliens, this doesn't ensure that we always understand them. In fact, taking this point too far can easily result in some unfortunate errors, not the least of them being in the area of communication. The Symbiots possess several modes of communication among their own kind, all of which are used by their agents in the Known Worlds. Some are more easily cracked than others, which is why anyone hoping to infiltrate or subvert their organization must be aware of them.

The primary means by which they communicate is through Urthish, whether in a standard or dialectical form. Most Symbiots have no difficulty speaking our tongue, which makes it a useful means to convey information without attracting attention to themselves. However, they frequently combine Urthish speech with a second form of communication, a non-verbal one consisting of subtle and complex body movements. Everything from stance to the baring of teeth and the blinking of eyes can be used to convey meaning, almost none of which would be discernible — let alone intelligible — to a non-Symbiot observer. We believe that this non-verbal speech is common to all Symbiots, making it an extremely effective means of communicating in code to one another.

The Symbiots also employ another language to speak to one another. This language is believed to be their primary means of communication amongst themselves. It's largely incomprehensible to Known Worlders, although there are certain similarities to extant human languages — further confirmation of these beings' ultimate origin. According to the Eskatonic scholar Estivan Larranaga, this tongue also shows similarities to roots once believed to be Anunnaki in origin. Larranaga questions the likelihood that these roots are indeed Anunnaki, but doesn't deny it's still a matter of some debate in scholarly circles. If true, that would add yet another element to our picture of the Symbiots, one we'd rather not dwell upon at this time.

Known Agents

The Symbiots are extremely difficult to track in the Known Worlds, because their numbers are small and they possess the ability to change their shapes and identities. Nevertheless, we have managed to identify several agents operating within the Empire. In some cases, we have only a name and a locality rather than anything more specific. It is our hope that over the next few months we shall obtain sufficient information to capture and interrogate more agents, so that we can further our knowledge and the safety of the Known Worlds.

- **Kaiquen:** This agent was first identified in al-Malik space, on the world of Shaprut where he was active among the traditionalist Shantor clans. Fortunately, his activities were discovered before long, and there is no evidence that he is on currently on Shaprut. Nevertheless, interrogations among the Shantor suggest that Kaiquen belongs to a faction within the Symbiots who believes in some form of accommodation with the Empire, although the specifics of how this could be achieved remain sketchy.
- **Delphi 4998:** We know little about this agent, except

that he was present on Delphi in 4998 before House Hawkwood launched a full investigation into his rumored activities among the peasantry. He hasn't been seen since, but stories continue to circulate that local Gjartins provide him aid and comfort until he can again operate more freely.

- **Mifsud Zuba:** This native of Midian is a former member of the Stigmata Garrison. He served between 4987 and 4996 with distinction, but since returning home to Li Halan space has become involved in several technophobic groups opposed to the development of Midian and other worlds for human use. Although we have no direct proof, we suspect he has either been replaced by a Symbiot or came under their influence while on Stigmata.

- **Banninicky:** This individual is unusual in that she is a Gannok. Since 4997, we have observed her activities on Bannockburn, where we believe she has had regular contact with a Symbiot insurgent cell. To date, she has done nothing that is strictly illegal or subversive and, being a Gannok, she is perhaps immune to symbiosis. Nevertheless, we keep her under surveillance in the event she inadvertently leads us to information of value to our cause.



Appendix: Rules

d20 System: Prestige Classes

Dervish

All the noble houses of the Empire have attempted to train and use psychic warriors at one time or another, and some have had remarkable success in these efforts. Although they have tried to keep their program quiet, the Hazat have achieved so much that the name they give their psychic warriors — Dervishes — has come to be applied to those of every house and faction.

The unique abilities of Dervishes come to the fore during missions that other types of soldiers find difficult, if not impossible, to undertake. Their wide range of psychic powers, and the secrecy under which they typically operate, make it surprisingly easy for them to succeed in their given tasks. For that reason, the Hazat fielded entire legions of Dervishes during the Emperor Wars, but used them sparingly. The other houses could not boast such numbers, which is why their own Dervishes are more rare. However, this massive troop strength has proved a peacetime burden, as the Hazat now fear their enhanced soldiers and seek to disband them.

The Church has always been suspicious of Dervishes, and not simply because of their prodigious psychic abilities. Rumor has it that the Dervish training program owes its origin to the heretical prophet Zegai, who lived on Grail a century ago. Zegai's followers practiced flagellation and other forms of self-discipline to achieve remarkable physical powers. However, the Inquisition contended they were child-killers as well, and destroyed the sect on ecclesiastical orders. The thought that such a foul group could give birth to the Empire's psychic warriors has prevented them from becoming too widespread even among the Hazat, making them oddities in the Known Worlds.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Dervish, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Feats: Combat Casting (Psi), Gifted (Psi), Improved Initiative

Psi: 3rd-degree powers in a primary psychic path (Bedlam, Far Hand or Soma), and 2nd degree powers in a secondary path (choose from the same three paths).

Special: The character must have been accepted into a psychic warrior training program run by a noble house or a similar organization.

