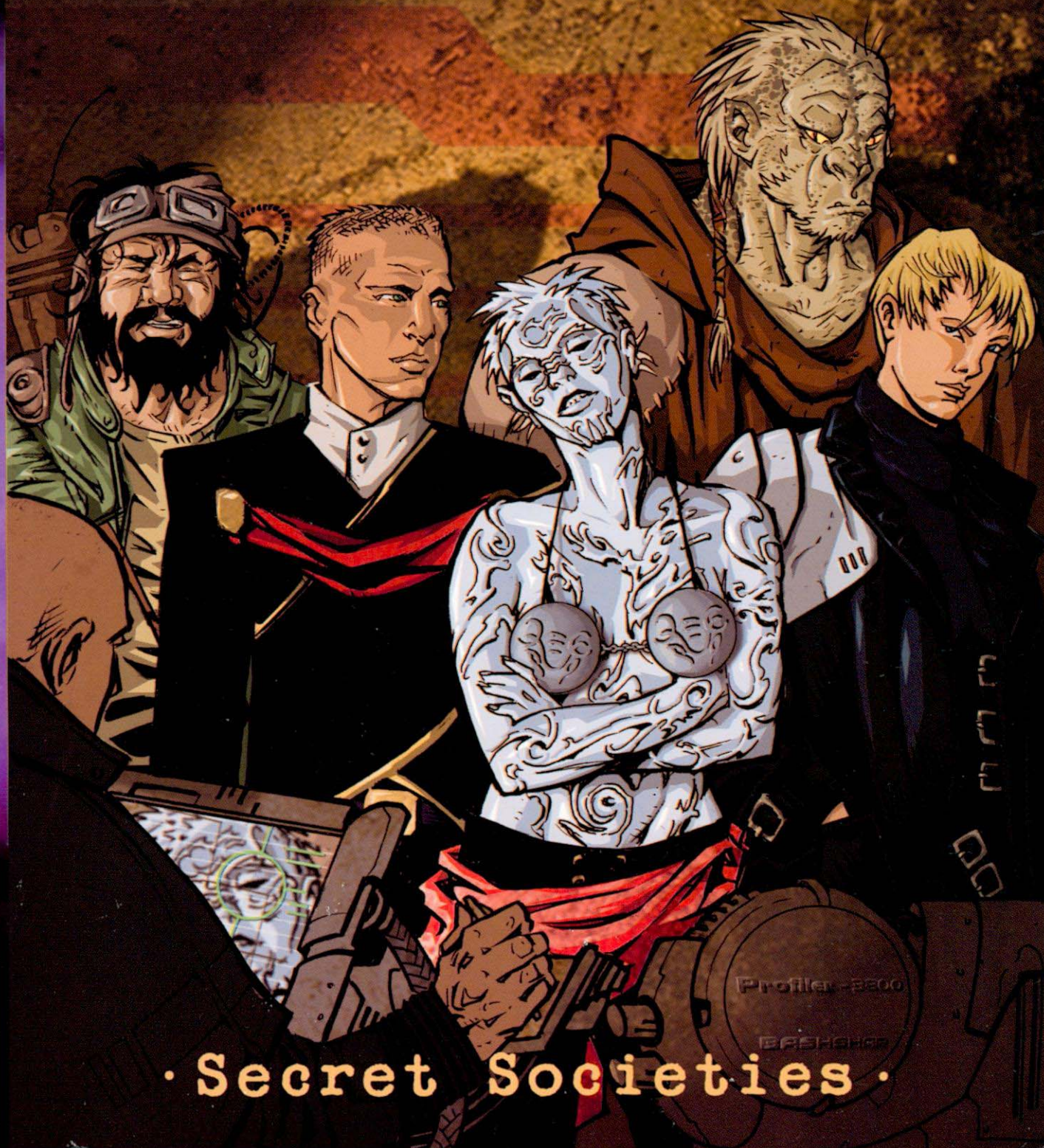


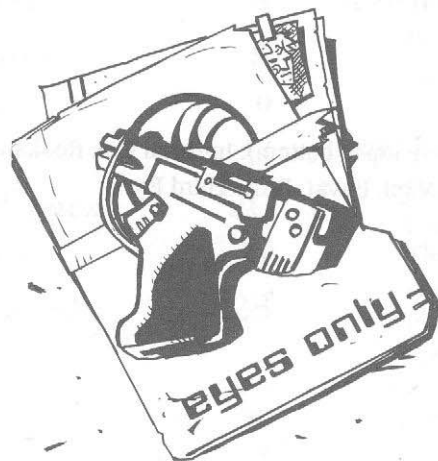
SPIES and Revolutionaries



• Secret Societies •

FADING SUNS™

SPIES and Revolutionaries



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Credits

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Speak not of the shadows that conspire around us. Instead, banish them with light, or remain silent lest they corrupt thy voice.

— Saint Horace, *The Epistles* (apocryphal)

Emblems:

The emblems on the front cover are (from top to bottom): Imperial Eye, Rooks, Archons, Mutasih, Synecullum, Kalinithi. Those on the back cover are: Killroys, The Vigil, Bava!, FAR, Third Era

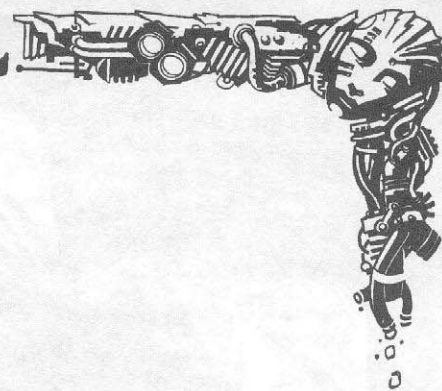


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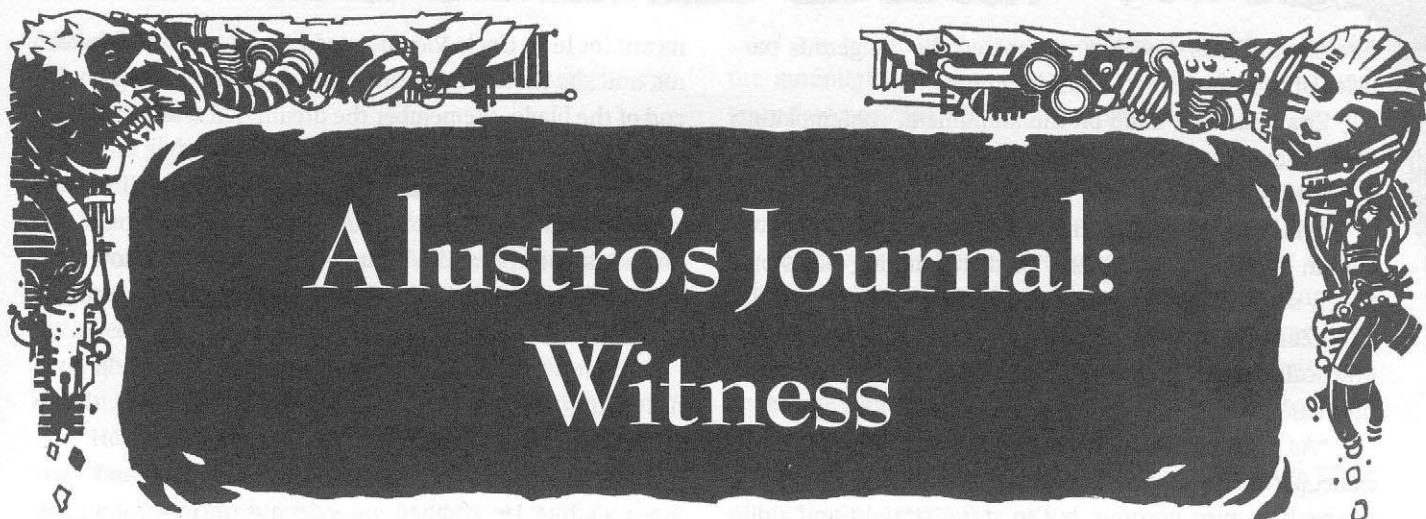


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Alustro's Journal: Witness

Erian Li Halan and I walked through the Resplendent Dew Gardens, both of us amazed at its marvels. Sculpted hedges mimicked animals from across the Known Worlds — mastoplants from Artemis, gorduvants from Grail and even a pod of leaping slu'meevee from Madoc. In some areas of the vast estate, the leafy creatures growing from the ground had existed only in legend, such as the mastadon, a folk monster of old Urth.

"Fascinating," Erian said, stopping to stare off the path at a collection of pack animals made almost real by the well-sculpted hedges. It helped that we walked in the late evening, when silhouettes shadowed mundane details, helping to evoke the myth of form. "They are exact duplicates of the maned wolf hedges on my father's estate."

I looked at them but they were unfamiliar to me. "I have visited that place many times and I do not recognize them."

"They hunted only in the family's private garden, off limits to those not of the immediate blood. I wonder how they came to inhabit this place, so far away from their home."

"I understand that often Li Halan ambassadors who are placed here to serve the Imperial Court bring with them tokens from their own lands, to ease the pain of separation. Perhaps one such ambassador once knew of your family's gardens and sought to imitate them here."

"Perhaps," Erian said, moving on. The path curved to the left and revealed an open lawn sparkling with many miniature ponds and tiny streams, each crossed by tiny bridges. "And yet, I still wonder. Those wolves bring back ill memories. A strange event in the garden, when I was... oh, I must have been no more than nine years old."

I listened quietly. I knew my lady well enough to realize that she needed to reminisce aloud without interruption.

"My father held a party. I'm not sure why. There were always parties for one reason or another, either ours or someone else's, where we children were taken off to distant estates and left alone with our nannies while the adults socialized in grand ballrooms or serene pavilions.

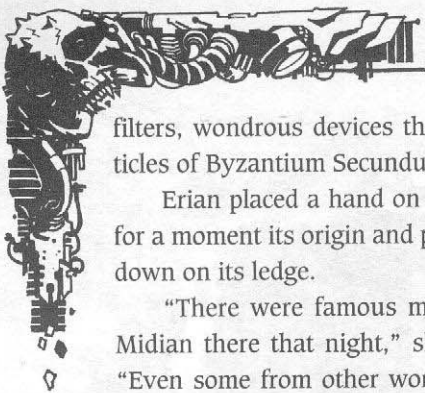
"This one was different, for it seemed more celebratory. I think it was my grandmother's birthday, perhaps? Or some other important anniversary of her's worth celebrating. My Uncle Vicardo was there."

I frowned, but knew Erian did not see my expression, for I still walked behind her. I knew the name. And the rumors about his demise. This memory was becoming familiar to me, also.

"We don't talk about him much, today. He was said to have been involved in... revolutionary thoughts and deeds. For a long time, I didn't understand what they were. I heard the rumors and gossip, of course. Most people believe he was involved in some sort of pro-Republican conspiracy, an attempt to place someone on the Imperial throne who would then declare a Third Republic. Of course, this was in the middle of the early Emperor Wars, so such plotting was perhaps even more dangerous than usual."

We stepped over a stream and entered a grove, ringed with Urthish yew trees. In the center was a small plinth with ancient markings, long worn by harsh weather. I suspected it had come here from its original home — wherever that was — already in its present state. These gardens saw much rain, but were protected by ancient Second Republic nanotech





filters, wondrous devices that ionized the dangerous particles of Byzantium Secundus's acidic rain.

Erian placed a hand on the monument, contemplating for a moment its origin and possible meaning, and then sat down on its ledge.

"There were famous men and women from all over Midian there that night," she said, continuing her story. "Even some from other worlds. I recognized a few: Duke Shou Zan, the famous general, and Countess Sa, considered practically a saint even then. Others, too, most of whom I do not remember.

"As usual, I was ushered in to stand nearby as the guests came, part of the illustrious host's shining family. I was not to speak or even murmur, but to stand straight and smile always. Once this was over, I was taken back to my rooms and not allowed to see the goings-on. However, this was our estate, not that of a stranger, so I knew well how to sneak away from my vigilant nanny and spy on the socialites from the top of banisters. I even knew a few hidey holes once designed for our family's secret guard.

"But I quickly became bored with watching people bow and smile and speak venomous lies to one another in honeyed words. Even then, I could recognize the cruelty of the court. My brother, old enough to stand by my father's elbow but still too young to be allowed to speak to guests, saw me on the stairs and scowled. Fearful he would report me, I slipped away into the garden and played in the groves and streams while the sounds of conversation could be heard over the walls from all directions.

"I heard voices approach from nearby, and wondered who would be walking in the private gardens, one of the few places forbidden to guests this night. I crept through the underbrush to get a peek and saw my Uncle Vicardo walking and talking in whispers with a courtesan. They giggled now and then.

"Too young to enjoy such voyeurism, I began to crawl away when I heard a sharp intake of breath behind me, the sound of someone startled and in fear — too afraid to even scream. I crept back and saw a robed figure standing before the couple. He wore a large hood and a mask underneath it, and had apparently stepped from out of the hedges across from me. The maned wolf hedges.

"He spoke: 'Baron Vicardo Chou Ssu Li Halan, you are guilty of conspiring against the prince!'

"Poor uncle stammered, deathly afraid, 'No!' he cried, 'You don't understand!'

"The hooded, masked figure drew a rapier and said, 'I understand too well!'

"He then stepped forward in a flash and thrust his sword at my uncle. But instead of poor uncle, his blade pierced the courtesan. She had leapt to save uncle and took the blow

meant for him. Uncle Vicardo stood staring at her with horror, and she choked out a final message before dying on the end of the blade: 'Remember the dream that was our ancestors!'

"The masked assailant seemed confused, as if he had not expected this. He acted very much unlike an ominous and sinister force, and withdrew his blade almost lovingly, as if he feared to stain the dead girl's dress. I was deathly silent. I don't think I even breathed.

"My uncle bent down to cradle her in his arms. 'It does not matter now,' he said. 'My dream is dead. Do with me what you will.'

"The masked man seemed to think a while and then acted swiftly: He stabbed my grieving uncle through the heart. He died without a sound.

"I must have then gasped or cried out, because the masked figure wheeled and stared at me, crouched on my hands and knees under the hedges. He (or she? I am still unsure) did not seem to know what to do. That's when my nanny arrived. She gasped and took in the situation immediately. She waved her hands at the masked one, as if warding him from me. Even in my terror, I almost giggled at the odd gesticulations she made, so unusual for my prim and proper nanny.

"But the masked figure bowed to her and then slipped back into the maned wolf hedges from where he had come. Nanny grabbed my hand and hauled me up, dragging me painfully back to my rooms by a route I'd never seen before or since. Once there, she harangued me viciously, making me swear never to tell a soul what I had seen on threat of death for the both of us. I began to cry.

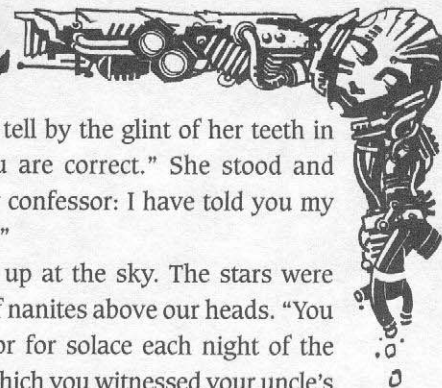
"She went to her locked cabinet and withdrew a large chocolate bar, the kind I was only ever allowed to eat on birthdays. She hushed me and fed me sweets the rest of the night until I fell asleep. I knew by that gesture alone that what had happened was truly important and that my silence was equally important. Nanny never broke the no-sweets rule. Until that night. She never broke it again. Even today, I associate sweets with conspiracy."

I had been standing quietly and respectfully throughout all of this, but now felt the need to speak.

"I have heard of your uncle. Many people have. He was said to have been killed by a jealous lover. Others, however, whispered that he had been killed by the Hidden Martyrs. I see now that the latter version is the truth."

Erian looked at me but I could not read her expression in the darkness. "I only discovered that years later, after learning about the Hidden Martyrs and their ways. I often think about my poor uncle and the crime he had been accused of. Perhaps he was a pro-Republican, but if so, it was for love. When his love died, so died his ideals. He quickly





followed them into death."

I nodded and sat down next to her. "And why do you tell me this now?"

Erian sighed. "I don't really know. Absolution, maybe? I have carried this with me for so long."

"Carried what?" I said. "You could have done nothing."

"No. Untrue. I could have cried out and brought guards or guests running. I could have saved my uncle, maybe even his lover."

"And what then? You would have been watched by the Hidden Martyrs for the rest of your life, if not killed by them."

"How are you so sure they don't watch me now?"

"I'm not, but rumors says they work mainly within the Garden Worlds, rarely without. It has been a long time since we were home."

"Yes, but my brother will surely have tried to contact them and turn them against me."

"I suspect that, if that were true, you would have seen them already. They may be fanatics, but they surely aren't so foolish as to follow your brother's twisted crusade against you."

I saw her smile; I could tell by the glint of her teeth in the moonlight. "I hope you are correct." She stood and smoothed her cape. "So, my confessor: I have told you my crime. What is my penance?"

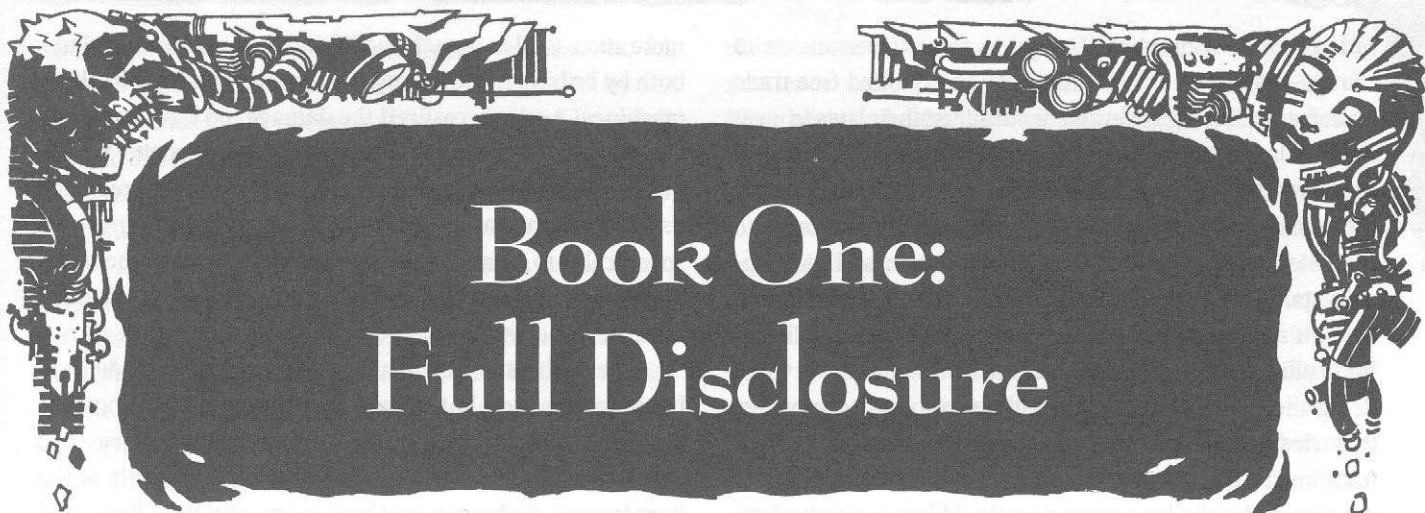
I leaned back and look up at the sky. The stars were dim, clouded by the screen of nanites above our heads. "You are to pray to the Pancreator for solace each night of the coming week at the hour in which you witnessed your uncle's murder. Thenceforth, do not remain silent when witnessing crimes, but speak out and rectify them. The little girl you once were could do nothing; let her forced inaction be a lesson for you to act upon your own will at all times."

"I shall do so," she said, head bowed. When she lifted it, I could see her smile again.

"Come, Alustro. We have walked too long alone in the garden. Let us join the others and be joyous!" She stepped out of the grove and headed back to the manse, where the rest of our crew were resting, waiting for us to return.

I followed behind her, glad to witness the bold steps she took as she sallied forth into her future, away from her past.





Book One: Full Disclosure

A Paranoid's View of History

Human history has never appeared especially pleasant. Genocide, oppression, civil wars and other horrors have marked humanity's endeavors from the first. Historians, philosophers, sociologists and many others seek out the cause of these atrocities, scouring tomes, diaries, holovids and more in their quest. Unfortunately, much of what they seek has never been recorded, and much that was recorded has been concealed from prying eyes.

Some of the dark conspiracies that shaped human destiny have come to light, but many more remain shrouded in mystery. Some, like the assassins who once held such power in Holy Terra's Middle East or the fanatics and industrialists who combined to bring National Socialism to power across Europe, were exposed when their forces lost tremendous wars, and history has revealed their plots. Others, like the government intelligence agencies who destabilized foreign governments during the early years of nuclear power, came to light while they were active but remained shrouded in lies. Of course, there are those schemes that never are revealed, and remain the realm of the insightful and the paranoid.

By the time humans reached space, conspirators had learned the lessons of the past, and conspiracies reached monumental proportions. While the history that we see is ugly enough, that which has remained hidden can only be uglier. History's grand scope appears in the rise of megacorporations, with their victory over government rules, and then again in their fall and the subsequent dispersal of humanity. While one can point to societal forces and sweeping cultural changes, others whisper about the roles of key

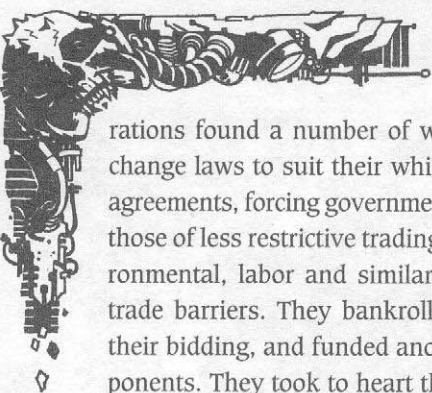
individuals in shaping humanity's destiny. These figures, sometimes famous and sometimes anonymous, made decisions and took actions that had major consequences for an unaware public.

The First Republic

The Zaibatsu learned well from these earlier experiences, and behind-the-scenes manipulations were the order of the day. Records from the pre-Zaibatsu era are especially scarce. The Zaibatsu and the leaders of the First Republic did their best to make their rise appear as a victory for humanity, and little documentation exists of their early meetings. After all, as Adam Smith, the father of the capitalist system that preceded the Zaibatsu, wrote, businessmen "seldom meet together but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public."

The Zaibatsu went to extremes to legitimize their rise to power, making it appear that cultural ethos, technological innovations, and "market forces" made their rise inevitable. What they destroyed was the evidence of their own extreme efforts to overcome all opposition. Massive disinformation campaigns led the way, with corporations funneling vast sums to individuals who then hid their association with their financiers. These individuals would feign to be concerned citizens with no ties to the companies involved, and would pretend that their activism came from grass-roots concerns.

Slowly the Zaibatsu became convinced that the best way for them to hold onto power was to completely free themselves from any country's laws, and the most powerful tool in their arsenal proved to be corporate sovereignty. Corpo-



rations found a number of ways to force governments to change laws to suit their whims. They exploited free trade agreements, forcing governments to adjust their laws to meet those of less restrictive trading partners, claiming that environmental, labor and similar safeguards produced unfair trade barriers. They bankrolled politicians who would do their bidding, and funded anonymous slanders of their opponents. They took to heart the adage that a lie told loudly enough and often enough becomes believed, and their political allies made great claims of sensitivity and caring while doing their bidding. The Zaibatsu also targeted companies that tried to support their political enemies, disrupting their trade and targeting them for cutthroat competition. And they did this under the best cover they could buy, paying whatever they had to keep their secrecy.

Once the First Republic formed and the Zaibatsu incorporated corporate sovereignty into its constitution, the most powerful conspirators became the members of the Zaibatsu boards of directors. Theoretically, there were enough Zaibatsu that no one board should have become too powerful. However, the board members also held seats on other boards, creating interlocking directorships. In fact, at the height of the First Republic, 28 people held all the seats for the 10 biggest zaibatsu, and most of these had more than three. Six different people had seats on eight of them. One man, Wiclief Hunter, had a seat on all 10.

This fact lessened competition in many areas, but actually increased it in others, often with deadly consequences. The Zaibatsu leaders limited their competition in most arenas. Each had its own sphere of influence and power, and the others rarely made serious intrusions into these areas. When they did conflict, it was usually at the behest of lower level officials out to make names for themselves. Of course, when chairmens' schemes and goals came into conflict, all humanity felt the effects — though it might not know the cause.

Where the Zaibatsu competed most fiercely was in newly opened areas. This proved especially true with new technologies and new solar systems. Wiclief Hunter himself justified these sometimes-bloody confrontations as a sort of survival of the fittest. He felt that the fiercer the competition between Zaibatsu, the more effective would be the survivor. For instance, on Leminkainen Agricorp Interstellar and Dextrite Medical Interplanetary fiercely competed for prime cropland even though their boards were almost identical, and Dextrite was a major customer for Agricorp. Their rivalry became especially fierce over the planet's terraforming. Dextrite feared that Agricorp's plans would disrupt the water and molten magma that provided the power for its pharmaceutical plants.

Dextrite hired mercenaries to raid Agricorp engineering facilities, but this overt violence was merely a cover. It was

more successful in secretly modifying the terraforming plans, both by bribing Agricorp engineers and by hacking its think machines. Agricorp realized the damage too late, and made the mistake of trying to take revenge on Dextrite for the billions wasted by its sabotage. This led to the first recorded use of chemical warfare by Dextrite, as it released fungi bred specifically to attack Agricorp crops. The board members watched all of this but never interfered, and applauded Dextrite's success at the end.

The Zaibatus' constant feuding may have made their businesses better, but it took their attention off domestic problems. The rise of Sathraism took them by surprise, and the decision to crush it came from the highest levels of the boardrooms. Sathraism reached across corporate lines, and the Zaibatsu saw pilots and other employees communicating as never before. Afraid that they might lose the space lanes to a consortium of fanatic pilots, they moved to destroy the movement. Of course, conspiracists provide many other reasons for the Zaibatus' reaction: the evil nature of Sathraism; Sathraists were threatening to open the space lanes to all people; psychic powers being discovered by Sathraists put their secrets at risk; board members had been the era's dominant psychics and that the Sathraists threatened their near-monopoly of such abilities; several board members who had become Sathraists began to work against the rest; or Sathraists were planning to assassinate leading board members as the first step in conquering the human race. These are only the most common conspiracy theories. Hundreds more rose during the Diaspora.

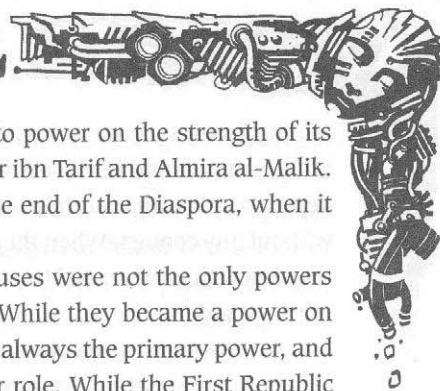
Diaspora

The Diaspora saw the rise of many other conspiracies, though none of them matched the scale of the Zaibatsu or Sathraism. The ones that have the most impact today are those that gave rise to the noble houses, though nobles fiercely deny the conspiratorial nature of their origins. While the idea of nobility (and even royalty) never disappeared on Holy Terra, it became less and less prominent during the First Republic. The Zaibatsu ended what little power nobles still possessed and made titles nothing but a decoration.

This did not keep people of noble birth from stressing their own importance — and complaining that the Zaibatsu had usurped their rightful place. While noble titles provided nothing toward advancement within the megacorp structure or on Holy Terra itself, they did help one's status on the new worlds. Also, since other colonists had few ways to check on each other's backgrounds, people could claim whatever heritage they pleased and not be challenged. Indeed, giving oneself a noble title became something of a fad after the Sathraist rebellion, and people with the faintest hint of nobility in their genealogy began to promote it like mad.

The craze became especially popular with frontier poli-





ticians and small businessmen on the new worlds, who felt that noble claims gave them a legitimacy denied by the Zaibatsu. Since many worlds had been colonized by people who had all lived in one area on Holy Terra, once one person made a claim to nobility, it would often spread to his family, friends and business associates.

As Zaibatsu power waned, these groups found themselves in position to take over more and more of the responsibilities abandoned by the First Republic. A number of groups also suddenly "discovered" noble blood when they needed to legitimize their power. House Koprul of Criticorum was a prime example of this. Made up of First Republic politicians and businessmen, its members seemed the most prepared when the First Republic began breaking up. Koprul leaders, now nobles, made claims to lands on a number of different worlds and seized First Republic military bases. The First Republic did nothing to stop this, and may in fact have aided some seizures.

Some houses just declared themselves noble at that point, seeing little need for ancient titles in their new age. House al-Malik is perhaps the best example of this effort, though its scholars have done much to validate their claims. They have constructed elaborate diagrams of their intermarriages and relationships to trace their ancestry back to such ancient figures as Sultan Saladin, King David, and King Faisal I. However, its success is not predicated as much on these

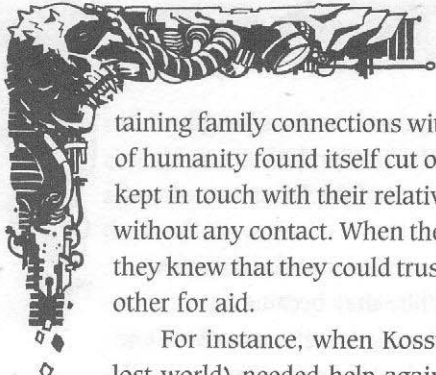
claims. Instead, it moved into power on the strength of its new leaders, especially Munir ibn Tarif and Almira al-Malik. They kept the house until the end of the Diaspora, when it made its move to power.

Of course, the noble houses were not the only powers to rise during the Diaspora. While they became a power on many planets, they were not always the primary power, and often ended up with a minor role. While the First Republic could hardly be considered the most democratic of institutions, most people were at least familiar with that form of government and viewed it as superior to others. Political parties rose up, military juntas seized power, religious cults declared crusades against one another, and psychic covens manipulated everyone else.

The diversity of regimes proved a handicap to any authority that tried to span more than one solar system. It did not take long for local rule to become ingrained on many worlds, and negotiations between religious fanatics, nationalist zealots and noble houses rarely led to anything except more fighting. This also affected trade between the planets, and piracy reached all new heights as alliances fractured and isolationism increased. Interstellar trade dropped off drastically, until the only ships able to make long voyages were either highly armed or part of well-protected convoys.

The noble houses flourished in such an atmosphere, for they could demonstrate strong planetary ties while main-





taining family connections with other worlds. While the rest of humanity found itself cut off from its cousins, the nobles kept in touch with their relatives, though years might go by without any contact. When they did communicate, however, they knew that they could trust one another and call on each other for aid.

For instance, when Kossuth nobles on Tophet (now a lost world) needed help against a local crime family, reinforcements came from Holy Terra, Gwynneth, Tethys and elsewhere. No one planet could offer much, but each could combine with others to provide a fair number of troops and a substantial amount of money. In addition, the diversity of contributions meant that the crime family could not anticipate what it was up against, as some Kossuth provided technologies and weapons unique to their worlds.

New noble houses came and went, sometimes falling to local enemies and sometimes to other houses. House Decados proved especially capable at swallowing other noble families, and the intelligence agents who formed it appeared to have contacts and inroads all over space. The rise of House Decados was itself a very successful conspiracy — one that involved agents from dozens of different organizations and planets.

The Church

One group that rose in power to rival that of the noble houses was the Universal Church. In the early days of the Prophet, no one would have expected it to grow as it did. In fact, Zebulon made little effort to start a new religion. Until he saw the Holy Flame, he often presented himself as a reformer for the religions that had spread from Holy Terra. He also warned against the rebirth of Sathraism, calling its spiritual aspect a fraud that all too often distracted people from true belief.

His disciples did much to spread his work, often acting in a quiet and conspiratorial manner, but the Church really came into its own through the efforts of Patriarch Palamedes and his allies. Many of these were his relatives in House Aleto, and he recruited a number of bishops from their ranks. His success in expanding the Church is well known, but of equal importance were his battles against those who would split the Church. For instance, many of the early bishops bitterly opposed him when he sought to move the center of the faith from Midian to Holy Terra. The bitterness became so intense that he blamed at least two assassination attempts on the pro-Midian faction. While his battle for followers with Amalthea never turned violent, it involved constant maneuverings with various planetary leaders. Only the coming of the Ukari made the Church the dominant force it is today.

That humanity could present any kind of united front to the Ukari threat is amazing. At the time, few groups held

significant power on more than one or two worlds, and many planets lacked any kind of central authority. The Vau had demonstrated just how fragile humanity's divisions had made it, and the Ur-Ukar's style of war took advantage of this weakness. It often seemed as if the Ur-Ukar knew which humans were at war with each other, and their offenses took advantage of this. Not recognizing the true nature of the alien danger, humans preyed on each other's seeming weaknesses and interfered with the flow of aid to beleaguered areas. Some even helped the Ur-Ukar, including some of the ancestors of the al-Malik.

The Church, however, seemed preternaturally aware of the danger. Palamedes had long warned that humanity must unite against deeper menaces, but most people assumed that he was speaking metaphorically. When the Ukari revealed themselves on Criticorum, long a focal point for Church warnings about sin, the Church seemed the only force ready to move against them. Indeed, Palamedes had quietly put Holy Terra's military industries to use after the move from Midian. After the Ukar seized Aylon, he revealed the full strength of the Church's military arm. He also managed to convince other human powers to ally with him, sometimes at the threat of excommunication and his dreadnoughts' guns.

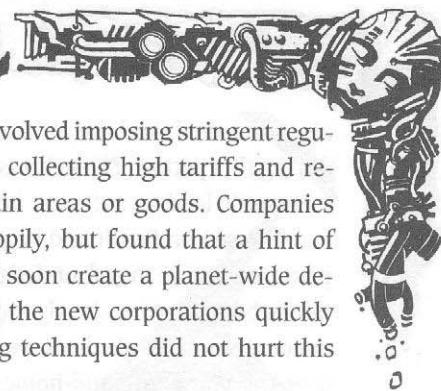
This new unification did not happen overnight. The war dragged on for years, during which time Palamedes managed to convince more and more people that they needed to help, lest they become the aliens' next targets. It seemed miraculous how alien terrorists would strike at places controlled by whatever faction Palamedes was trying to mobilize, creating cries for immediate vengeance. The Patriarch also had an uncanny knack for winning a big battle whenever popular sentiment was fluctuating or turning against him.

After much fighting, however, resentment at a war that just seemed to drag on built and built. Just as the grumbling began to grow into a roar, Palamedes revealed the location of the Ukari homeworld, and the greatest fleet in human history made the jump to that dark world. Now that he had removed the threat to human space, he began his final push to reunite humanity. Both his military and political power were without peer, and slowly even the most resistant made at least token recognition of the Universal Church.

While this newly united humanity included an incredibly wide variety of people, one type that Palamedes could not abide were those who claimed that he had instigated or manipulated the long war. Charges that he had forewarning of the alien plans were immediately quashed, as were the rumors among the Ukari that he had controlled their leader, Rajan oj Malak.

The most common accusation held that one of the Istakhr Seven, a group of Ukar who warned the rest of their race about human encroachment, was secretly a fanatic convert





to the Church. This Ukar, said to be a powerful psychic who Palamedes taught to tame his urge, helped inspire their war hysteria. Unable to control the Ukar's ruler, the psychic slew him and then became his son's main advisor. While none of the Istakhr Seven survived the long war, one of their descendants was named to the ruling council after the war, and she became part of the Suderik clan.