Class Skills

The Dervish's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Academia (Int), Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Jump (Str), Occultcraft (Int), Psi skills (Bedlam, Far Hand and Soma), Swim (Str) and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Dervish prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Dervish is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light armor, medium armor and shields. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than synthsilk apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble.

Wyrd: The Dervish is an occult character class; like Psychics and Theurges, Dervishes gain an amount of Wyrd points per level equal to their primary path's key ability modifier.

In addition, Dervishes gain bonus points at certain levels. These points are added to the character's previous total and are in addition to those gained based on the key ability modifier for



Table 1—1: The Dervish

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Wyrd Bonus	Special
1 st	+1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Quicksilver
2 nd	+2	+0	+0	+3	+1	Uncanny Dodge (Dex bonus)
3 rd	+3	+1	+1	+3	+1	Bonus Occult Feat
4 th	+4	+1	+1	+4	+0	Uncanny Dodge (Flanking)
5 th	+5	+1	+1	+4	+1	Bonus Occult Feat
6 th	+6	+2	+2	+5	+1	Weapon Specialization
7 th	+7	+2	+2	+5	+0	Bonus Occult Feat
8 th	+8	+2	+2	+6	+1	4 th -Degree Power
9 th	+9	+3	+3	+6	+1	Bonus Occult Feat
10 th	+10	+3	+3	+7	+0	Whirlwind Attack

his primary psychic path. For example, if the Dervish's primary path is Bedlam, and his Strength is 16, he normally gets +3 Wyrd points for every level he gains in an occult class. If this character gains two levels in Dervish, he gains an additional +1 Wyrd point, for a total of +4, at that level. These bonus points are only gained when the character acquires an appropriate new level in Dervish, not any other occult class.

Quicksilver: At 1st level, the character gains a +4 initiative bonus. This stacks with his Improved Initiative feat (a requirement for becoming a Dervish).

Bonus Occult Feats: At 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th levels, a Dervish gains a bonus occult feat from the following list, assuming he already possess the prerequisites: Attune Fetish, Imbue Tabernacle, Enlarge Psi, Extend Psi, Multiply Psi, Spell Focus (Psi) and Spell Power Penetration (Psi). These feats may be exchanged for knowledge of a 4th-degree power in the paths Bedlam and Soma, if so desired.

Uncanny Dodge: Starting at 2nd level, the Dervish gains the extraordinary ability to react to danger before his senses would normally allow him to do so. At 2nd level and above, the Dervish retains his Dexterity bonus to Armor Class (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by a hidden attacker. Note that this level of Uncanny Dodge does not affect flank attacks.

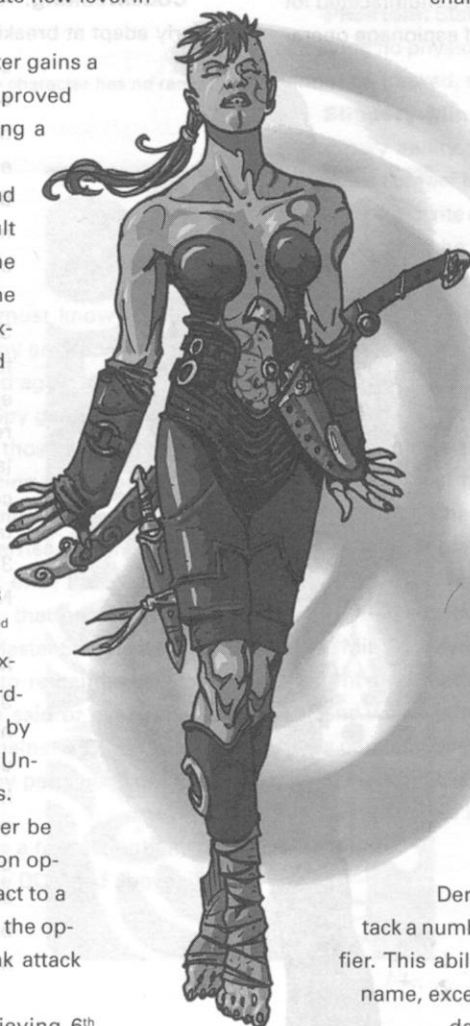
At 4th level, the Dervish can no longer be flanked, since he can react to opponents on opposite sides of him as easily as he can react to a single attacker. This ability denies Knaves the opportunity to use flank attacks or to sneak attack the Dervish.

Weapon Specialization: On achieving 6th level, a Dervish gains the Weapon Specialization feat. Weapon specialization adds a +2 damage bonus with a chosen weapon. The Dervish must have Weapon

Focus with that weapon to gain Weapon Specialization. If the weapon is a ranged weapon, the damage bonus applies only if the target is within 30 ft., because only at that range can the Dervish strike precisely enough to hit more effectively. Dervishes gain Weapon Specialization as a free feat; it does not count against a character's bonus and regular feat acquisition. The character cannot take Weapon Specialization as a regular feat at any other level, unless he does so as a result of gaining levels in the Soldier class.