This reunited humanity proved especially receptive to calls for a new republic. While the Church offered it spiritual unity, Palamedes' death left it unable to exert political dominance. His successors began the factionalism and sectarianism that still afflicts the Church. While numerous Church leaders hoped to create a theocracy that would guide humanity for eternity, numerous forces stymied it at every turn. Most notable in these efforts were the giant corporations of that era, some the descendants of Zaibatsu, and others newly formed entities.

The Church had succeeded in ending humanity's isolationism, and the corporations found this new environment especially conducive to their business. With the growing interest in other worlds and a new desire to reconnect the race, the space routes began to crowd with new business. While the noble houses had managed to accumulate most of the political power during the Diaspora, they proved no match for the corporations during the new era. Confined to a few planets, they could not obtain land on other worlds. Corporations, on the other hand, seemed to create new trading opportunities at will, and they merged with one another constantly.

The Second Republic

Criticorum, rebuilt following the Ukar War, became home to corporations who would soon have interests on hundreds of worlds. The ruling Peltan Oligarchy did away with almost all restrictions on business, and companies like the Bashar Corporation used it as a base for innumerable activities. Money began to pour into its coffers, and other planets saw similar effects. Byzantium Secundus, Leagueheim and worlds now lost began to gather wealth on a level unseen since the First Republic. Holy Terra also prospered during these years as a flood of pilgrims brought its money with it.

Most noble houses could not contend with these new forces. Some, like the al-Malik, created alliances with them and achieved new heights of power. Others saw commerce as a threat to their way of life and did everything that they could to stymie its growth. This conflict took on many forms. Some nobles forbade corporate commerce on their worlds, but soon saw the danger of cutting themselves off when their neighbors suddenly began equipping themselves with new weapons. Corporations also worked with networks of smugglers to ensure that their trade continued. When such obstructive nobles finally backed down, the corporations could establish whatever terms they wanted.

A more common tactic involved imposing stringent regulations on the corporations, collecting high tariffs and restricting their trade to certain areas or goods. Companies went along with this unhappily, but found that a hint of access to their goods would soon create a planet-wide desire for them. The fact that the new corporations quickly applied once-lost advertising techniques did not hurt this demand at all.

The Peltan Oligarchy mastered many of these techniques, and its influence grew as it became less obvious. It maintained influence in many of the new companies, but its members withdrew from day-to-day management. Instead, they prepared interstellar marketing campaigns, both to promote new products and to open new markets. When the Li Halan demanded massive bribes to allow trading on its worlds, Jeroboam Fogle and Henrietta Cliff of the oligarchy managed to place several broadcast satellites in orbit over Kish. These satellites began broadcasting both educational and anti-noble messages. They also began secretly pumping money into local businesses.

Within a generation, the Li Halan found its influence on Kish waning, and its own nobles began clamoring for new consumer goods. The house began selling its lands to meet its new needs, only stopping the trend when Palides Li Halan came to power. He made a new alliance with the Peltan Oligarchy, opening Li Halan worlds to their traders and becoming a secret member of their organization.

The primary groups who formed the Second Republic were a number of trade alliances that had come into existence since the Ukar War, though members of the Peltan Oligarchy had investments in most of them. These Leagues began with the need to make space travel safer and to open new markets. They created small police fleets to stop piracy, both from traditional brigands and from overzealous tariff collectors. While none of these fleets was especially powerful by itself, combined they created a force second only to the Church navy.

That these new corporations rarely clashed with the Church surprises some historians, but many of these early executives were also stalwart Church members. They contributed generously to its causes, and many members of the clergy learned to turn to them when they needed funds. This was also a time of political conflict for the Church and the nobility, and many merchants learned to play the two sides off each other. When the Merchant Authority, the Liberty Confluence and other merchant leagues announced the creation of the Second Republic, the Church accepted it as another counterbalance to noble power.

While many noble houses opposed the new republic, the most successful actually embraced it. House Li Halan had learned its lesson, and its members became leaders in the new government. Houses Windsor, Chauki and Alecto

also prospered, and the al-Malik really came into their own during this period. Those houses that clashed with the new mercantile leaders suffered, however.

House Von Ferdinand began its long feud with the corporations before they founded the Second Republic, but hostilities became overt shortly after the Second Republic's first major election. While the Republic did not claim sovereignty over the Von Ferdinand homeworld, it did try to make the house's holdings on other worlds subject to its laws — and taxes. The Von Ferdinand strongly objected to this, and proved a stubborn foe.

The usual threats of blockades did little good, because Redand, the Von Ferdinand homeworld, had been self-sufficient for centuries, and its enclaves on other worlds could fend for themselves. As if this were not bad enough, the Von Ferdinand had strong contacts with many other groups, and its leaders had supported the Church since the Ukar War. In addition, as House Von Ferdinand made its stand, it began attracting supporters from across human space, and from beyond the other noble houses. Anyone who felt threatened or aggrieved by the rising tide of democracy sided with the Von Ferdinand.

This motley consortium included other noble houses, radical Church sects, trade competitors, nationalistic groups, anti-alien fanatics, and those who promoted many other agendas. Second Republic leaders saw this coalition as part of a growing backlash to its authority, and they began calling emergency meeting after emergency meeting to deal with the threat. Some called for calm, insisting that trade restrictions and the coalition's own differences would eventually break it. Others, however, insisted on immediate action — something that would prove that the Second Republic was a force with which to be reckoned. As the Von Ferdinand opposition heated up, the calls for strong action grew and eventually overwhelmed the other voices.

One night in 3526, armed teams landed on Von Ferdinand estates, seizing armories and rounding up family members. At the same time, a significant portion of the Second Republic armed fleet made the jump into Von Ferdinand space. It quickly neutralized their defenses at the jumpgate and began making its way into the system's interior. News media quickly noticed what was happening and trumpeted the events across space. Second Republic leaders called the action necessary to head off greater hostilities later. They promised a speedy resolution and a quick victory for democracy.

The quick victory turned into a grinding stalemate. The Von Ferdinand fiefs proved well stocked and ready to resist. In their home system, the Von Ferdinand put up an extremely spirited resistance, harrying the Second Republic fleet all the way to Redand, its home planet. By the time the fleet made orbit around Redand, it had suffered a 25 percent re-

duction in its effectiveness, and the news had begun to spread throughout the Republic. The orbital bombardment began, only to be met by planet-to-space missiles and energy shields that protected the Von Ferdinand's main installations. House Von Ferdinand went to great lengths to dramatize the suffering of Redand's common people, and popular opinion began to shift against the Second Republic.

While few doubt that the Second Republic would have succeeded in the long run, calls for it to cease its offensive grew. When the Church weighed in and called for peace, the Second Republic acquiesced, and Archbishop Durang negotiated a peace. Immediately rumors sprang up about the real reason for the Second Republic's attack. Some pointed to the prime land that the Von Ferdinand then owned on Criticorum. Others whispered that the Von Ferdinands controlled an Anunnaki relic that helped them cloak their motives while revealing what others were up to. Such a relic threatened the heart of the Second Republic, or so the gossips said.

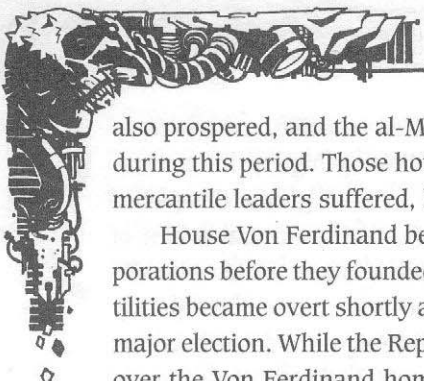
Whatever the cause, the Von Ferdinand debacle and similar Republic missteps helped galvanize opposition to the Second Republic — an opposition that did not fade even during its glory days. Numerous small groups saw the Second Republic as responsible for all their woes, and they worked in and out of the system to bring it down. While these many disparate groups worked against each other as often as they worked together, their combined efforts proved a constant drag on Second Republic resources.

In addition, the Church-brokered agreement with the Von Ferdinand also changed its relationship with the Second Republic. While the Church had worked with the Republic's founders, it found itself more and more in opposition to its new growth and role. Often the Church found itself the only force speaking out against the excesses of Second Republic businesses and politicians. The Church had also become a large landowner and established businesses of its own that the Second Republic sought to tax. Holy Terra offered the largest tax base in human space, and the Church was moving to put more and more of the planet's resources under its control.

As always, Holy Terra divided into innumerable factions. Many people wanted to see the Church role lessened and the planet more fully integrated into the Second Republic. Others wanted to see the Church reign supreme and secular authority removed completely. That Holy Terra, home of the Church, and Byzantium Secundus, crown jewel of the Second Republic, sat nearly side by side only exasperated the situation.

The Fall

By the 40th century, Holy Terra had become a hive of action for many of the groups calling for the dissolution of the Second Republic. Second Republic intelligence agents



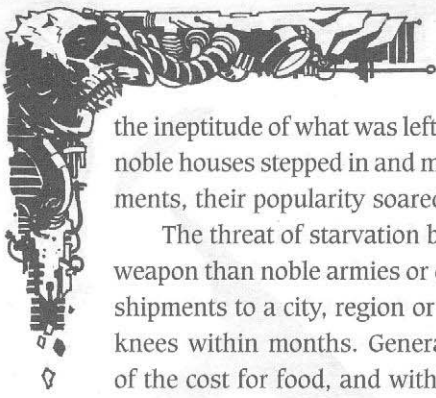
operated there at a distinct disadvantage due to the Church's dominance. Nobody knows which group sabotaged the welfare think machines, but most believed it to have involved more than one. The most common accusation has involved Church agents, but their technical acumen was in doubt. Due to the sheer number of computers and amount of data involved, such sabotage must have involved hundreds of agents on many different worlds, all coordinated by some sort of organizational masterminds. That the Church had such organizers working for it is undisputed, as is the fact that many of the best — the agents of the Synecallum — worked undercover and had infiltrated many groups throughout the Republic.

We know that Second Republic leaders believed the Church had been involved, and they sought to buy it off by making the Church the official religion. This move may have emboldened the Republic's other foes, and finally the rogue worlds made their attack on Byzantium Secundus. These rogue worlders, including House Von Ferdinand, did not seem especially surprised when the Ten moved against them. They slowly pulled their forces off Byzantium Secundus, retreated to their homeworlds, and disappeared into the mists of time. They closed their jumpgates or had their gates closed for them in the many small wars that broke out as the Second Republic collapsed. Those that survived abandoned their fiefs on any planets but the ones they controlled, leaving little trace of themselves behind.

No one can deny that the Ten were prepared to survive and prosper during the Fall. As the rogue worlders made their move, the Ten claimed Second Republic military bases in their fiefs "for the good of humanity." They then sped their forces to confront the rogue worlds, appearing in a well-coordinated advance. After the rogue worlders retreated, suffering only minimal casualties, the Ten took over what was left of the Second Republic government. They arrested numerous officials, charging them with everything from dereliction of duty to ill-defined crimes against humanity, and shut down most media outlets as part of their emergency powers. Attempts to mount any resistance to this noble takeover met with harsh responses, and hundreds of thousands of people disappeared in the ensuing chaos (and noble repression).

Humanity also came to realize that the nobles had quietly taken control of most of the major food producing businesses even before the Fall started. They had bought up land, taken over businesses, and did much to curtail small farm operations and urban greenhouses, as well as algae production and the conversion of inedible organic items to foods. One of the first symptoms of the Fall came in the form of food shortages, as the noble houses stockpiled food and prevented its delivery to normal distribution points. Most people blamed this on either the general chaos of the Fall or





the ineptitude of what was left of the Second Republic. When noble houses stepped in and made very public food disbursements, their popularity soared.

The threat of starvation became an even more effective weapon than noble armies or death squads. Cutting off food shipments to a city, region or continent could bring it to its knees within months. Generational contracts became part of the cost for food, and within nearly a single generation, almost all of the Known Worlds were in noble or Church hands. With their control complete, the Ten began the next stage of their takeover — incessant feuding and backstabbing.

Alliances and hatreds ebbed and flowed, changing as quickly as an Avestite at an orgy. Some houses, like the Li Halan, underwent drastic changes instigated by only a few of their members. Human contact diminished, as some worlds cut themselves off from external contact and others found themselves cut off against their will. Many planets fell into internal strife that prevented them from flying to other systems and scared people off from theirs. As external contact ceased, they became forgotten, their jumproutes lost. Finally, some worlds actively sought out existing jumpkeys to their routes and destroyed them in order to give them the isolation they desired.

By the time Vladimir came to power, the Known Worlds had started to resemble that which we know today. House Alecto had become one of the most significant powers in the new order, and Vladimir was the greatest leader of that house. He operated very much in the open, proudly extolling his virtues and letting everyone know whether they were friend or foe. His actions against the barbarians (basically, any planets not tied to the Ten or the Church) brought him many allies — and more than a few enemies. The force that he used to make himself Emperor involved much of what remained of the Second Republic's military equipment. The Windsor, Justinian, Van Gelder and Gesar houses gave him his primary support, but other houses, like the Hawkwood, Hazat and al-Malik, also ended up aiding his effort. He arrived at his coronation promising to be the spark that would relight the stars.

His death turned space into a whirlpool of death, starting mere seconds after his assassination. All the Ten had sent forces to salute his coronation, but most of these were just for show. The Hazat and Decados ships proved more heavily armed than the rest, however. With their minor house allies, they quickly destroyed the Alecto contingent, including Vladimir's flagship. They pressed their attack on other worlds as well, attacking their enemies before they had even received word of the Emperor's death. The Church also weighed in, seizing Alecto lands "to protect their inhabitants."

The Li Halan also sided with the Decados, and the Alecto alliance fell apart. The Hawkwood and al-Malik were the first to break ranks with the Alecto, and soon their other allies were on the run as well. More worlds became cut off from the rest of humanity, and more were wrecked by the war. Finally, human space was left with the worlds and noble houses we know today.

It took the Known Worlds several centuries to recover from the war. Even the victors had been ravaged, and this marked the weakest state of humanity since it entered the interstellar age. Interplanetary communications became a rarity, and interstellar communications almost shut down completely. Even contact between continents and regions grew dangerous, and only the most committed managed to maintain any sort of communication.

Of course, the members of the many conspiracies swirling around at the time were among the most committed. They managed to keep their ideas and plans alive during these difficult times, either maintaining their own ships or finding passage on those that still flew. Their own conflicts became more and more intense. With the great war fleets of Vladimir's era mere shells of their former selves, conflicts took on subtler and quieter aspects.

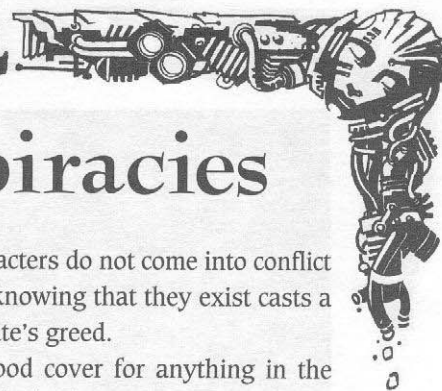
The Emperor Wars

Most house and guild intelligence operations expanded during these years, taking on larger roles since they could operate on a smaller budget than a regular military could. They also found this new era more conducive to their sort of tactics. Since people rarely knew what was even happening in the next fief, conspirators could act with a great deal of anonymity. Their tendrils spread throughout the Known Worlds, finally culminating in the Emperor Wars.

All of the conspiracies of which we are aware played significant roles in those 40 years of war as well as the years leading up to them. They either had their own candidates to support or saw the chaos the wars wrought as the perfect time to advance their own agendas. Mammonists generated magnitudes of wealth with their war profiteering, while the Charioteers' Killroys took the opportunity to collect hundreds of jumpkeys that had escaped their control.

Indeed, the Emperor Wars were as much a conflict of conspiracies as they were of armies. More than a few new conspiracies grew out of the wars, including some that favor the Emperor and some that want him dead. Unfortunately, no conspiracies died during this time, and now the Known Worlds face more than ever before. All seem to either want to use the Emperor or destroy him.





On the Nature of Conspiracies

Some people see conspiracies lurking behind every event in the Known Worlds. Others believe them to be overemphasized, the creations of overactive imaginations. Indeed, the conspiracies that fill the Fading Suns universe operate with an amazing level of both invisibility and openness. The vast majority of humans have no idea that mortal manipulators affect their lives. While few serfs have any problem imagining unseen supernatural hands toying with every part of their existences, they have a harder time imagining humans doing the same. As humans gain education and come into closer contact with each other, however, they find themselves in both real and imagined conflict with each other more often. It seems that the more sophisticated a culture becomes, the more likely it is to start blaming hidden manipulators for its problems.

Oubliette guild Mind Physicks offer many explanations for this. They say that some people look to conspiracies to make themselves feel comfortable. Such plots prove that someone really *is* in charge, and reality is not as random as it might seem. Others note humanity's long-held fear of outsiders, and say that as our world involves more strangers, we make up roles for them to fit our view of things. These roles are often antagonistic and help justify our own failures. This is similar to another, more mystical theory, that says people create what they perceive. Thus, if people look for Good, they find it magnified, but if they look for Evil, then it too increases. Of course, everyone now seems to be looking for Evil. Finally, some Oubliette guildsmembers say that the conspiracies really exist, and that people need to realize this as soon as possible. Then again, those who understand conspiracies often realize that they are as lost as anyone else.

Game Roles

Conspiracies offer gamemasters innumerable tools and plot devices. Their most obvious role is to provide allies and enemies. A master Hawkwood fencer (and his entourage) can be tough enough, but just wait until the characters learn that he is targeting Questing Knights as part of an anti-Alexius conspiracy. Ur-Ukar psychics can cause massive devastation, especially when they can draw on Bava's resources.

A second function of conspiracies is to allow gamemasters to reveal secrets over a long period of time. Conspiracies rarely show their true nature all at once. Instead, it happens bits at a time, as if someone was unraveling a blanket. Gamemasters can shape their conspiracies to fit their chronicles or shape their chronicles to fit their conspiracies. As a third feature, conspiracies give a greater depth

to a setting. Even if the characters do not come into conflict with the Mammonists, just knowing that they exist casts a new light on a Reeve advocate's greed.

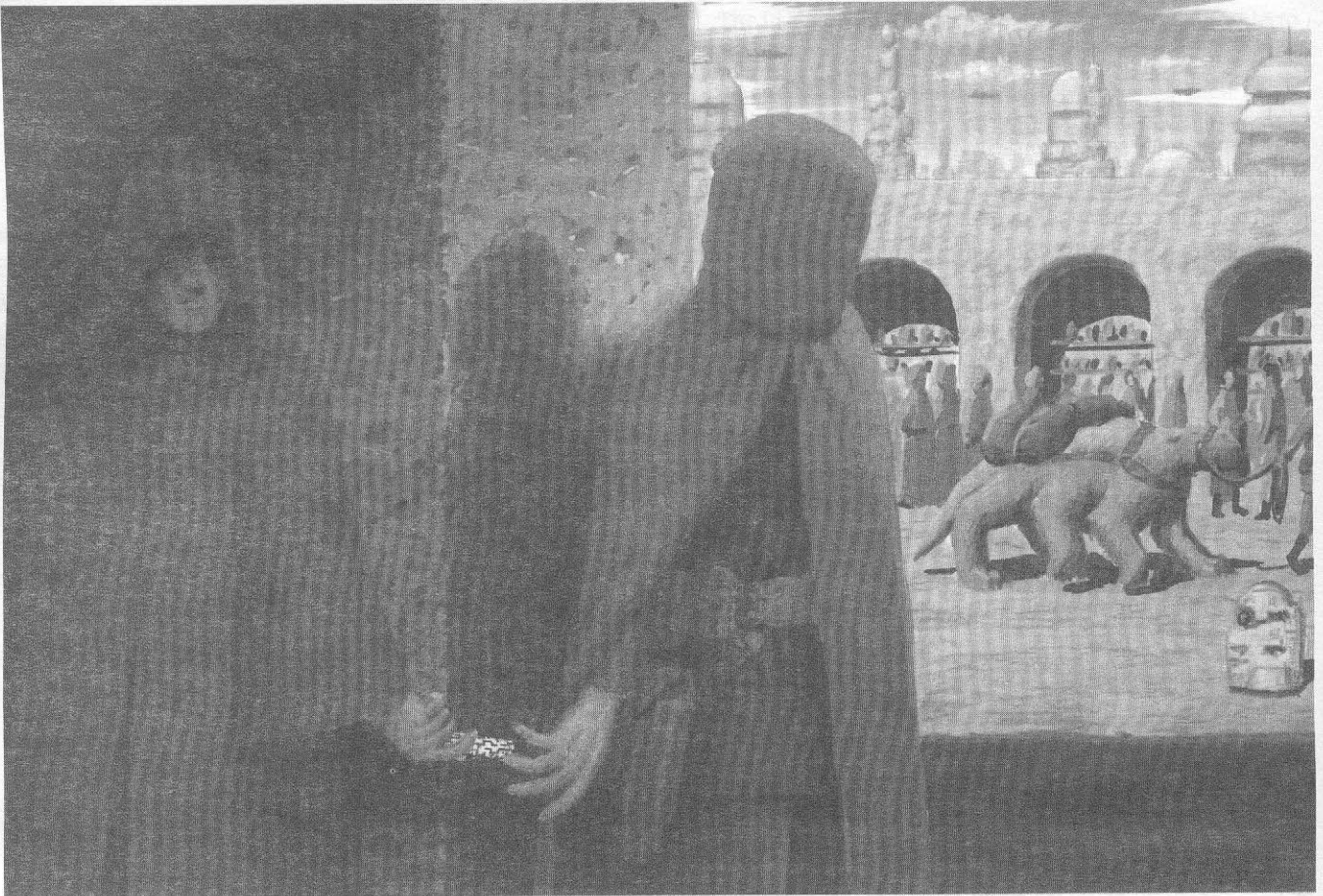
Conspiracies make a good cover for anything in the game. After all, they can be behind anything, and nobody ever knows their real goals. However, gamemasters must make revelations. The best use of conspiracies involves balancing hiding too much and revealing too much. Gamemasters can also introduce the conspiracies at any point during the chronicle. They may have been there the whole time, acting covertly, or they may have just taken an interest in the characters' activities. By the same token, gamemasters should feel free to ignore them completely. They can make characters feel ineffectual, as if events would have gone the same way even if the characters had not gotten involved.

Conspiracy Traits

Game conspiracies have a number of characteristics in common, and gamemasters can use these to make their conspiracies more realistic... and more ominous. First of all, most claim a more grandiose history and power than they really have. They do their best to trace their ancestry back into the mists of time, for most feel that age increases their legitimacy and makes them more awe inspiring. This also helps them hide their true goals behind layers of misdirection and metaphor. Mammonists can make their quest for money a symbol for anything, and only show its true face when they are ready.

Charismatic leaders help this process. Since only a few people ever really know what the conspiracy is up to, it is important that the most knowledgeable also be the most effective. One person who can organize, inspire, direct, and sometimes even take direct action is extremely important. This does leave the conspiracy open to the threat of falling apart when its leader goes down. However, conspiracies are never completely revealed or destroyed. Even if they appear destroyed, a secret aspect can later arise. There are always parts to it about which no one knows anything. Conspiracies are by their nature hidden and threatening, and gamemasters should capitalize on that as best they can.

Their size reinforces this. Conspiracies are almost always small. The more people involved, the less likely it is to keep its secrets. While two can keep a secret if one is dead, conspiracies do not exist with just one person. It is not a conspiracy unless there are at least two participants. Some conspiracies are extremely small, as in the Third Era cells that pop up on various worlds. Others, like the Royal Gambit, include dozens of members in many minor houses, but



few know what members of other houses are up to.

Of course, the various intelligence agencies are fairly large, but they are not necessarily conspiracies. Instead, they illustrate an important point about conspiracies: all conspiracies have internal conspiracies. Lay members are rarely told the whole truth about their organizations, instead learning it in stages. By the time they discover the greatest mysteries, they may realize that they work for an organization completely unlike the one they thought they joined. Mammonists might join the group believing it is a moneymaking network, only to later realize its religious nature.

In addition, different factions pursue different agendas. Leaders often come into conflict, wanting their own plans to succeed even if the group's plans fail. Even if all the factions within a conspiracy agree on one goal, they often see different means or areas that need emphasis. If the conspirators do their jobs very well, their activities might remain secret even from their allies in their own organization.

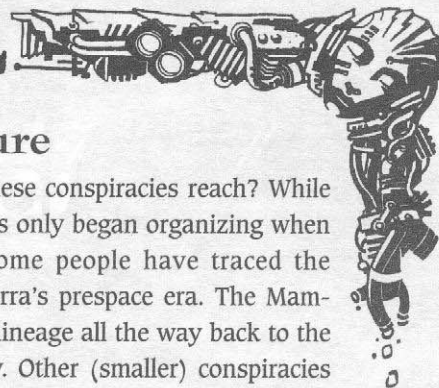
After all, conspirators join for many reasons. They may ardently believe in the cause, as in Hawkwood nobles who join the Rooks. They may have a driving desire for the power that a conspiracy offers, as with the wealth controlled by the Mammonists. Rewards, often in the form of money or promotions, can make the risks worth it, especially with a group like the Decados Jakovians. Some people get brought

in by someone they trust and respect, hoping to emulate them, which is a common reason people join the Oneirokritikos. Finally, they might just enjoy being superior or naughty — one of the main reasons people join the Mercurians.

Conspiracies vary as much as their conspirators do. They are most commonly divided between those that have a rigid hierarchy and those that have a cell structure. Intelligence agencies generally have a rigid hierarchy, where failure to listen to one's superiors brings with it serious penalties. Groups that rely on cells, like the Ukari United Freedom Movement, has less penalties but strongly encourages all cells to work together. If characters infiltrate one cell, they will not learn much about the overall group.

All of these conspiracies act as far behind the scenes as possible. They strive to be puppeteers controlling puppeteers. The final puppets may believe that they are doing something important, but may not know for whom. After all, conspirators always need some kind of cover to screen their work. Revealing a conspiracy to the light of day almost always ruins its effectiveness. If it could operate out in the open, it would not need to stay in the shadows. Indeed, direct involvement in a situation often limits a conspiracy's abilities. When people discover a conspiracy's interest, it leaves them extra cautious and at-





tracts outside interest. When this happens, conspiracies retreat as quickly as they can. Nothing hides their involvement as well as time. Witnesses die, forget what they saw, or come to doubt their own eyes. The compulsive lying that many conspirators seem to engage in does not hurt this process.

Conspirators prefer to sit back and watch for as long as possible. Observation is a major activity for these groups, and knowledge is worth a lot. This is especially true in regard to one another. While most people do not know these conspiracies exist, they keep an extra close eye on one another. High-level members of these groups have often encountered each other more than once, and might even socialize. If their organizations rarely come into conflict with one another, they may work together. For instance, Harbingers and Mutasih trade surveillance data gathered on spacestations, while some people suspect that FAR and Bava! are led by the same people.

Outsiders would be surprised at how often these groups work together. Their spheres intersect in places where they can cooperate as often as they do in places where they fight. At the same time Jakovians and Hidden Martyrs race to battle each other on Malignatius, they may work together on the same planet to destroy a Newtopia printing press. Of course, they may still try to pin the blame on one another even when they do work together.

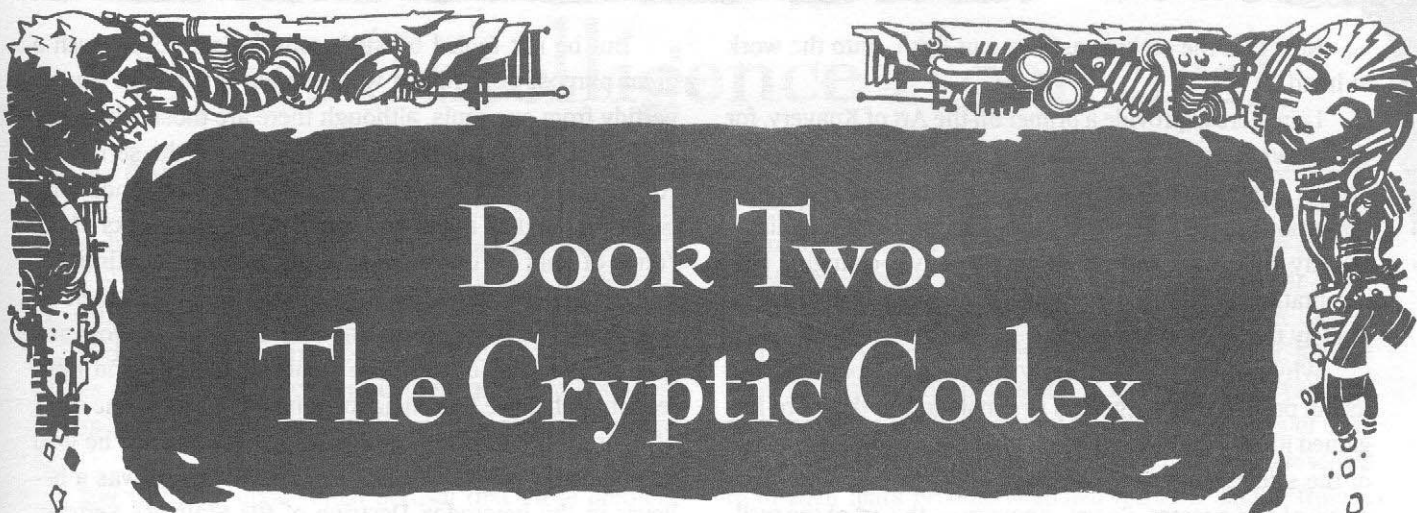
The Big Picture

Just how far back do these conspiracies reach? While the anti-Alexius Hawkwoods only began organizing when Alexius became regent, some people have traced the Mercurians back to Holy Terra's prespace era. The Mamonists claim to trace their lineage all the way back to the beginning of human history. Other (smaller) conspiracies claim that they began with the Anunnaki.

Gamemasters should decide for themselves just how much of this is legend and how much is true. Does Wicliet Hunter, great mastermind of the Zaibatsu, still have direct descendants in places of power? Is House Decados truly a noble house or is it still just a front for powerful intelligence agents? Just how important are the Anunnaki relics and gargoyles to these conspiracies?

Houses, guilds and sects are generally not thought of as conspiracies because they operate out in the open. However, they do interact with the conspiracies, using them to fulfill their needs and being used in turn. People like Salandra Decados have ties to many of them, and wise characters will always look into the shadows to see who is really pulling the strings.





Book Two: The Cryptic Codex

A Primer on the Art of Knavery

Hail, Phoenix heir! At the behest of your father, I, Sir Chamon Mazarin, have prepared the following codex for your education in the realm of spycraft. No ruler can possibly lead unhindered without some knowledge of this shadowy underworld where even the most honorable and ethical of princes betrays trusts and truth in pursuit of realpolitick. The realm of intelligence gathering, manufacturing and implanting is vital to the continued rule of any monarch — no less so for you one day than your father today. Blessed be his eternal rule through scions such as you.

So that you may more quickly understand the secret forces arrayed for and against your eventual rule, I have compiled this codex, replete with dossiers on what major intelligence agencies, revolutionary societies and terroristic cabals threaten your father's just rule or the interests of his allies and even rivals. Even though some of these threats may seem distant and even humorous, their existence — and that of the fanatics who man them — must be taken into account. Indeed, even those groups that conflict little with your father's interests — your future interests — but who risk the stability of a rival must be known, for they work autonomously of your father's reign, and are thus wild cards even if they share his goals.

My agents are spread throughout the Known Worlds. Some are fiercely loyal and close to me, while others are mere adjuncts, beholden to me through self-interest or even the threat of blackmail. Nonetheless, you may be assured that the dossiers contained herein are of considerable accuracy, checked not just with their authors — whose personal

opinions are often stated openly — but also with a network of informants who, in most cases, are unknown to the dossier authors. Hence, where error has been made, I have endeavored to correct it.

However, the groups examined are never forthright in any of their dealings, even among their own members. Hence, some degree of inaccuracy must be assumed, especially as time progresses from the authoring of these dossiers. Where doubt prevails, I or the author make note of it. It is my sincerest hope that I shall one day be able to advise you in person on these affairs, but for the present, it cannot be so.

It mayhap that, even with the great precautions I have taken for the preservation and eventual delivery of this collection of dossiers, this codex shall fall into wrong hands. For this reason, I have concealed the identities of the various agents reporting herein. While their individual voices may show past the objectivity each strove for, their identities are well concealed. Where the author has made an inadvertent slip, I have corrected it with intentional misinformation, so as to lead a spymaster away from any conceivable guess as to actual identities.

Hence, I do not advise you to pay any heed to anyone who may represent himself as a confidant of mine. Consult me or your father if anyone does so, for none of my agents have leave to perform such a bold act, should they even discover your existence. (Indeed, do you even exist? Or are you but a test put to me by your father, Pancreator bless his wisdom? And what will my rivals read into this parenthetical aside, should they be so blessed as to acquire this work?)

Now that the prelude as been put forth, onto the work at hand...

I aim here to provide a primer on the Art of Knavery, for this is what the craft of spying surely is: an art. It is no science, although technology is certainly utilized in the craft for various means; the ends, however, are too uncertain to classify it as such. No, it is an art — an ever-changing representation of the character and prejudices of its artists, namely the spies themselves.

Why “knavery”? Why apply such a base word to such a useful profession? I urge you to consider that the word has gained its unfortunate meaning in the pulpit, not the reality of the streets outside the cathedral. There, it is a mark of survival and success. So yes, knavery — the art of the well-placed lie. Not the brutish and obvious mistruth, but the falsehood in fine clothing, the lie that is only revealed as such in the harsh light of dawn — when the beautiful poppet of moonlight and satin sheets is shown to be the whore she is.

These are, of course, matters not to be discussed openly in society. An artist does not reveal his craft, only the results of it. Only among fellow artists can he openly discuss his work and theirs, in a shadowed garret far from the ears of clergy or rival nobles. It is a backroom philosophy, debated only in private shadow or veiled in code when it must be spoken of in public. Like psychic powers, it is a shame that must be hidden in public but which one privately exults in. (Nay, don't deny this — this art requires that one stare sin straight in the eye and speak of things as they are, not as they should be in some Empyrean realm.)

Indeed, to properly succeed at spycraft, one must strip away all illusions until the world as it is can be seen without sentiment or ideology. Only then can one act with surety, unclouded by the detritus of morality. I do not dismiss the reality of higher worlds or truths, but they are the matter of priests and departed souls. Our work is in the here and now, and if we must sully ourselves so that others might have the luxury of purity, then so be it. Let this be our sacrifice, our penance before the Pancreator, that we might so win our way into the Empyrean despite our flaws. Our souls may appear dim, but they are merely cloaked, concealing the light within that fuels our duty.

But be not fooled by such consolations. Even such a great purpose behind our work cannot remove all sign of perfidy from our souls, although there are those who think otherwise. These questionable souls look to the sermon of Archbishop Saluda, written when he was imprisoned after being revealed as a regency spy in 4822. He speaks of the “onus of guilt for the act of spying,” and places it firmly in the hands not of the spies themselves but their masters — the nobles and even priests who commission such work and gain the benefits of it. These “lanterns of piety and righteousness believe that their souls be unsullied by the work of their minions,” but they are just as stained as “he who mistreats his beholden serf.” Of course, Saluda was a believer in the heterodox Doctrine of the Stainless Servant, which places any sin committed by a serf or householder at the urge of his master fully upon the master. While this has been argued endlessly in theological circles, it has never been officially adopted by a Patriarch — although its potential issuance has been used as a threat on many occasions.