4th-Degree Power: At 8th level, a Dervish gains a 4th-degree power in either Bedlam or Soma, if he has either of these psi paths. If he does not, he may increase one of his other psi paths by one degree. For example, a Dervish has the 2nd-degree power of Psyche, he may use this ability to gain the 3rd-degree power. If all of his known psi paths are already at maximum level, he may choose a new psi path to learn at the 1st-degree. Note, however, that a Dervish may not use this ability to gain a 4th-degree power in any paths except Bedlam or Soma. If he already possesses the 4th-degree in these paths when he receives this ability, he cannot choose to raise any of his other paths higher than the 3rd-degree, even if they possess 4th-degree powers, as do Psyche and Sixth Sense, for example.

Whirlwind Attack: At 10th level, a Dervish gains the ability to make a Whirlwind Attack a number of times per day equal to his Dexterity modifier. This ability functions exactly like the feat of the same name, except that it is limited in the number of times per day it can be used and the character need not meet all the prerequisites. If the Dervish already possesses Whirlwind Attack, he may substitute another feat from



the following list: Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Mobility, Improved Critical, Improved Initiative, Parry (Cloak Fighting, Improved Feint, Riposte), Point Blank Shot (Far Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Rapid Reload, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run), Power Attack (Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Sunder), Quick Draw, Subtle Strike, Two-Weapon Fighting (Improved Two-Weapon Fighting), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (Deflect Missiles) and Weapon Specialization.

Master Spy

It would be an understatement to say that the Known Worlds are rife with intrigue. Every faction and power bloc, from the Emperor to the noble houses to the Church to the guilds — and many more besides — have a vested interest in knowing precisely what their opponents are up to at any given time. This has created a climate in which information is a valuable commodity.

Master Spies are men and women who have devoted themselves to providing others with the information they seek. Whether for personal reasons or profit, Master Spies train themselves to be the eyes and ears of their patrons, infiltrating enemy strongholds to learn the secrets of their adversaries. Most function solely as intelligence gatherers, but Master Spies are a multifaceted lot and include among their number all manner of espionage operatives. Like it or not, Master Spies have always been an integral part of the working of the Known Worlds and, especially since the Emperor Wars, their numbers are on the rise.

Note that, because all Master Spies do not work for established intelligence agencies, they need not possess the social feat Secret Agent to qualify for this prestige class. After all, there are many freelance spies in the Known Worlds. Similarly, not all members of established intelligence agencies will possess this prestige class, since the Master Spy is a particular type of character whose abilities are focused on only one aspect of espionage, namely field operations.

Hit Die: d6.



Requirements

To qualify to become a Master Spy, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Diplomacy: 6 ranks

Gather Information: 8 ranks.

Innuendo: 4 ranks.

Listen: 4 ranks.

Sense Motive: 6 ranks.

Feats: Alertness

Class Skills

The Master Spy's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Academia (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Decipher Script (Int), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Innuendo (Wis), Knowledge (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis) and Sense Motive (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the spy prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A spy is proficient with all simple weapons and light armor (but not shields).

Codebreaking: At 1st level, the Master Spy becomes particularly adept at breaking secret codes. The DC to decipher the codes of simple messages is normally 25, or 30 for larger texts. The DC can be 35 or higher for intricate or military codes. However, for the Master Spy with Codebreaking, these DCs are reduced by 10 (15 for simple messages, 20 for texts, 25 for military codes, etc.).

Networking: At 2nd level, the Master Spy becomes adept at forging special contacts with those people he meets in his travels. Even a chance encounter can create a reliable informant he may call upon years later. During any encounter, the Master Spy can spend experience points to forge a contact from an encountered NPC. The cost is 3 XP per the contact's class level. A 5th level Noble costs 15 XP is acquire as a contact.

Networked contacts will provide the Master Spy with information on whatever gossip or lore they know, but they do not have to like her or appreciate being called upon — their personal reactions depend on how well the Master Spy befriends them. Those who like the spy may go so far as to offer temporary lodgings or even help smuggle him out of town in a hay wagon, but they won't usually risk their lives for him.

Table 1—2: The Master Spy

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+0	+1	+2	+2	Codebreaking
2 nd	+1	+2	+3	+3	Networking
3 rd	+2	+2	+3	+3	Clarity of Purpose
4 th	+3	+2	+4	+4	Training Regimen, Bonus Language
5 th	+4	+3	+4	+4	Innocuous
6 th	+5	+3	+5	+5	Phantom
7 th	+6	+4	+5	+5	Slippery Mind
8 th	+7	+4	+6	+6	Training Regimen, Bonus Language
9 th	+8	+5	+6	+6	Poison Immunity
10 th	+9	+5	+7	+7	Personae

Clarity of Purpose: At 3rd level, a Master Spy gains a +3 bonus to saving throws versus mind-affecting attacks, whatever their origin (including psi powers and theurgy).

Training Regimen: At 4th level, the Master Spy learns a secret training regimen that gives him an edge over others. Choose one from the following list. At 8th level, he can choose another regimen.

Regimen	Effect
Instant mastery	4 ranks of a skill in which the character has no ranks
Stoic Mind	+1 bonus to Will saves
Salubrity	+1 bonus to Fortitude saves
Agility	+1 bonus to Reflex saves
Pugilism	+1 bonus to attack rolls
Avoidance	+1 dodge bonus to AC
Applicable lore	Any one feat

Bonus Languages: Master Spies must know many languages to perform field operations in many environments. They can choose a new language at 4th level and again at 8th level.