It seems but petty name-calling to me. No man is without responsibility for his own sins, regardless of his reason for committing them. Nonetheless, we who wage war in the fields of this profession may take it as a matter of faith that the onus of our work lies not with us or even our masters, but with the dark necessity that drives our work: the impediments that stand between our lords — be they noble, priest or guildsman — and their just rule.

You, like us, will only earn a greater share of Empyrean reward for doing the necessary work of the world so that others may rise, protected from the ravages of alien agendas by your own foresight, earned through the humble and unremarked profession of spycraft.

Eternally your servant,

Sir Chamon Mazarin

Postscript: I am even now assembling another volume of this codex for your further education. Titled “Heretics & Outsiders,” it shall deal with those organized heresies within our realm that strive to poison our souls, and with foreign threats, those plots hatched against us from outside the Known Worlds.



Spies (Intelligence Agencies)

Our first examination concerns the professional intelligence agents who make the art of spycraft not simply their hobby but their career. Their agencies are often ages old, some of them existing even before the rise of the Second Republic. While their current manifestations are surely much unlike their former incarnations, certain agendas and techniques persist. These dossiers will examine the histories, means and characters that make up the agencies in question.

You will note upon initial perusal that these dossiers include not only those agencies sponsored by the Royal Houses — whose agents' legends are told even among the peasantry — but also the lesser-known agencies operating within the guilds of the Merchant League and orders of the Church. These latter organizations may come as a surprise to many, but those within the field know well that even a spiritual organization such as Palamedes' Church is conversant with secular methods. Although their goals and methods may be vastly different from those of the noble houses, Church agencies are no less skilled or dangerous.

You will also note that I do not mention the agencies operating under the sponsorship of the minor noble houses. While certain agencies do exist within these forsaken folds, their histories are spotty, and their charters are often withdrawn for decades at a time for lack of funds or skilled members. Some have been so badly infiltrated by the Royal House agencies that they merit note only as adjuncts of those organizations — whether or not they are even aware of such co-optation. So, I do not waste time here outlining agencies that may or may not even exist by the time you read this report. Be aware, however, that I do track them and keep constant watch; if any rises to prominence, I shall issue a report forthwith.

Some of what you read may shock your sensibilities, especially if you were raised — as most in our house are — upon tales of honor above all. There is indeed much perfidy afoot in these agencies and their doings, such that one could very well question known history as to the secret causes behind any action. Be not overly paranoid, however, for one quickly learns in this profession to rely upon well-reasoned and supported intelligence, not the idle wonderings of conspiracy-fed fanatics. Those who cannot distance themselves from such fears become wretched recluses, hiding from a world they believe is orchestrated not by Empyrean powers but through the whims of mortal men. Indeed, our world is surely affected by such mortal schemes, but they are often countered by the dictates of fate. No matter how well launched a plot, chaos or grace may still steer its course to unforeseen harbors.

In the course of your own rule, you will deal with many people who are not what they seem and who may indeed be professional agents. Trust no person who has not earned such confidence from you many times over. Only those who fully share your dreams or whose survival is reliant upon them can be given even the slightest leeway in your eyes. All others are suspect. Never forget this.

Even I am to be mistrusted. I say this because of my love for your father, which extends to all his scions into eternity. However, you must ever keep even me at arms' distance, for I am, in the final judgment, but an artist of knavery, despite the ends I serve.

And so, too, are all those mentioned in this chapter of the codex: agents and artists of knavery all.



Imperial Eye

When inhabitants of the Known Worlds think of espionage agencies, the Imperial Eye is usually the first to come to mind. Not only is it the most widespread intelligence organization — Empire-wide in its scope — it's also one of the oldest, with a history stretching back to the days of the First Republic. Unsurprisingly, this lengthy history makes the Imperial Eye an extremely difficult agency to comprehend fully, as the following report shows.

History

Although the contemporary intelligence agency calling itself the Imperial Eye was founded by Vladimir Alecto during his rise to power in the 46th century, its antecedents are much older. The Eye has its origins in the tumultuous times of the Sathraist insurrections. At that time, humanity was just beginning its expansion into space by means of the mysterious jumpgates left behind by the equally mysterious Anunnaki. Transit through the gates often induced mystical epiphanies and visions that came to be known as the Sathra Effect. These visions sometimes led to acts of rebellion against governments and corporations alike.

Consequently, the First Republic responded to these acts by sending agents of its Internal Investigations department (otherwise known as I.I.) to infiltrate the Sathraists wherever they were found. These agents proved quite successful in their mission, spying on numerous Sathraist cults. They then returned to their superiors with incredible tales of the Sathraists' supposed plans for widespread insurrection against the Republic. In addition, they relayed even more incredible stories of bizarre rites in which the cultists pledged their loyalty to weird alien gods who demanded human souls for propitiation.

Whether or not these stories were true — and there is much evidence that points to exaggeration on the part of I.I. — the leaders of the First Republic were horrified. They ordered I.I. and the military to conduct a full-scale purge of the Sathraists, whom they vilified as "enemies of the Republic." The agency then set about assassinating Sathraist leaders and imprisoning anyone who expressed sympathy for the cultists' plight. Yet, despite the massive resources expended to wipe out the Sathraists, the Republic never succeeded in doing so. Many cultists escaped to distant worlds; others hid themselves in the shadows, away from prying eyes.

At this point, the history of I.I. takes on an unusual character. With the Sathraist threat driven underground, the agency took an even stronger line against the cult. Each year, I.I. demanded an ever-larger budget from the Republic

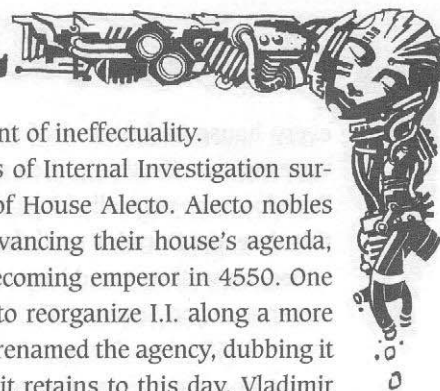
— and got it. The leadership of Internal Investigations claimed that the Sathraists remained as powerful as they had before the purge. In fact, they argued that the Sathraists who remained at large were the most dangerous ones of all. After all, they had escaped I.I.'s dragnet thus far, making them wily and resourceful to say the least. The frightened Republican government continued to increase funding to the agency, as well as granting them increasing authority over intelligence gathering and internal security. By the eve of the Diaspora, I.I. was the Republic's sole espionage agency. In addition, I.I. controlled the important world of New Istanbul, treating it as its own private fiefdom.

Even so, the Sathraist threat remained, seemingly invincible in the face of Internal Investigation's incredible might. Indeed, colony worlds now openly challenged the authority of the First Republic. The rebellions I.I.'s purge of the cultists was supposed to prevent had come anyway. When asked to explain how this could be, the leadership of the agency argued that the Republic had given it insufficient resources to deal with the Sathraist threat. If only more funding could be provided, the cult could be eliminated once and for all. However, the zaibatsu had heard enough excuses. In the face of growing unrest, the Republican government cut I.I.'s funding drastically. To survive, the agency turned increasingly to illegal activities, such as assassinations and extortion, among others.

In retrospect, I.I.'s inability to eliminate the Sathra cult seems implausible, especially given the resources and authority at its disposal. While history provides no definitive explanation, a fascinating theory has emerged. This theory, advanced by the Church historian Gelasius Savundragayam, suggests that Internal Investigation was at some point infiltrated by the very Sathraists it was supposed to suppress. These infiltrators slowly took over the agency from inside, all the while pretending to fight against their coreligionists. By the time of the Diaspora, the Sathraists had gained total control of I.I., rendering it impotent and hastening the revolt of far-off colony worlds.

Savundragayam's theory is attractive because it explains many anomalies in I.I.'s behavior. However, there is only the scantest of evidence to support it. Moreover, the contemporary Imperial Eye has its own theory, one that doesn't cast its predecessor in such an unfavorable light. This theory suggests that it was not I.I. that was infiltrated by the Sathraists — it was the Republican government itself! The Eye points to records of appropriations committee meetings that show a marked unwillingness to support increasing I.I.'s manpower. Instead, the government would fund only im-





proved technology and equipment. Thus, the agency was left without the manpower necessary to carry out its task properly and ultimately denuded of its effectiveness.

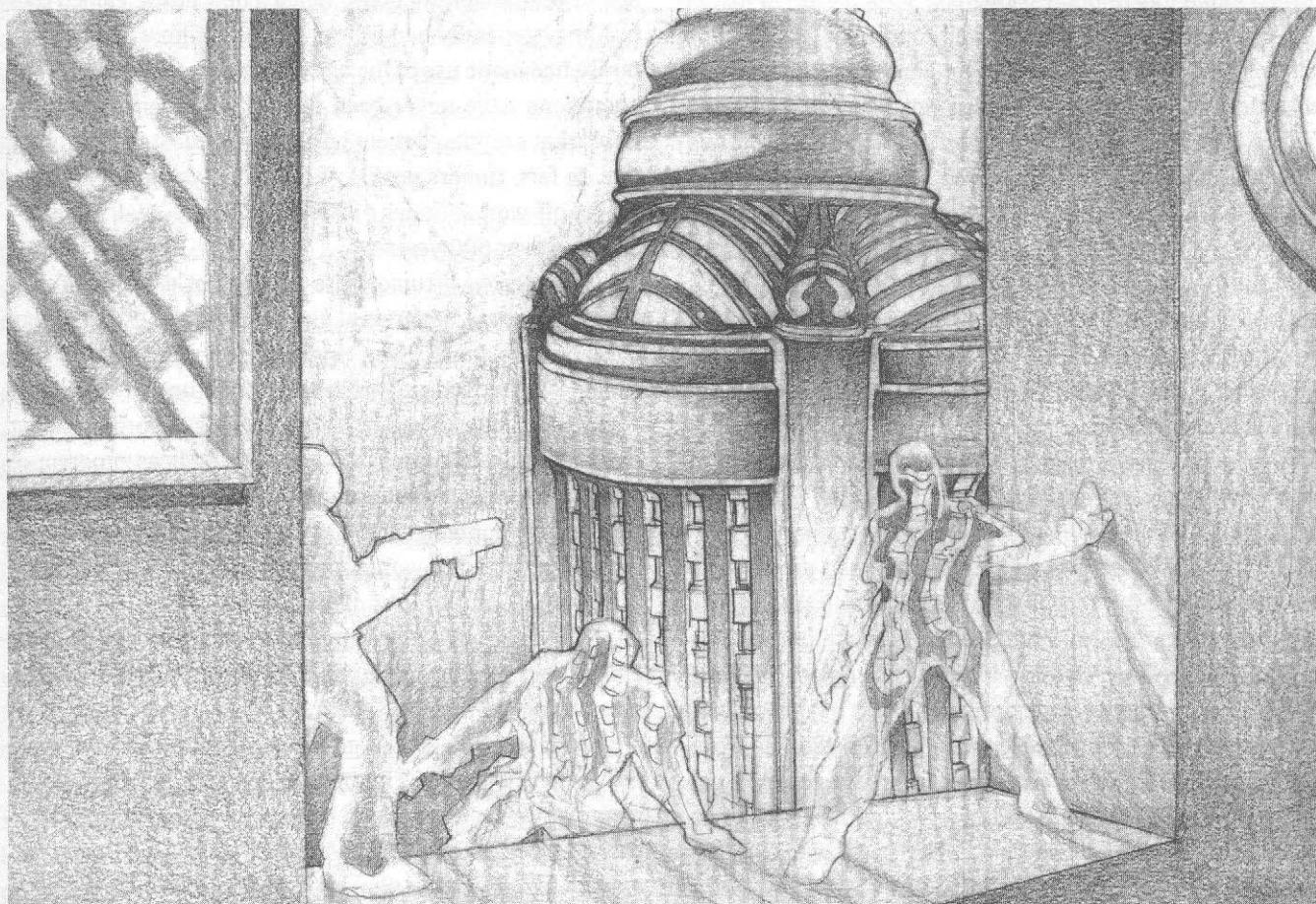
Very few people outside the Eye accept this latter theory. However, even Savundragayam's position is of little interest to anyone outside pedants and clergy looking for an excuse to attack the Eye. In any event, the Diaspora and subsequent collapse of the First Republic were unkind to I.I., which had become little more than a criminal organization by the rise of the Second Republic. Ironically, it was precisely for this reason that the leaders of the Second Republic again turned to the I.I.

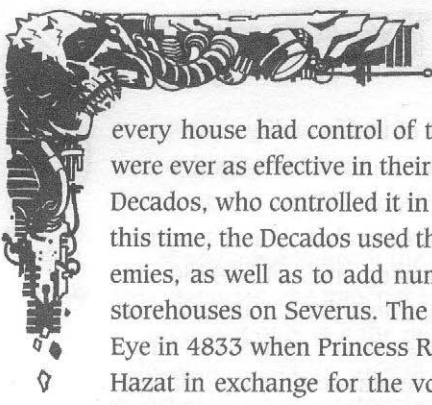
In the interim between the two Republics, House Decados had become masters of intelligence gathering and espionage. Indeed, they were without peer in black operations of all sorts. Consequently, they were a threat to the new Republic, a threat that only the battle-hardened veterans of Internal Investigation could counter. Skilled in both traditional espionage activities and in criminal endeavors, I.I. was thus the perfect instrument through which the leaders of the Second Republic hoped to bring the noble houses to heel. This strategy worked for a time, but it ultimately proved futile. The Second Republic was no match for the Decados or any of the Ten, most of whom worked to bring about its downfall. Indeed, the noble houses infiltrated I.I. with their own double agents and bribed their underpaid rivals — a tactic

that weakened I.I. to the point of ineffectuality.

Nevertheless, fragments of Internal Investigation survived under the protection of House Alecto. Alecto nobles used I.I. as a means for advancing their house's agenda, culminating in Vladimir's becoming emperor in 4550. One of Vladimir's first acts was to reorganize I.I. along a more professional model. He also renamed the agency, dubbing it the Imperial Eye, the name it retains to this day. Vladimir tasked the Eye with hunting down technology from the Second Republic, as well as alien artifacts. He also ordered its agents to seek out Lost Worlds, which did not endear the Eye to either the Church or the Charioteers, each of which opposed this role for very different reasons. Finally, the emperor promised that the Eye would maintain only a small presence on Byzantium Secundus, thereby ensuring that world would remain a place largely free from Imperial espionage. Had the agency been completely removed from its base, it would still have been able to perform its duties, except that now it could not be watched in turn. Vladimir's allies and rivals preferred to keep the Eye where they could see it.

When Vladimir was assassinated, the Eye survived by becoming the tool of ambitious houses. Control of the Eye was offered in exchange for the votes necessary to become regent. Thus, the Eye bounced from house to house, its effectiveness hampered with each shift in allegiance. Nearly





every house had control of the Eye at one point, but few were ever as effective in their use of the agency as were the Decados, who controlled it in the early 49th century. During this time, the Decados used the Eye to assassinate their enemies, as well as to add numerous alien artifacts to their storehouses on Severus. The house only lost control of the Eye in 4833 when Princess Ralitsa Decados traded it to the Hazat in exchange for the votes she thought would allow her to become empress. Unfortunately for House Decados, the Hazat had already safeguarded against such an event by making a separate deal with the al-Malik, who transferred their votes elsewhere — thereby depriving the Known Worlds of a single ruler for another century and a half.

Eventually, control of the Eye passed into the hands of House Hawkwood. During his regency, Alexius made effective use of the agency. He not only employed it to advance his personal goal of becoming emperor, but he also reemphasized its charge to seek out artifacts and Lost Worlds. As proof of his good intentions, Alexius tried to place some distance between himself and the Eye by appointing someone from outside his house to head up the agency. He chose Duchess Oelestre Xanthippe, a formidable woman known for her strong code of ethics. Alexius clearly hoped this would allay the fears of many of the Eye's opponents — which it did, to a small degree. Nevertheless, many viewed the agency with wariness, as they knew all too well that it could be turned into a tool of oppression.

Sadly, Alexius failed to allay all concerns during his regency. Most particularly, he did not agree to limit the Eye's activities on Byzantium Secundus, as Vladimir had done before him. This both angered and frightened House Cameton, whose leaders wondered whether their days as governors of the throne world were numbered. Although Alexius made no overtly hostile moves toward House Cameton — or any of the other houses on the planet — his omission in renewing Vladimir's promise chilled his relations with that noble faction. It also encouraged suspicion about just what he intended to do with the Eye should he win the Emperor Wars.

Upon becoming emperor, Alexius tried to address these suspicions by continuing his reforms of the Eye. For one, he retained the services of Duchess Oelestre, stating that the agency would be best served by her continued presence as its head. It was at this time that he formally barred the agency from operating on Byzantium Secundus, much to the pleasure of House Cameton. In addition, he strengthened the Eye's focus on rooting out external enemies of the Empire, such as the Vuldrok and the Kurgans. Not only did this serve a genuine strategic purpose, it also showed other Royal Houses that Alexius did not intend for the Imperial Eye to become the Imperial secret police. The Eye exists to serve the Empire, not merely the emperor.

At the present time, the Eye is at a crossroads. The agency has survived in one form or another since the time of the First Republic. It has shown itself willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain its existence. It has also served as the tool of nearly every faction within the Known Worlds. Now, Emperor Alexius is attempting to take the best of the past while jettisoning those parts that do not serve the high ideals he espouses. It is still too early to tell whether such an attempt will prove successful. The only certainty is that — whatever the outcome — the Eye will survive; it always has.

Known Operations

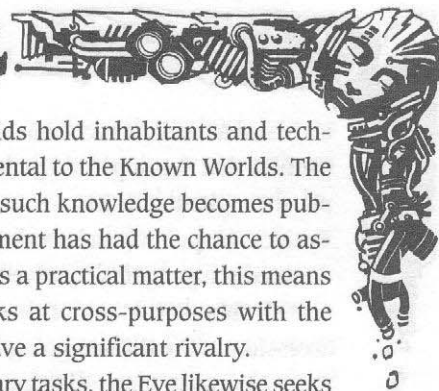
The Imperial Eye operates across the length and breadth of the Empire. Its agents involve themselves in literally thousands of operations every day. Indeed, it has been said that no one — not even the agency's director — has a complete idea of everything the Eye is up to at any time. Given the Eye's long and rather tortured history, this is probably a very true statement. Both Vladimir and Alexius charged the agency with several significant duties.