Innocuous: At 5th level, the Master Spy gains the extraordinary ability to go unnoticed even among those he directly interacts with. Once per day, when first initiating an encounter with another person, he can declare himself innocuous, hypnotizing the person through subtle cues. He then carries on conversations and performs actions normally. However, once the encounter is over and he has parted with that person, that person will have trouble remembering anything about the Master Spy. He will know that he met someone but it is an effort to remember anything about what the Master Spy did, what he said or even what he looked like. He must make a Will save against a DC of 10 + the Master Spy's total class levels to recall any particulars of the encounter.

When the hypnotism first begins (it is a free action), the target can make a Will save against the same DC listed above; if he

fails, the hypnotism proceeds. If he succeeds, he can then make an Intelligence roll against the same DC to realize that anything untoward took place. If he succeeds with this roll, he recognizes that the Master Spy was trying to bamboozle him. The Master Spy may affect a number of people at one time equal to his Charisma modifier.

Phantom: Starting at 6th level, the Master Spy becomes adept at leaving no physical trail in natural or artificial surroundings and cannot be tracked, except by occult means.

Slippery Mind: At 7th level, the Master Spy gains the extraordinary ability to wrest free from occult powers that would otherwise compel him. If the Master Spy is affected by a psychic power, theurgic rite or other occult effect and fails her saving throw, one round later he can attempt his saving throw again. He only gets this one extra chance to succeed at his saving throw. If it fails as well, the occult effect proceeds normally.

Poison Immunity: At 9th level, the Master Spy becomes completely immune to all forms of poison, due to her extensive experience and bodily conditioning.

Personae: At 10th level, the Master Spy can create separate personalities that he auto-hypnotizes himself into believing are fully real. While he never forgets who he really is and is always aware that he is playing a role, it is nearly impossible for others to realize this. The Master Spy cannot be made to reveal — either through interrogation, torture, psychic scans (such as Mind Sight's Probe Mind or Psychic Interrogation power) or theurgic rites (such as Scent of Deception or Divulgence) — which of his personas are real and which false. He may even live a fully realized life as one of his persona for years, thus gaining the deep trust of whoever's house he is infiltrating. The number of false personas he can create is equal to his Intelligence modifier. This is an extraordinary ability.



d20 System Rules: Wyrd Point Recovery

Wyrd points that are spent or drained are regained over time. You recover two times your total character levels in Wyrd points per day, regardless of rest or activity. A 5th-level Psychic recovers 10 Wyrd points per day. He may engage in any manner of activity, including activating occult powers (although this will only lower his Wyrd points further).

You may meditate to recover points faster. If you spend an entire day in rest and contemplation, doing nothing but meditating and sleeping, you recover three times your level in Wyrd points. A 5th-level Psychic recovers 15 Wyrd points per day of meditation.

Recovery Limits: You can never get back more Wyrd points than you lost.

Literacy

Literacy is a skill that requires only one rank. It is a class skill for Nobles, Priests and Guilders, and thus costs these characters only one point (Priests get literacy in one language for free). It is a cross-class skill for most other classes, and thus costs them two points.

Literacy in a language applies to that language's alphabet. Characters who know the Urthish and Urthtech languages do not need to learn to different literacies to read both. The chart below lists a number of languages and shared alphabets.

Language Alphabet

Urthish	Urthish (Roman)
Urthtech*	Urthish (Roman)
Latin	Urthish (Roman)
Voroxish	Urthish (Roman)
Lojmaa	Lojmaa**
Uryari	Uryari**

* Urthtech is not so much a language as a knowledge of the very specialized vocabulary used in the Second Republic technical sciences. Urthish speakers do not necessarily know the meaning of these words, just as most modern-day English speakers cannot understand Latin medical terminology. It is considered a special language in **Fading Suns** due to the vast vocabulary involved and the rarity of speakers.

** Lojmaa and Uryari share some common characteristics. A literate Lojmaa speaker may learn Uryari literacy as if it were a class skill, regardless of his character class. Vice versa for literate Uryari speakers learning to read Lojmaa.

Non-Theurgic Brother Battle Monks

Brother Battle characters do not have to take theurgic rites. At every level in which they are offered theurgy, they can instead choose from the Soldier's Bonus Feats. However, once they refuse the 1st-degree rite in a canon, they cannot later take it in place of their 2nd- or 3rd-degree choices; they must wait until they are again offered a 1st-degree rite before they can learn a canon.

For example, if Acolyte Osho does not wish to learn theurgy at 5th level, he can choose a feat from the Soldier's Bonus Feat list instead. Should he do so, he cannot then learn theurgy at 7th and 9th levels (he must choose more Soldier feats instead). He can again learn theurgy at 11th level, when a 1st-degree rite is offered. However, this becomes his primary path (not his secondary, as listed).

New Theurgic Rites: The Rule of Battle

Those Brother Battle warrior monks who follow the heresy of the Rule of Battle may learn special theurgic rites.