These duties, however, are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Eye's activities. During the regency, the agency passed from house to house, becoming a tool of this noble or that one. Each subsequent house gave the Eye a different mandate, often staffing it with a new group of agents and troubleshooters. When a new house gained control, they generally had little or no idea of how the previous house had made use of the agency. Thus, many projects and operations have never been shut down, even though the noble that originated them has long since lost control of the Eye. In fact, rumors persist of Imperial Eye agents laboring on far-off worlds under orders from Prince Basil Alecto — dead for over 500 years!

Whether such rumors are true or not matters little. In the end, these rumors reveal a truth about the Eye: it is very old, and very large. Even under the most benevolent and skilled of directors, it would take a lifetime to place it in some semblance of order. Thus, Alexius' reforms are but the beginning of a long and possibly endless program of reorganization and restructuring. If the Eye is to become a truly effective intelligence agency, the emperor and his successors will need to work long and hard at overcoming the accretions of centuries of misuse.

That being said, the Imperial Eye nevertheless has several strongly delineated areas of interest. Its first is also its most vague: defend the Known Worlds against the "enemies of the Empire." This task goes back to the earliest days of the agency, when the First Republic feared Sathraist insurrections. Vladimir reiterated this task when he became emperor, as did Alexius. However, "enemies of the Empire" is a maddeningly vague phrase; it could include almost any-





one or any group. Over the course of the centuries, it probably has.

Under Alexius, the Eye has paramount authority to investigate, arrest and interrogate anyone deemed to be a threat to the security of the Empire. The Eye also has the authority to use deadly force against such persons, if no other means is available. In general, "enemies of the Empire" is held to mean Vuldrok and Kurgan agents, as well as those who threaten lawful commerce, such as criminals and space pirates. However, the term has also been used to describe rebels and heretics whose views undermine the stability of the status quo. Unsurprisingly, this has led many critics to claim the Eye is a tool of oppression — just as it always has been.

The Eye also has jurisdiction over unclaimed Second Republic technology, as well as artifacts of Vau, Anunnaki and other alien origin. The Eye understands "unclaimed" to mean any item that does not have a legally recognized owner. Consequently, almost anything found in hidden vaults or on abandoned starships found in the depths of space is fair game. Of course, the Merchant League, the Royal Houses and the Church take exception to this definition. All make claims on a wide variety of Second Republic items, especially if they're found within their territory. The Church points to its traditionally recognized claim of withholding technology from others, while the Scravers argue that tech reclamation is within their guild monopoly. However, the emperor takes a dim view to such claims and accedes to them only when pressing his own authority would cause more trouble than it's worth. Such was the case in 4999, when the Eye found a starship within Decados space — a ship the house claimed for itself by virtue of its location, even though it bore the markings of the extinct House Datta.

In the case of alien artifacts, the Eye rarely acquiesces to outside demands. Alexius is convinced that to do so would set a bad precedent, especially when so many of these artifacts could pose a threat to the stability of the Known Worlds. Consequently, the Eye vigorously seeks out and claims any alien devices or items found anywhere within the Empire — and beyond. The agency possesses some of the greatest experts on alien artifacts to be found anywhere. In addition to seeking out these devices, the Eye also works to unravel their mysteries, so as to use them to defend the Empire and understand the wider universe that exists around it. Again, the Scravers take exception to Alexius' position, which is why the emperor has not formalized this position. To do so would be a deadly affront to guild power. Consequently, each instance is handled on a case-by-case basis and ultimately comes down to which agency can acquire the artifact first.

The Imperial Eye also seeks out Lost Worlds. In some respects, this task overlaps with that of the Questing Knights. Unlike the Knights, the Eye seeks out these worlds not to expand knowledge, but to restrict it. Past experience has

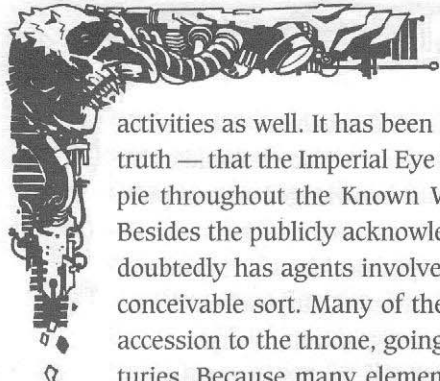
shown that many Lost Worlds hold inhabitants and technology that would be detrimental to the Known Worlds. The Eye works to ensure that no such knowledge becomes public until the Imperial government has had the chance to assimilate and prepare for it. As a practical matter, this means that the Eye regularly works at cross-purposes with the Knights, with whom they have a significant rivalry.

Beyond these three primary tasks, the Eye likewise seeks out internal threats against the Empire, such as criminals and insurgents of all sorts. Critics among the nobility charge that the Eye engages in spying on their activities as well. For its part, the Eye has never denied such charges, reiterating that its role is the defense of the Empire against all enemies, whether internal or external. Even so, proof of the agency's complicity in plots against noble, even Royal, houses always send shockwaves throughout the Known Worlds. These incidents have declined markedly since Duchess Oelestre became director, but they still occur. One example was the discovery that the Eye had infiltrated the household of Prince Flavius Li Halan, having replaced numerous members of his staff with agents. When uncovered, the Eye claimed they were simply investigating a report that certain members of the prince's household had returned to the family's ancestral dedication to Antimony, a charge no one — not even the Church — believes has any basis in fact.

The Imperial Eye also maintains a cadre of soldiers trained in the agency's methods. These troops can be found anywhere that the Eye possesses a public presence, such as on Byzantium Secundus. In addition, Eye troopers can often be found on the grounds of any Imperial embassy throughout the Known Worlds. Although not espionage agents themselves, Eye soldiers are fully integrated into the organization's chain of command. Likewise, they are trained to be observant, looking for signs of anything that might be of use to their superiors in the Eye. For this reason, many noblemen consider their presence a provocation. They resent the emperor's attaching them to diplomatic teams, which, by tradition, are supposed to be more neutral in carrying out their duties.

Of course, Eye soldiers are more commonly used in the fight against space pirates and other criminal elements. Duchess Oelestre has made it a priority to combat threats to lawful commerce, a move partially calculated to win the support of the Merchant League. Thus far, these efforts have enjoyed a modicum of success. The recent arrest of the notorious Jacques Murdoch was an important public relations coup for the director. Unfortunately, the continued depredations of Beliah Black and Tracina Isterot have cast a pall over this success. Consequently, Duchess Oelestre plans to devote more of her already-thin resources to fighting these scourges of the spacelanes.

As noted previously, the Eye engages in numerous other



activities as well. It has been said — and not without some truth — that the Imperial Eye has its fingers in nearly every pie throughout the Known Worlds, and perhaps beyond. Besides the publicly acknowledged operations, the Eye undoubtedly has agents involved in activities of nearly every conceivable sort. Many of these activities predate Alexius' accession to the throne, going back decades, and even centuries. Because many elements of the agency have grown used to functioning independently, they have little interest in reporting in to a new director, or even accepting funds from headquarters. Instead, they carry on as they always have, some of them not believing that Alexius' reign will last long enough to have a genuine impact. Thus, they continue by supporting themselves and their endeavors by whatever means they deem necessary. This fact makes the Eye one of the most infiltrated agencies in the Known Worlds, with moles from every other agency using its fractured power base to thrive. This is one of the main areas Duchess Oelestre is attempting to rectify, since it is difficult for her to implement many missions when she has no idea whom to trust.

It is this legacy that haunts the Imperial Eye to this day. The Eye has the potential to do great — or horrific — things in the service of the Empire. The real question is whether anyone is capable of comprehending this fact well enough to mold the agency into something more than a tool for petty agendas. Thus far, Duchess Oelestre and Emperor Alexius have made a valiant effort, but there can be no doubt that it will take many more years before the ultimate disposition of the Imperial Eye is determined — for good or for ill.

Observations

Because of both its age and scope, the Imperial Eye is rife with factions and internal discord. Broadly speaking, these factions can be divided into two groups: the so-called "Angels" and the Old Guard. The Angels largely consist of the agency's newer agents, those who joined during the regency of Alexius or after he attained the Phoenix Throne. These agents believe firmly in the goals of the emperor and actively work to reorganize the Eye along more professional — and manageable — lines. Their numbers are augmented by older agents who have also come over, relieved to have a worthy, stable allegiance at last.

The primary representative of the Angels is Duchess Oelestre Xanthippe, the current director of the Eye. Although she could not by any stretch be called an idealist, she does wholeheartedly endorse Alexius' goals. Since becoming director, she has done her best to do a full accounting of the agency's activities and operatives. She has even shut down several operations she deemed to be incompatible with the Eye's new mandate, such as the "extracurricular" activities that have lined the pockets of the Eye for centuries. This isn't to say Duchess Oelestre has fully succeeded in these

efforts. That she has even attempted to reform the Eye along such lines is nevertheless a testament to the strength of the Angels as a faction.

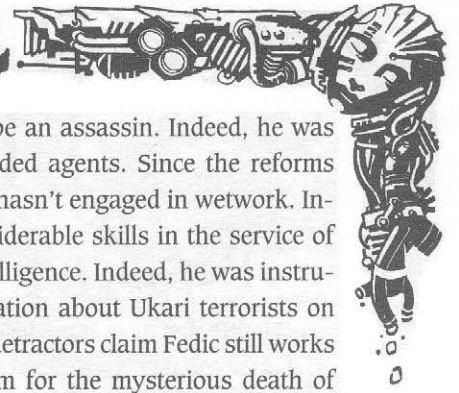
The Old Guard, on the other hand, is a much more fractured and fractious group. They are united only in their opposition to any attempts to remake the Imperial Eye into a professional intelligence agency guided by principles. Thus, the Old Guard isn't so much a faction as a blanket term to describe the large number of agents who prefer the status quo. The smallest portion of the Old Guard is made up of those who disavow the emperor's idealism as "misguided." These cynical and embittered souls believe the Empire cannot stand if the Eye is made to abide by anything other than the iron logic of *realpolitik*. In their way, these individuals are Imperial patriots; some of them even supported Alexius during the Emperor Wars. However, they doubt that the Eye can be an effective defense against the Empire's enemies if its activities are in any way restricted by the application of moral precepts.

The larger element within the Old Guard consists of remnants of the pre-Alexius agency, when the Eye was an instrument of the Royal Houses as they battled for supremacy. While in control of the Eye, each house filled the agency with political appointees and party hacks that supported their own agendas. When control shifted, these appointees sometimes remained, pursuing their own goals, often to the detriment of their new masters. Given the immensity of the Eye's apparatus, it's relatively easy for an individual or group to become "lost." Nominally still part of the agency, these agents have little difficulty maintaining themselves and their projects with almost no interference from headquarters.

Consequently, the bulk of the Old Guard is made up of self-aggrandizing remnants from the days before Alexius became regent. By and large, they oppose attempts at reform because its success would jeopardize their sinecures, nothing more. They have no political agenda other than retaining the power they've secured for themselves over the years. Small numbers of the Old Guard remain loyal to the houses that appointed them in the first place, but this is the exception rather than the rule. This means that there is no blanket solution to the problems posed by these parts of the Old Guard. Instead, Duchess Oelestre and Emperor Alexius must deal with each subgroup on an individual basis, finding a way to co-opt them more fully.

Rumors persist that the Imperial Eye is a haven for Sathraists, supposed descendants of those that infiltrated Internal Investigation during the time of the First Republic. Naturally, this rumor is denied by the Eye's supporters, especially by those who hope to give the agency a better standing in the eyes of the nobility and the Church. Yet, these rumors continue unabated, due to the periodic discovery of Sathra cultists among the Eye's agents. As recently as two





years ago, a Sathraist cell was found to be operating on Icon, an incident that nearly toppled Duchess Oelestre from her position as director.

Rumors also persist that the Eye employs psychics and practitioners of theurgical rites not sanctioned by the Church. Because these rumors usually originate among the Avestites of the Inquisitorial Synod, they are often dismissed as deluded ravings. Indeed, these rumors often dovetail with the imputation of Sathraist infiltration as well. According to the more bizarre conspiracy theories, Alexius has struck a deal with the Sathraists within the Eye, offering them freedom of worship in exchange for using their psychic abilities in defense of the Empire. Of course, such tales are told about nearly every persecuted sect within the Known Worlds, from the Favayana to even Antinomists, which casts some suspicion on the truth of the charges. Even so, it's hardly implausible that the Eye uses many unusual agents in its quest to protect the Empire from all enemies.

Agents

As one might expect, the Imperial Eye has an exceptionally diverse membership, with agents drawn from every conceivable background. However, the new regime instituted by Alexius since becoming regent has attempted to put forward a more consistent approach both to recruitment and training. Thus, while it's likely the current Eye membership contains agents with a wide variety of skills and experiences, future additions to the agency will follow a more strongly delineated regimen. This regimen will consist of training in unarmed combat, surveillance and human intelligence. Agents will likewise be trained in one or more specialties, ranging from tech redemption to think machine operation to sabotage. The emperor has asked that the Eye de-emphasize black operations, such as assassination and kidnapping, in favor of intelligence gathering and investigation. The theory is that sufficient skill in these areas will mitigate the need for extreme solutions after the fact.

Imperial Eye agents use codenames for their own protection. These names vary from world to world and division to division. For the most part, they consist of nonsense words or phrases that have no obvious connection to the work in which the agent is engaged. A few examples are:

- **Bandersnatch:** This agent is a prominent pre-Alexian agent who has since joined the Angels faction. He (or she?) has served the Eye in numerous capacities, most notably as an infiltrator of Kurgan space. Consequently, Bandersnatch has worked closely with the Hazat on numerous occasions, making him instrumental in showing the house that the Eye has much to offer those who support its activities. Unfortunately, this agent is showing signs of age and may soon retire, depriving the Eye of a valuable resource at a critical time.

- **Fedic:** Fedic used to be an assassin. Indeed, he was one of the Eye's most dreaded agents. Since the reforms instituted by Alexius, Fedic hasn't engaged in wetwork. Instead, he has used his considerable skills in the service of surveillance and human intelligence. Indeed, he was instrumental in obtaining information about Ukari terrorists on Aylon. Stories circulated by detractors claim Fedic still works as an assassin, blaming him for the mysterious death of Damasus Li Halan in 4999.

- **Swindoll:** This legendary agent is another holdover from the time before Alexius. He is reputed to have worked against Republican insurgents while amassing a fortune through illicit deals with organized crime. There is no question that Swindoll is a powerful individual within the Eye, since no one — not even Duchess Oelestre — has dared remove him from his position on Istakhr. His success in uncovering plots against the Empire is without comparison, which may be how he continues to retain the goodwill of his superiors despite his illegal activities.

Revealed Agents

There have been several Eye agents whose identities have been revealed over the years. This is actually somewhat more common since Duchess Oelestre became director, as her efforts at reorganizing the agency have worked to the detriment of several undercover agents.

- **Talor Rensler:** This leader of the Old Guard owed his position to an appointment by House Decados. Rensler used his position to terrorize the inhabitants of Suryada on Ravenna — all in the service of his noble patrons. When Alexius became regent, Rensler actively resisted any attempt at reforming the Eye. Unsurprisingly, he became a prime target for the Angels, who arrested him on charges of abuse of power. He was then publicly tried and convicted to make an example of him. Unfortunately, Rensler escaped captivity before he could be imprisoned, and he is still at large today.

- **Danyelle Sufrin:** Sufrin was Duchess Oelestre's personal assistant, using her years of experience to help the director reform the Eye from within. Sadly, someone took offense to Sufrin's "betrayal" of the Old Guard (who viewed her as one of their own) and gunned her down while visiting the Imperial City on Byzantium Secundus. Sufrin's loss profoundly affected the Duchess, who has become even more driven in her desire to reform the Eye since then. Yet, it has also served as a warning to other members of the Old Guard who might think about turning on their former colleagues.



Hawkwood Rooks

History

The Rooks' distant predecessor organization, the D.I.R. (Delphian Intelligence Resource), was by all accounts a competent but unexceptional bureau, just one of many such groups hired by the emerging corporate nobles of the First Republic. As with other similar agencies, its priorities lay more in the province of trade secrets and family security than in the interstellar games we play today. Even then, however, House Hawkwood insisted that its security apparatus comport itself with the same honor as the family as a whole. A troublesome injunction, perhaps, for an agency that must deal in a world of murky lies and half-truths, but such is the way we confront the universe.

House Hawkwood has risen to its current lofty position largely by taking the measure of both its friends and its enemies. During the First Republic, the mogul Gervaise Windsor secured Delphi by subduing and then making common cause with its rebel elements. His own daughter married one of the rebels (a Hawkwood), but he never would have dared so audacious an undertaking if he did not have reliable intelligence that the rebels could be trusted. In a similar vein, Gervaise's granddaughter, Zenobia Hawkwood, expanded the family's sphere of influence to Ravenna by arranging the marriage of her son to Mariane Mountbatten. The DIR's name changed to the Rooks after House Hawkwood extended its control beyond Delphi. Tradition has proudly carried the name forward ever since.

With the collapse of the First Republic, the murder of Lord Cyprian's daughter sparked the invasion of Gwynneth. Suspected Decados involvement in that incident began the centuries long game of cat-and-mouse between the Rooks and the Jakovian Agency. During the war with the Ur-Ukar, House Hawkwood gained a reputation for vociferously defending humanspace, a distinction which gave us a great deal of latitude in protecting the Ur-Obun over the centuries to come. The Rooks formed a special division, known as the V-Sector, to deal with aliens and the unique problems and opportunities they presented to our intelligence initiatives.