VPS: The Rule of Battle Reprisal

(Level 6, Strength + Vigor, P, self, temporary, 1W)

Once cast, the Brother gains a free attack against anyone who hits him with a hand-to-hand or melee attack, even if it delivers no damage (he gets no free attack against ranged attacks). He suffers no multiple action penalties for this free attack, and may make it even if he has already performed three actions that turn.

Far Reprisal

(Level 7, Strength + Vigor, P, self, temporary, 1W)

As Reprisal, above, except this power works against ranged attacks. It can be cast at the same time as Reprisal (one roll, spend two Wyrd points if it succeeds) to provide a free attack against both melee and ranged attacks.

Bloody Fray

(Level 8, Dexterity + attack skill, LG, area effect, instant, 1W)

The Brother attacks a target with such fury that anyone near the target is also smitten by the blow. The skill used is either Fight, Melee or Shoot (depending on the nature of the attack). As long as Wyrd is spent during the attack roll and the attack hits its target, anyone within a radius of three meters plus two per victory point is also attacked. Make separate attack and damage rolls for each target, but no extra Wyrd needs to be spent for these attacks. The ritecaster cannot selectively choose who within the area is exempt from the attack — everyone there is affected, friend or foe alike.

The Rule of Battle Canon

Degree	Rule of Battle (Str)
1 st	Reprisal
2 nd	Far Reprisal
3 rd	Bloody Fray
4 th	Salutation to Zakhayelos

Battle Sense Canon

Degree	Battle Sense (Con)
1 st	Battle Heat
2 nd	Penetration
3 rd	Sense Weakness

d20 System: The Rule of Battle

Requirement: Brother Battle only

Key Ability: Wisdom

1st-Degree Rite: Reprisal (Trained Only; Brother Battle Theurgy User Only)

Components: P

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: 1 turn

Saving Throw: None

Check: The Brother becomes so infused with righteous fury that he can make a free attack of opportunity against anyone who attacks him in melee. He may make one such attack per round for every round in which he is attacked, for as long as the rite's duration lasts. His Reprisal attack can only be in response to a melee attack that actually hits him (including touch attacks, but not ranged touch attacks). He cannot make Reprisals against ranged attacks with this rite (see Far Reprisal, below).

This rite may be stacked with Far Reprisal (below), allowing the ritecaster to respond to both melee and ranged attacks.

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

2nd-Degree Rite: Far Reprisal (Trained Only; Brother Battle Theurgy User Only)

Components: P

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: 1 turn

Saving Throw: None

Check: This rite acts the same as the 1st-degree Reprisal, except that it works against ranged attacks instead of melee. What's more, he can make a melee attack Reprisal against whoever delivered the ranged attack upon him — his sword cleaves across the distances to the one who did him injury. This attack is made like a normal melee attack except that it is considered to have a range increment of 10 ft., and suffers any penalties for each increment thereafter. The Brother can choose instead to make his Far Reprisal with a ranged weapon, as long as it was already in hand,

using that weapon's normal range increments.

This rite may be stacked with Reprisal (above), allowing the ritecaster to respond to both ranged and melee attacks.

3rd-Degree Rite: Bloody Fray (Trained Only; Brother Battle Theurgy User Only)

Components: L, G

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Close

Area: 10 ft. + 5 ft./skill rank burst centered on the ritecaster's attack target

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Check: The Brother attacks a target with such fury that anyone near the target is also smitten by the blow. The attack can be either touch, melee or ranged, and it is considered part of the rite activation action. Anyone within the area burst of the Bloody Fray blow is also attacked; make separate attack and damage rolls for each target. The ritecaster cannot selectively choose who within the area is exempt from the attack — everyone there is affected, friend or foe alike.

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

4th-Degree Rite: Salutation to Zakhayelos (Trained Only; Brother Battle Theurgy User Only)

Components: L, G, P

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Close

Target: One object

Duration: Hours

Saving Throw: None

Check: This exceptionally rare rite, a closely guarded secret of the Brother Battle order, allows the ritecaster to contact and summon to the physical world one of the "bodiless powers of the Empyrean," the strong and warlike intelligence known as Zakhayelos, Lord of Hosts. According to Eskatonic doctrine, Zakhayelos rules in the Fifth Emanation from the Celestial Sun, among the ranks of the Imperitories.

Zakhayelos is the pure embodiment of all the military virtues to which the order aspires: strength, courage, discipline, a perfect understanding of strategy and logistics. As with all Empyrean powers, Zakhayelos will almost never take direct physical actions, such as fighting alongside the troops, but, as a being of near limitless capabilities, can act in ways both grand and subtle to tip the scales of victory in the Brothers' favor. Zakhayelos has been known to aid the order with signs and omens that reveal enemy positions and tactics, or to bolster the troops with substantial (but temporary) morale bonuses, or to appear in the sky above Brother Battle armies, displaying its most fearsome form to the enemy. When taking a visible form, Zakhayelos will most often appear as a tall noble knight clad in shining, elaborately decorated armor, wielding a flaming sword and a mirrored shield emblazoned with the Church symbol.

The exact benefit gained by summoning Zakhayelos depends on the activation check result. Note that the effects listed with





each DC are not cumulative; only one effect is achieved.

DC Effect

- 15 Zakhayelos' presence is felt through omens and signs (the turning of a storm, the cawing of crows); everyone fighting on the ritecaster's side gains a +2 morale bonus.
- 25 Zakhayelos' voice speaks to everyone fighting on the ritecaster's side, personally bolstering them; each gains a +2 Strength bonus and a +2 morale bonus.
- 35 Zakhayelos takes visible form and strikes terror in the ritecaster's enemies. They must each make Will saves or be panicked for the next hour. Those who make their saves are nonetheless shaken for the following day.

Many outside the Church claim that such "angelic beings" are merely mass hallucinations called up from the minds of believers by the ritecaster, and that they do not really exist. But they rarely make such claims in public.

Restriction: This rite may be successfully cast only once per day. In addition, casting it more than twice a week causes the ritecaster to suffer Zakhayelos' punishment: he is fatigued for the rest of the day (regardless of rest), although his army still receives the rite's activation check result.

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

New Theurgic Rites: Battle Sense

These rites are available to any theurgic practitioner, although they are chiefly practiced by Brother Battle monks.

VPS: Battle Sense

Battle Heat

(Level 5, Perception + Vigor, LG, self, temporary, 1W)

The ritecaster enters a trance wherein she gains a +2 Strength, +2 Endurance and +2 bonus to all attack rolls, Dodge rolls or occult defense rolls. Because of the Endurance bonus, she also gains two temporary Vitality points, which are lost before any of her normal points (once the rite ends, she loses these temporary points). While in a Battle Heat, the ritecaster cannot take any actions that require patience or concentration, or cast any other rites except those developed by the Brother Battle order. The duration of this rite can be extended by spending extra Wyrd points (one point per extra 10 turns).

Penetration

(Level 6, Perception + Focus, LG, self, temporary, 1W)

The ritecaster can empower his attacks (hand-to-hand, melee or even firearms) to ignore energy shields and any occult protection or armor, such as Armor of the Pancreator or FarWall.

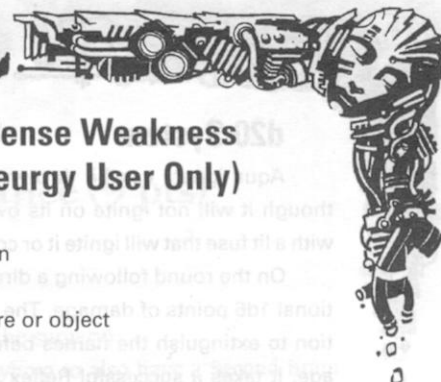
Sense Weakness

(Level 8, Perception + Observe, P, sight, temporary, 1W)

The ritecaster can examine a chosen creature or object and perceive a weak spot or chink in its armor that he can exploit. Just how deeply he can perceive depends on the result of his roll.

VP Effect

- 1 +1 goal to hit target; target's armor/defense dice are reduced by one against the ritecaster's attacks.
- 2 +1 goal; -2 armor dice



- 3 +2 goal; -3 armor dice
 4 +2 goal; -4 armor dice
 5 +3 goal; -5 armor dice
 6 +3 goal; -6 armor dice

The effect lasts only for the duration of the rite's activation. Once expired, this rite cannot be cast upon the same target that same day. The bonuses apply only to the ritecaster's attacks, although he can extend the effect to any who is joined to him by the Oath of the Shieldmates rite.

d20 System: Battle Sense

Key Ability: Constitution

1st-Degree Rite: Battle Heat (Trained Only; Theurgy User Only)

Components: L, G

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: 1 turn

Saving Throw: None

Check: The ritecaster enters a battle frenzy wherein his physical capabilities are supernaturally heightened. He temporarily gains a +4 to Strength, +4 to Constitution, and a +2 moral bonus on Will saves. The increase in Constitution increases his hit points by 2 per level, but these hit points go away when the Constitution score drops back to normal. They are considered to be temporary hit points, and are lost before any of his normal hit points (unlike those gained by a Barbarian's rage).

While in a Battle Heat, the ritecaster cannot use skills or abilities that require patience or concentration, such as moving silently or casting spells. Exception: Any theurgic rites whose key ability is Strength, such as those in the Wrath canon or the Rule of Battle canon. He can use any feat except Expertise, item creation feats (including tech items), metapsi feats, and Skill Focus (if it's tied to a skill that requires patience or concentration).

The Battle Heat lasts for 1 turn, although it may be extended for another turn with the expenditure of more Wyrd (no new activation check is required).

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

2nd-Degree Rite: Penetration (Trained Only; Theurgy User Only)

Components: L, G

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: 1 turn

Saving Throw: None

Check: The ritecaster empowers his attacks (touch, melee or ranged) with the ability to ignore his enemies' Damage Reduction, including that provided by energy shields. The DC for this rite is 20.

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

3rd-Degree Rite: Sense Weakness (Trained Only; Theurgy User Only)

Components: P

Activation Time: 1 action

Range: Close

Target: One living creature or object

Duration: 1 turn

Saving Throw: None

Check: The ritecaster can examine a chosen creature or object and perceive a weak spot or chink in its armor that he can exploit. Just how deeply he can perceive depends on the result of his activation check.