Under the rubric of the Second Republic, the Rooks concentrated primarily on corporate security and information warfare. Unfortunately, this role was largely seen as having little to offer our military structure. As the Ten Houses closed in on Byzantium Secundus to sound the death knell of the Republic, House Hawkwood (then ruled by Prince Roderick) led the pack. Unfortunately our armada's commanders, while fully competent in a tactical sense, failed to measure the political ramifications of their military accomplishment, un-

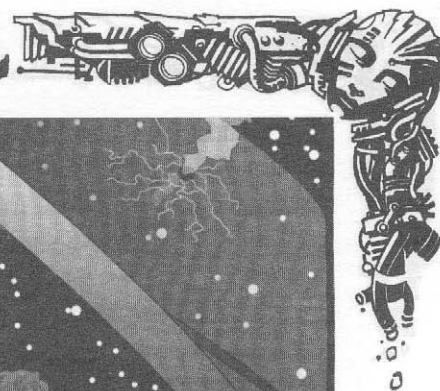
wisely keeping the Rooks at arm's length. Even as House Hawkwood basked in its victory, the Decados were hard at work undermining the situation on the ground. Unused as they were to the political exigencies needed to *maintain* power, the armada allowed the political situation surrounding Byzantium Secundus to deteriorate. The ensuing reversal of fortune eventually lead to the suicide of Prince Roderick, a fact his son, Prince Gordon, would not soon forget. Gordon surrendered rulership of the house to his younger, steadier sister (Justine) and undertook the task of reasserting the Rook's role within the family hierarchy.

The first half of the 5th millennium was largely a period of retrenchment for House Hawkwood, which rebuilt its military and governing institutions with a long-term eye toward empire. As the house cemented its relations with the Church, it became more aware of the restless darkness that lay between the stars. It would take some time for the results of this realization to come to full fruition in the intelligence sphere, but abortive attempts were made to use house psychics for this purpose.

When the barbarian hordes launched their attacks from the Lost Worlds in 4525, they found us surprised but not wholly unprepared. We had always suspected that we would hear from these planets again, but after 500 years, it always seemed the problem would wait for another generation. Nonetheless, House Hawkwood had rebuilt its forces magnificently and put its entire resources toward teaching the barbarians what it meant to beard the lion in its den. Daring Rook spies penetrated deeply into barbarian space, gathering data that eventually allowed the Known Worlds to stem the Vuldrok tide. Into this environment strode Vladimir Alecto. Putting its own ambitions temporarily aside, House Hawkwood supported Alecto's bid for the throne and would have reaped much from his victory, had he not been assassinated. The Rooks had little doubt that the Decados were behind his murder, despite the vile calumnies spun by the Jakovian Agency to place blame on Hawkwood shoulders. Assassination is not our way — rare and necessary exceptions aside, of course.

Two watershed events shaped the Rooks in the past century. The desperate years of the early Symbiot Wars shook the Known Worlds to their foundations and — needless to say — standard methods of information gathering were ineffective against so alien a species. It was the psychic Grania Hawkwood who, along with Mariah Juandaastas (an Eskatonic priestess), provided humanity the edge it needed to check the creatures at Stigmata. At the house's behest, Grania marshaled what psychic resources she could gather





into a special department known as the Echo Chamber.

If there was ever any doubt that the modern Rooks could compete and win on an interstellar stage with such vaunted opponents as the Jakovian Agency or the Mutasih, the Emperor Wars put that to rest. Despite its victory over the Symbiots, House Hawkwood has always been more at home testing its mettle against its noble competitors — and against itself. The wars proved more a victory for incisive intelligence than superior armaments. The Rooks were — by many outside accounts — one of the most balanced forces of any kind in the field. The Hawkwoods' decisive victory against the Decados and Hazat at the Battle of Jericho was largely due to a daring — if imperfect — espionage operation by the Rooks.

Things have hardly slowed since Alexius ascended to the throne. Technological growth has enjoyed something of a renaissance since the end of the war. The Rooks have taken full advantage of these trends while not neglecting their more fundamental skills. Unfortunately, elements within our house have cried foul at what they perceive as successive Imperial neglect. Alexius's loyalists do themselves a disservice when they ascribe these malcontents' motives solely to petty power lust, for many within the family sacrificed and suffered much to realize Alexius' ambitions. A vocal (or more dangerously, a silent) minority, they have friends in every stratum of so-

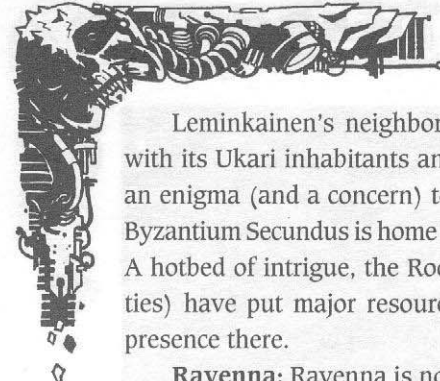
ciety, including the Rooks. No less a personage than Alvarex Hawkwood, the emperor's brother, has his hooks deep within the intelligence community. Ever since Alexius distanced himself from the day-to-day of family business, his brother's influence has waxed strong. Alexius loyalists like the Rook's current leader, Marquis Cedrick, guard the emperor's flank and endeavor to diminish the power of the family's malcontent faction.

Current Initiatives

Dissension aside, House Hawkwood is at peace and growing in power and influence. Threats still exist, however.

Leminkainen: Leminkainen is a harsh world, in no small measure due to the depredations of the Vuldrok Star-Nation. While the Vuldrok border requires vigilance, the Rooks believe there is little imminent threat of a major offensive, as long as we remain strong. Leminkainen remains an invaluable listening post for our intelligence operations in Vuldrok space. The Rooks have a main office in Hakkonen, with agents in the grim industrial city of Dyrak and the intrigue-riddled pleasure-city of Sardan. The bordering barbarian world, Hargard, has long been the staging area from which the Vuldrok have launched their raids into Hawkwood space. While still spotty, Hawkwood intelligence in Vuldrok space continues to improve.





Leminkainen's neighbors present little threat. Aylon, with its Ukari inhabitants and noble dissidents, is more of an enigma (and a concern) to the al-Malik than it is to us. Byzantium Secundus is home to our recent greatest triumphs. A hotbed of intrigue, the Rooks (and numerous other parties) have put major resources into maintaining a strong presence there.

Ravenna: Ravenna is not as stable as it once was. The Austram Islands conflict now threatens to spread to the neighboring Trusnikron fiefs. House Trusnikron has tacitly thrown its support to East Austram, while the emperor's brother, who lives on nearby Andyra, supports the western island. Alvarex has used this situation to tighten his control over the Rook's main planetary office in Suryada, supplanting imperial loyalists with his own operatives. Ravenna borders the recently rediscovered world known as Twilight. Technologically advanced, densely populated and aggressive in the extreme, this dying world is currently at war with itself, but the Rooks project that this may soon change. House Hawkwood fears that an attack from Twilight may embolden the Vuldrok and its Known Worlds noble rivals.

Gwynneth: Despite Alvarex's machinations on Ravenna, it is, perhaps, Gwynneth that presents the greatest risk of internal rebellion. Forest revolts present a persistent local threat, but the greatest danger is purely a family matter. Duke William Rochfort's madness has continued to grow and his paranoia has increasingly found outward expression. Controlling both the planet's second largest continent and almost eight percent of our family's armada, his religious mania has led to recent incidents on bordering Hôd, and with Hawkwood ships from other planets. The family faces a devil's choice; if he remains in power, an entire planet may be compromised. Unless the current attempts at imperial intercession work swiftly, one of our operatives has standing orders to attempt the assassination of our kinsman — may the Pancreator forgive us.

Gwynneth's jumpgate conjoins Vuldrok space, but this connection is decidedly one-way; Vuldrok raiders use the gate freely, but we do not have the key. Rook operatives have labored to rectify this state of affairs, but so far with no success. Nevertheless, Vuldrok raids here are infrequent; our information implies that Vuldrok politics preclude their regular use of the gate.

Delphi: The center of noble power and politics has long been the primary stronghold for the Rooks, who maintain their central headquarters (the Kessel Building) in the eastern Anschok city region. Dissent on Delphi is minimal and of a local variety. Neighboring planets present little threat. Pentateuch is largely unobserved by the Rooks, but serves as a meeting place between the Hawkwood Echo Chamber and the Church-sponsored Kalinithi. Tethys, while officially an imperial world, has long hosted a strong Hawkwood con-

tingent. Cat and mouse games between the Rooks and the Imperial Eye have taken a troublesome direction in recent years. No less a personage than the emperor's mother, Lady Octavia Regnus, has acted as a guarantor for long-standing Rook activities on this planet (a matter which rankles those in the Imperial Eye who consider Tethys their personal preserve). Hawkwood interests in the Ambrim shipyards stretch back for centuries, however, and the Rooks strongly assert their historical rights to operate unfettered on this world.

Methods and Morals

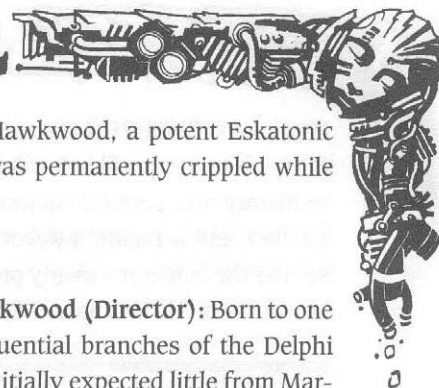
As complex as the world of espionage can be, the Rooks have always operated from a simple three-fold operating philosophy: Balance, Flexibility and Honor.

Balance: Stressing a holistic approach to their profession, the department's directors have created an environment that has successfully balanced the need for top-down command and control with the individual agent's need for operational discretion. Initiative is rewarded, but responsibility is imperative. Despite occasional old guard resistance, the agency has also balanced its personnel. While most in its upper echelon are still titled nobles, many of its operatives are yeoman commoners, and upward mobility is possible for meritorious conduct (this is particularly true since the last war). On an individual basis, agents are well rounded, schooled in history, etiquette and philosophy. Finally, balance is a guiding concept in resource allocation. The Rooks are particularly adroit at choosing the correct tools for a job.

Flexibility: The universe is an imperfect place. In recognition of this fact, the Rooks are trained to think quickly and to use every available resource to its fullest capacity. They use both high-tech countermeasures and old-fashioned detective work. In a fight, an agent is taught to use a blade, a firearm, a nearby bottle or his bare hands as a deadly weapon. This is also the case when attempting to engineer an information network in an unfamiliar culture or an escape from a seemingly hopeless situation. This flexibility extends to their intelligence analysis as well, which puts more emphasis on accurately reporting a situation than in making it palatable for political consumption.

Honor: On the surface the Rooks play at espionage as the "gentleman's game," but they realize that intelligence is a murky and deadly pursuit full of lies and half-truths. The knowledge that they serve a greater good allows some agents to skirt the borders of noble morality. Even the most devious Jakovian agents have been surprised by just how ruthless and sly their Rook opponents can be. This does not, however, mean that Rooks may indulge in any sort of skullduggery in the field — they are Hawkwoods, after all. Honor comes as naturally to them as breathing. Inexcusable crimes in the field include, but are not limited to rape, torture, the unnecessary murder of native or foreign individuals (noble





or common), and profiteering. The necessity for court marshals to punish such actions is, fortunately, very rare. As with the house as a whole, the Rooks have long ago discovered the advantages of candor. Simply put, people believe the Rooks when they give their word. If a Rook says he will get a peasant off world in return for her help against her masters, she can believe that he will do everything in his power to do so. This reputation for honor ultimately aids the Rooks far more than any short-term advantage gained by duplicity.

Branches

V-Sector

Because of House Hawkwood's longstanding alliances with House Juandaastas and the Ur-Obun, the Rooks are blessed with a dependable supply of talented Obun operatives. Prejudice being what it is, of course (even among the comparatively tolerant Hawkwoods), V-Sector is rarely recognized for its accomplishments and is required to remain under human leadership — though even this is changing. It is an eclectic department with bureaus based in the Kessel Building on Delphi, Gwynneth (Rangor Island), Trieste Island on Ravenna and on Velisamil. The department has been used (and misused) to disrupt perceived alien threats within Hawkwood space, but also as an effective tool for gaining alien assistance. Its focus changes with shifting tides of necessity and political sentiment.

The department is currently under the aegis of Count Leonin Juandaastas, but its field director (a particularly adept Obun psychic named Shatara Han Kavar) rigorously manages its day-to-day operations. Although its membership is predominantly human and Obun, other alien races have made important contributions to this department.

The Echo Chamber

Despite society's widespread distrust for psychics, the gifted of this program have served House Hawkwood well, both as intelligence gatherers against the Symbiots and in blunting the activities of psychics used by the Rook's competitors. The Echo Chamber's primary headquarters is a high-security, subterranean complex centered in a hidden thermal rift valley on Gwynneth's arctic continent of Moshala. The majority of Rook human psychics and theurgists are in this program, although Obun psychics are not unknown here. While V-Sector generally deals with alien affairs, the Echo Chamber is charged with a far more dangerous mission. The Dark is growing. While the Rooks have never made this matter their primary point of concentration (they are far stronger in temporal matters), the necessity for a division to combat it is real and increases yearly. Often working in cooperation with holy orders such as the Kalinthe, agents of the Echo Chamber track Antinomists and other supernatural threats to house security. The current director of the Echo

Chamber is Bishop Petros Hawkwood, a potent Eskatonic theurgist and ascetic who was permanently crippled while on Stigmata.

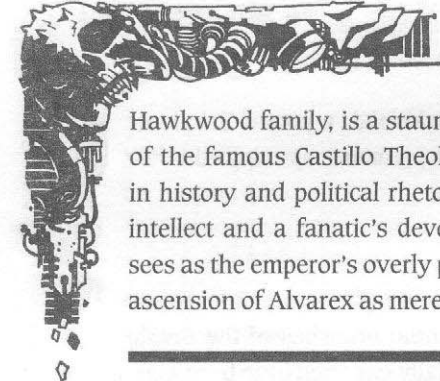
Agents

• **Marquis Cedrick Hawkwood (Director):** Born to one of the richest and most influential branches of the Delphi Hawkwoods, many people initially expected little from Marquis Cedrick, who had garnered a reputation as a dilettante and a playboy. Most believed his high-profile appointment to the directorship of the Rooks during the last years of the Emperor War was undeserved, the result of patronage from his powerful aunt (Lady Victoria). The doubters soon watched with dumbfounded amazement, however, as the energetic marquis reorganized the Rooks from top-to-bottom, firing hidebound traditionalists and engaging the services of the Hawkwood worlds' best and brightest. Staunchly loyal to both Alexius and the family as a whole, he has protected the emperor's flank from family dissenters while simultaneously preparing contingencies against the advent of the emperor's failure. Charming by inclination and ruthless when necessary, the red-bearded marquis's duel æ wherein he drew blood against Duke Alvarex at the emperor's coronation æ has become something of a legend in intelligence circles.

• **Shatara Han Kavar (Field Director, V-Sector):** The driving force behind the alien affairs department, the wizened but lively Shatara Han Kavar is an odd sort of Obun. Part human ancestry on her father's side, she is more hard-driven and sharp-tongued than many Obun would deem appropriate. Few can argue with her effectiveness, however. Largely a political appointee meant to ensure Velisamil's cooperation during the frantic middle years of the Emperor Wars, her cagey diplomacy and use of Obun spies blunted the activities of even the most elite telepaths of competing houses. Many expected her to fade quietly to the background after the war. Since then, however, she has used her political cache and imperial connections (she is half sister to Alexius' left-hand counsel, Bran Botan vo Karm) to expand the Obun role in the Rooks and to gain additional concessions for her people from House Hawkwood. Most frequently seen shuttling from Velisamil to Byzantium Secundus with her human and alien retinue, the silver-haired Shatara was also a recent visitor to Twilight, where she made clandestine contacts (and plans) with that planet's long-sundered Obun population.

• **Count Hadrian Windsor (Director, Ravenna Bureau):** In the confusion surrounding the Austram conflict on Ravenna, the emperor's brother has planted many of his own agents within the Ravenna Bureau. First and foremost among these is the bureau's new director. Count Hadrian, scion of the long-underestimated Windsor branch of the





Hawkwood family, is a staunch traditionalist and a product of the famous Castillo Theological University. Well-versed in history and political rhetoric, he combines a razor keen intellect and a fanatic's devotion to undermining what he sees as the emperor's overly progressive policies. Seeing the ascension of Alvarex as merely a means to an end, the count

has secretly colluded with various fringe elements in the orthodoxy that wish to establish a new theocracy. An middle-aged, clean-shaven man with a white Caesarian haircut, he prefers the simple robes of a novice to the supposed extravagance of the Ravenna court.

Decados Jakovians

History

The Jakovian Agency was officially founded in 2818, the year of the "re-emergence" of House Decados. However, its forebears existed as a secret clique among many Diasporan intelligence agencies, and were instrumental in re-establishing their patron family and destroying several minor noble houses. Jakovians now look back on those early years proudly, when their hidden wars with Hawkwood agents made planetary lords out of Gloucester vassals.

One notable operation of the time was the Cadavan White War. Jakovian-supported partisans — the White Army — were formed to disrupt the delicate planetary unification occurring under the Army of Independent Cadavus. The Independents had threatened Decados mining operations on Cadavus; Jakovian covert activities successfully destabilized the planet for almost a century.

The Jakovian Agency perfected its skills during the Second Republic, when its operations beyond Severus were technically illegal. Many of these operations created friction between the agency and the families that would later form the Scravers Guild, such as the two factions' conflicting attempts to blackmail Senator Viggo Valentino Arbusto of Aylon. However, Jakovian agents were instrumental in delaying the government's deliberations on whether to aid the besieged House Chauki from the Hazat insurgency.