DC	Effect
15	-1 penalty to target's AC or hardness
20	-2 penalty to target's AC or hardness
25	-3 penalty to target's AC or hardness
30	-4 penalty to target's AC or hardness
35	-5 penalty to target's AC or hardness
40	-6 penalty to target's AC or hardness

The effect lasts only for the duration of the rite's activation. Once expired, this rite cannot be cast upon the same target that same day. The AC and/or hardness penalties apply only to the ritecaster, although he can extend the effect to any who is joined to him by the Congregation rite.

Retry: Yes, but Wyrd points are still spent for failed attempts.

Equipment

Aqua Ignata

TL 3

Cost: Varies (see below)

A slightly denuded solution of Ka oil (the kind used in flamerguns) and other flammable substances, aqua ignata has been blessed by an Avestite bishop and consecrated to a holy task. Aqua ignata is only dispensed by the Temple Avesti to its members. Possession by non-Avestites is punishable by imprisonment in an Avestite prison.

Victory Point System

A standard one-ounce vial of aqua ignata adds three dice of damage to a burning target and, like flamergun damage, can ignore shields and armor that is not sealed (like powered ceramsteel) or coated with flame retardant. Damage dice which roll 1 ignore armor or enemy shields. In addition, aqua ignata sticks to anything not coated with frictionless gel, and retains heat so that it continues to deliver heat damage for one turn after the flames have been extinguished (even underwater!).

The traits below are for a thrown vial. If the vial has a fuse, it can be lit before throwing it, in which case it will cause its damage even to non-burning targets. Fuses can be set to go off anywhere between one to 10 turns after igniting them. Anyone who can reach a burning fuse can extinguish it with one action (no roll required).

Roll	Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate	Siz	Cost
Dex+Throw	—	3	10/20	1	1	S	2



d20 System

Aqua ignata can be thrown like a grenadelike weapon, although it will not ignite on its own — it must either be thrown with a lit fuse that will ignite it or contact an already burning flame.

On the round following a direct hit, the target takes an additional 1d6 points of damage. The target can take a full-round action to extinguish the flames before taking this additional damage. It takes a successful Reflex saving throw (DC 15) to extinguish the flames. Rolling on the ground allows the character a +2 bonus. Leaping into a lake does not automatically smother aqua ignata, although it does provide a +4 bonus to the Reflex save.

Weapon	Cost	— Damage —		Range	
		Direct Hit	Splash	Increment	Weight
Vial	20 fb	+1d6**	1 pt***	10 ft.	1 1/4 lb.
Fused vial†	25 fb	1d6	1 pt***	10 ft.	1 1/4 lb.

* As a grenadelike weapon, aqua ignata ballista require no proficiencies to use.

** Targets take damage only if they are already aflame.

*** Grenadelike weapons deal splash damage to all creatures within 5 feet of where they land.

† The thrower lights the fuse before tossing the vial; this is a move-equivalent action. Most fuses are set to burn quickly, igniting the aqua ignata within three seconds, but they can be set to go off within 1-10 rounds. However, such a fuse can be put out by anyone who takes a standard action to do so (and can reach the fuse).

Mimetic Disguise System

TL 8

Cost: 7500+ firebirds (500 fb per mimetic plastic charge)

Weight: 1 lb. (with 10 "charges")

This is an advanced disguise system created for use by Internal Investigations during the last days of the Second Republic. Consequently, it is extremely rare in the New Dark Ages and limited to espionage agencies with reliable access to high-tech caches, such as the Imperial Eye or the al-Malik Mutasih. The system is designed to overcome any security system by creating a disguise appropriate to its unique characteristics.

The system consists of two parts. The first part is a small think machine that governs the actual creation of the disguise. The user of the system must therefore be knowledgeable in the use of TL 7 think machines in order to take full advantage of the system (the computer is TL7, but the device as a whole is TL8). The second part is a quantity of "mimetic plastic," a nanotechnological fluid whose integral nanites can be given electronic instructions by the disguise system's think machine. These instructions enable the nanites to mold themselves into a wide variety of forms that can then be used to create a near-perfect disguise. In cases where the disguise requires more mass than the mimetic plastic possesses, the nanites make use of nearby raw materials (such as wood or stones) to create the additional mass.

For the think machine to produce adequate instructions to the mimetic plastic, its user must possess electronic data of the individual to be impersonated, including his retina pattern, fingerprints and (most importantly) a genetic scan. Without this data in whole

or in part, the disguise produced will be less effective, especially if the impersonated individual is easily recognizable or otherwise well known. In such cases, the impersonator must rely on his natural abilities at performance and mimicry to overcome the weaknesses of the disguise system.

The disguise created allows the user to alter nearly everything about his appearance, including externals like clothing and equipment (although the latter will be non-functional, unless they contain no moving parts). The user's body does not undergo any actual change, although prosthetics can be created to alter height, body weight and even the number of limbs. However, height cannot be changed by more than one-half and weight by more than one-quarter. This means that most humans cannot reliably disguise themselves as a Vorox or a Gannok, but an Ur-Obun or an Ascorbite is possible. In the case where the disguise creates specialized limbs or appendages (such as Etyri wings or Oro'ym gills), these are completely non-functional.

The disguise uses the information imprinted by the think machine to create retinal contacts, fingerprints, voice modulation and false skin cells in order to foil security systems that detect impostors based on these characteristics. This is usually more than sufficient to overcome all but the most sophisticated or unusual (such as occult) means to ascertain falsehood. As noted above, the disguise is only as good as the information placed into it, which is why the user must be a skilled think machine operator (or have an accomplice who is).

The mimetic disguise system contains sufficient mimetic plastic to produce 10 different disguises, after which its supply is exhausted and must be replaced. Unfortunately, nanites of this sophistication are rare in the Known Worlds outside of the laboratories of the Engineers, which is why the system is used sparingly and only by the most trusted of agents.

Victory Point System Traits

The user must make a Wits + Think Machine roll to determine the usefulness of the disguise created:

VPs **Bonus to Relevant Skills (Disguise, Performance, etc.)**
Failure None; disguise is unusable

0	+0
1	+1
2	+2
3	+3
4	+4
5	+5
6	+6

Note: The GM determines which skills receive a bonus based on how the impersonator uses his disguise. Thus, using it to bypass a high-tech security system (such as gen-locks) might provide a bonus to Lockpicking, while social interactions might get a bonus to Charm, Impress or even Knavery. In addition, the bonuses listed above are the maximum and assume that the user possesses all the pertinent information needed to create an effective disguise. The GM should feel free to lower the bonus if it lacks one or more elements of the disguise, such as fingerprints, retinal scans, etc.

D20 System Traits

The user must make a successful Use Think Machine check to gain any advantage from the disguise created (in the form of circumstance bonuses to Disguise and penalties to others' Spot checks to see through the disguise):

DC Max Modifier to Disguise/Spot checks

12	0/+2
15	+1/+1
18	+1/0
20	+2/-1
25	+4/-2
30	+6/-3
35	+8/-4
40	+10/-5

Special: These modifiers are in addition to those normally associated with Disguise and Spot checks. The GM should feel free to lower the bonus if the user lacks one or more elements of the disguise.

Cyberware

Knowing Glance (9 pts)

TL 7

Proscribed by the Church

Incompatibility: 8

Cost: 2526 fb (+1500 for the surgery)

This device requires the cyborg to also have a Second Brain and an artificial eye.

The Knowing Glance is a favorite implant of the Cyberevolutionaries. This secret sect of heretics uses it for identification and the passing of information. The implant is a modified infrared cybersoptic and light system. Inside an artificial eye is a small infrared laser attached to an I/O port that allows it to be tied to an implanted think machine or recording crystal. The infrared laser is used to beam the information out through the eye to a recipient. In addition to giving the ability to see in the dark, the infrared cybersense allows the user to see the infrared light produced by another and record any information beamed to him. This allows two Cyberevolutionaries to identify each other and share information even across a room just by looking at each other. The transfer requires eye contact and a single turn/round to complete. If both parties have implanted think machines, they can carry on a conversation just by staring at each other. Additionally the infrared laser can be used as a light source in totally dark, largely temperature-constant areas.

VPS Traits

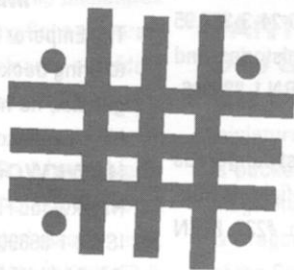
Benefice cost: 9 pts

Features: Cybersenses (Infrared sight, Video), Light, Self-Powered, Hidden

At great distances, it might require a Dexterity + Observe roll to correctly make eye contact and a proper connection with another person.

d20 System Traits

At great distances, it might require a Spot check to correctly make eye contact and a proper connection with another person.



Heretics and OUTSIDERS

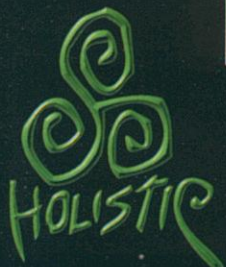
Threats to Crown and Soul

The Known Worlds are rife with those who refuse to follow the social order. Whether practicing their rebellion in private or fomenting public revolt, these malcontents threaten the powers-that-be. Heretics refuse to follow the Church's doctrines of proper faith, and so risk their own souls and those of others through their example. Psychics plot to overthrow mundane humanity — or worse, attempt to force psychic awakening on others through the mysterious Sathra Effect.

It is not only humanity's soul that is so threatened, however, for its very right to rule itself is challenged by the potential power of the alien Vau Hegemony. The incursions of the metamorphic Symbiots threaten to warp peoples' own bodies. What's more, barbaric human star-nations lust after the riches of the Known Worlds — or wish to forcibly convert their citizens to false faiths. Amidst these dangers, is it any wonder the stars darken before such sin?

Heretics & Outsiders is the second volume in the *Secret Societies* series. Sir Chamon Mazarin, the Emperor's spymaster, presents new dossiers on heretical cults, underground psychic covens and foreign intelligence agencies — including Vau infiltrators and Symbiot insurgents.

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