The first years after the Fall were, ironically, a period of decline for the Jakovians. Without a central authority to interfere, House Decados seized worlds by outright conquest rather than covert operations. However, the Decados were caught completely unprepared for the rise of the Brother Battle order in the late 41st century. When Decados properties on De Moley were lost to the new order, the house restored the agency to its ancient position of prominence. Its first task was to disrupt relations between the order and the patriarch, and prevent the Church from gaining a stronghold on Severus' doorstep. Thanks partly to Jakovian rumormongers, the Church would not recognize the Brother Battle order for nearly half a century.

The barbarian invasions were a heyday for the

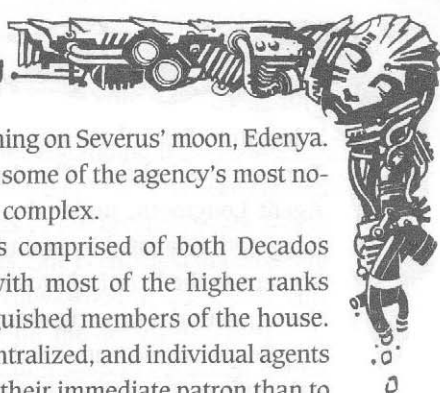
Jakovians, but also led to their soundest defeat. As other houses emptied their coffers into defense efforts, their intelligence operations languished. The Jakovians seized this opportunity to widely infiltrate rival agencies while fomenting revolt on other worlds. However, Vladimir Alecto's favored niece was killed by a rebel's bullet on Apsai. Jakovian involvement in the rebellion was revealed, and a systematic two-year witch-hunt almost destroyed the agency's entire network within Alecto and Li Halan territories. The Jakovians now see this as retribution for their arrogance. They will not be so careless again.

Following Vladimir's death, the Jakovian Agency again took an active role, taking advantage of the turmoil to further Decados interests across the Known Worlds. Jakovians ensured that the few surviving leaders of House Van Gelder accepted the mercy of the Decados and swore fealty to the house. Meanwhile, Jakovians funneled information on House Windsor to the Merchant League. The Windsors had defaulted on their crushing debts to the Reeves Guild, which, in retaliation, seized properties and placed bounties on Windsor heads. The few Windsors who survived were adopted into House Hawkwood, bringing their remaining properties and massive debts with them.

The Jakovians were extremely busy during the Emperor Wars. They activated deep-cover operatives and expended their finest agents in their desperate bid for the Empire. Jakovians diverted the Li Halan military from Malignatius to Rampart while sabotaging the arctic world's defenses. Prince Hiram's own godson, Count Rurik Dmitri, was lost while engaged in the Ukar revolt on Aylon.

However, the agency's most critical operations were far from Decados worlds. Jakovian diplomats engineered a tryst between Sir Nestor Trusnikron and the Contessa Rosa Maria Rolas de Kurga, both too young to realize the political repercussions of their illicit love. Contessa Rosa conceived a child, and the Rolas Hazat demanded satisfaction from House Trusnikron. The Trusnikron refused, stating that, since both parties had been willing, no sin had been committed in their eyes. The Hawkwoods supported the Trusnikron, and Hawkwood-Hazat relations deteriorated to the point that





Prince Juan Jacobi Nelson Eduardo de Aragon, head of the Hazat, resorted to an alliance with the Decados, persuaded by members of the Castenda Hazat.

Observations

The headquarters of the Jakovian Agency is within the fortress-city of Jakovgrad, deep within the Severan jungles of Rhodesland. New agents train here in infiltration tactics, interrogation procedures and agency protocols. Officially, the headquarters is located underground, beneath the residence of Duchess Nadia Decados, ruler of Rhodesland and head of the agency. However, since no outside agent has found a means of entry, even this "common knowledge" should be held in question.

More recent reports suggest that the true location of the Jakovian headquarters is near Tsaritsyn, the capital of Severus. There is a known facility near the city, a small citadel inaccessible without air travel or a dangerous trek through the Severan jungle. The complex is called Piddisyat One, although none of the inhabitants of nearby Tsaritsyn recognize the name. This is more of an archive and communications center than a command base, but it is possible that a great deal has been hidden in the area. Security is relatively lax, since the Jakovians believe that their enemies have no idea of the facility's existence. Only a few Kossack guards are housed within. The Kossacks view this as a kind of si-

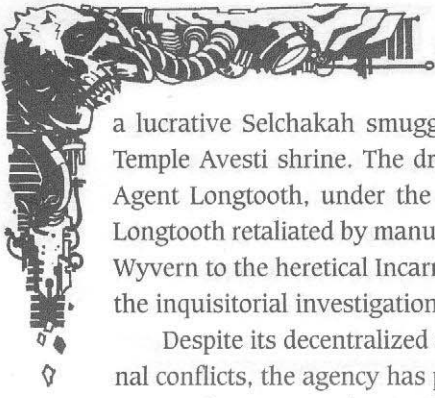
necure, compared to their training on Severus' moon, Edenya. Out informants have sighted some of the agency's most notorious operatives inside the complex.

The Jakovian Agency is comprised of both Decados nobles and their subjects, with most of the higher ranks reserved for the most distinguished members of the house. The agency is extremely decentralized, and individual agents often display more loyalty to their immediate patron than to the organization as a whole. In fact, rumors have been circulating of a possible split within the Jakovian Agency itself, due to the growing rivalry between Duchess Salandra Decados of Cadiz and Duchess Nadia of Severus. Jakovians from Cadiz are loyal to Salandra, while Severan Jakovians serve Nadia. Operatives on Malignatius and Cadavus are culled from both worlds, and conflict may be brewing between them.

Prince Hiram Decados is a notorious spectator of such internal struggles, employing a small network of private operatives to monitor the various contending factions within the agency. However, the prince himself rarely intervenes; intelligence suggests that his interest is simply an exotic voyeurism, rather than a concern for Jakovian security. It is possible that he even encourages the disputes between agents by fomenting the rivalries among their noble patrons.

A serious incident has already occurred on Criticorum, where one of Salandra's operatives, Agent Wyvern, destroyed






a lucrative Selchakah smuggling ring while infiltrating a Temple Avesti shrine. The drug ring was controlled by an Agent Longtooth, under the authority of Duchess Nadia. Longtooth retaliated by manufacturing evidence that linked Wyvern to the heretical Incarnates; Wyvern did not survive the inquisitorial investigation.

Despite its decentralized command structure and internal conflicts, the agency has proven quite resistant to infiltration, due in part to the number of psychics among Jakovian personnel. Foreign conspiracies within their ranks are unlikely, given the lavish rewards that tempt informers. Additionally, the agency has always sought to recruit psychics for security and information-gathering purposes. It is only within the last few decades that the agency has employed psychics for military applications, aiding the conquest of Malignatius.

Beyond recruitment, the Jakovians also manage a breeding program designed to produce agents of psychic ability, raised from birth into loyalty to the agency and the Decados. Evidence even suggests that the Jakovians may be hunting down members of House Thana for this purpose, to exploit their abnormally high incidence of psi abilities.

Over the years of the agency's existence, it has periodically come into conflict with an organized psychic coven called the Invisible Path. The facts of their relationship are difficult to ascertain, as the relevant data is held at the highest level of security in the agency's archives. However, rumors among Jakovian agents suggest that the two groups have, at times, cooperated. House Decados has sheltered Path psychics — especially in Li Halan space — in exchange for the use of their psi talents in covert operations. At other times, the two groups have feuded fiercely, such as when the Path dared to recruit the agency's own psychics or the agency betrayed the Path to its enemies. Jakovian psychics are indoctrinated far more thoroughly than other agents, to prevent the Invisible Path from infiltrating the agency.

Known Schemes



Because of the Jakovians' decentralization, procedures and identification protocols vary among regions. This hampers cooperation within the agency, but also protects it from widespread infiltration. On Grail, agents employ a complex handshake for identification purposes, but have been partially infiltrated by House Keddah's operatives. A small tattoo on the left foot marks Jakovian operatives on Rampart. The Jakovian organization on Velisamil operates strictly on informal, facial recognition, as the group is small enough that each agent can recognize one another. On Byzantium Secundus, Jakovian security is extremely tight; as a result, little is known about the size of local operations or their procedures. Unconfirmed reports place one of their safe houses in the Imperial City, near the Frederic De Vatha Coli-

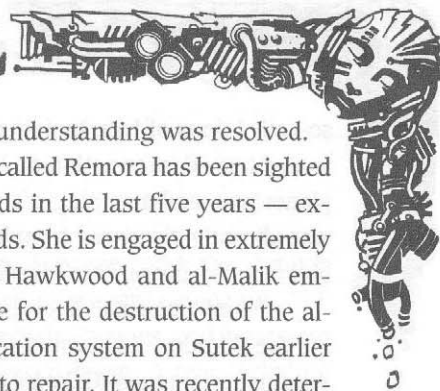
seum.

The heart of Jakovian operations is on Severus and Cadiz, where the agency is involved in law enforcement, house security, alien surveillance and the observation of important noble, Church and guild officials on the planet. Jakovians serve as labor troubleshooters, crowd control specialists and police investigators, apart from their involvement in foreign affairs. For example, the agency recently ended a strike of textile workers in New Capetown by blackmailing its leader, Kenneth Ipe, with the promise of emancipation and passage to Holy Terra. His firmest supporters were intimidated or eliminated by Kossack enforcers. Ipe never made it past the Church's strict immigration authorities on Holy Terra and now lives as a beggar on Mars.

Beyond the two Decados heartworlds, the Jakovians assume a far more covert role, furthering Decados interests by any means necessary. The Jakovians are infamous for their infiltration of noble houses, the Church and League. The agency is especially skilled in this aspect due to its ties with the Genetechs' Cartel, whose body-shapers can sculpt the visages of agents, rendering them unrecognizable. Furthermore, there are indications that the Genetechs may have mastered the creation of Changed Metonyms, shapeshifters capable of altering their appearance at will.

Beyond infiltration, the Jakovians also maintain a vast network of informers, controlled by a wide variety of methods. Selchakah addiction is a well-known means of extorting information, but it is of limited use against other covert organizations. This method is most effective when applied to nobles and other powerful figures who enjoy the privacy — and funds — necessary for drug addiction. Blackmail and bribery, along with simple intimidation, have their places within the Jakovian ranks. Agents close to Duchess Salandra have recently employed brainwashing techniques to create absolutely loyal moles among other groups. Baron Tso-lin Li Halan, lord of the town of Mukden in the Navaro Mountains of Kish, is suspected of being such a mole, although even he may be ignorant of this.

In gathering information, the greatest weapon that the Jakovians enjoy is their reputation. No other covert group is as feared as the Jakovian Agency, and its operatives capitalize on that fact. The agency projects the image that there are few limits to its abilities in providing for its informers — or in punishing its obstacles. As such, the Jakovians can gain access to confidential data more easily than other groups. However, the value of this information varies wildly. The Jakovians collect massive amounts of data, but so much of it is worthless or misinformed that the agency often fails to act upon information until it is too late. Such was the case in the Siege of Jericho, when the agency did not connect the Hawkwoods' most remote contingency plans to their own invasion, resulting in the ultimate defeat of House Decados



and the Hazat during the Emperor Wars. Even Prince Hiram has not yet realized this fact.

Information is always transmitted personally, except in the secure space of the Severus system. The Decados realize their weakness in technological communications when compared to the al-Malik or the League. However, high-tech means are often employed, such as cybernetic body cavities or internal think machines. Such messages are always coded, and Decados codes are nearly unbreakable. During the Emperor Wars the Decados adopted the spoken portion of the Ascorbite language as a code for military transmissions; its success has led to its adoption by the Jakovian Agency. This code has only been partially broken by the Eye.

Agents

• **Stiletto:** This agent has been active under this codename for nearly 10 years, engaged in a covert campaign to ruin Baroness Cecilia Hawkwood, a landless — although influential — noblewoman of Gwynneth. Stiletto reports directly to Countess Illyana Usupova Decados, whose rule of her fief on Severus was threatened by Cecilia's support of their mutual cousin, Earl Joseph Hapsburg Decados, a rival claimant to her land. Baroness Cecilia, a favored cousin to Princess Melissa, is strongly resistant to Stiletto's attempts at court gossip. However, her recent attempt to claim a fief of Criticorum was sabotaged by the leak that Earl Joseph was connected to the notorious Countess Carmetha Decados, who led the Stigmata Garrison's attack into al-Malik space. This leak was arranged by Stiletto at the behest of Countess Illyana. In doing so, however, Stiletto disrupted the Jakovian operations dependent on Earl Joseph's Hawkwood connections, which has not endeared him/her to Duchess Salandra.

Stiletto's present whereabouts and activities are unknown, but unconfirmed reports place this agent in hiding on Istakhr. Little is known about Stiletto apart from mastery of the intricacies of the art of noble diplomacy. Several al-Malik, Hawkwood and Justinian nobles are suspected of answering to Stiletto, and are under investigation.

• **Sten Jiko:** The alias for the Jakovian operative at the center of the agency's Selchakah smuggling operations. Then house has maintained this lucrative trade for centuries, with Byzantium Secundus at its hub. Even at the height of the Emperor Wars, the traffic continued, thanks to Jiko's powerful contacts among the Cameton customs bureau.

Jiko's appearance is changeable thanks to Genetech medicine, but he is usually of slim build and just under two meters tall, with pale blonde hair. The extent of his cybernetic augmentation is unknown, but his display of an implanted rapier suggests that he may be of Decados noble birth. In 5000, Jiko was revealed while impersonating one Danius Harton, a Charioteer affiliated with the Gailbreath hong, resulting in the real Harton's incarceration by Impe-

rial authorities until the misunderstanding was resolved.

• **Remora:** An operative called Remora has been sighted throughout the Known Worlds in the last five years — excepting only the Church worlds. She is engaged in extremely successful sabotage against Hawkwood and al-Malik embassies. She was responsible for the destruction of the al-Malik consulate's communication system on Sutek earlier this year, which took weeks to repair. It was recently determined that her movements coincide with those of the Scraver vessel called Barter. Remora is of dusky complexion, dark hair and small build; it is only a matter of time before her cover on Barter is completely compromised.

• **Baronet Taty Ehrtanit Decados:** A public manager of Jakovian data-smuggling operations from her small fief on Cadavus. Her network of couriers bring her news of Jakovian operations in al-Malik, Li Halan and Hawkwood space, which she relays to Duchess Nadia on Severus. The baronet controls her couriers via their families, who are guests in her modest — but very secure — estate. The couriers pose as pilgrims, traveling to holy sites on other worlds, collecting and relaying information to Jakovian operations on the planets that they visit. Most of these couriers are drawn from Cadavus' destitute peasantry, who have no idea of the value of the information they carry.

• **Lady Marina Jakovich Decados:** The infamous "Chameleon Python," ambassador to House Hawkwood, considered one of the Jakovian Agency's key operatives on Delphi. She is easily the most well-known of Jakovian agents, at once admired and adored for her competence and grace while loathed and feared for her appearance and ferocity. Lady Marina has been cybernetically enhanced extensively for stealth, assassination and Decados aesthetics. She is a notorious cyberfetishist and is quite popular among those younger Hawkwoods who disdain the traditional views and feuds of their elders. The Hawkwood Rooks hold her responsible for numerous acts of murder, sabotage and barbarian agitation on both Leminkainen and Gwynneth, and have tried her for espionage twice. Evidence was insufficient in both cases. It is possible that Lady Marina is merely a decoy for the Jakovians, drawing the Hawkwoods' attention away from the agency's true operations.

Revealed Agents

• **Bertrand Wilhelm:** Also known as "Spider," Wilhelm was until recently head of Jakovian operations on Pandemonium. Under the authority of Count Enis Sharn, Wilhelm established a small network among the servants of local nobles to monitor noble activities that might threaten the count's rule. He also facilitated dealings between Count Sharn and the Muster, creating guidelines for slave-raids that would disturb the population as little as possible. Wilhelm attempted to investigate rumors of a secret society on the world, the



so-called Sons of Iver. In doing so, Wilhelm unwittingly revealed critical information on House Decados' plans for the planet Iver, embarrassing his noble patron badly. Wilhelm was abruptly dismissed from his post and sent to the Symbiot front by his Muster associates.

• **Nami Lukon:** One of the Jakovians' informants during the Decados conquest of Malignatius. Born into a local Zuranist community, Lukon's people were persecuted under House Li Halan. In exchange for food and fuel from the Jakovians, she provided them invaluable information on the Li Halan's orbital defenses, troop distribution and known areas of discontent. Other Children of Zuran claimed neutrality during the war, and some reportedly gave shelter to Li Halan troops as they fled the Decados advance. In retaliation, the Jakovians revealed their links to the Zuranists. Areas still loyal to the Li Halan experienced pogroms against them, including Lukon's own caravan. Lukon was exiled from the Malignatian Zuranists, and soon disappeared from sight. It is believed that she was abducted by the Jakovians and interrogated for her knowledge of Zuranist merchant operations. Her survival is unlikely.

• **Boyar Yurigen Decados:** Prince Hiram's personal liaison on Leagueheim, operating under the alias "Raxo Buedoon," an associate of the De Vatha hong. Although no evidence exists, it is likely that this cover was established

with the willing cooperation of the De Vathas. Sir Yurigen was instrumental in preventing infiltrators from the Engineers from stealing critical data on jumpkey manufacturing from De Vatha facilities. He also blackmailed certain high-ranking Reeves to delay demanding repayment on the debts House Decados accrued during the Emperor Wars. However, Sir Yurigen's cover was compromised by agents in the employ of Duchess Salandra Decados, who has formed her own ties with the League independent of the rest of the Jakovian Agency. It is assumed that Prince Hiram turns a blind eye to Salandra's sabotage to allow her as much personal leverage in the Imperial Court as possible.

• **Miguel Andreas:** One of the Jakovians' best operatives, an infiltration expert with considerable psychic abilities, recruited from the Hazat Dervishes. He was active for the last several years on Byzantium Secundus and Stigmata, as part of Duchess Salandra's operations against the Countess Theafana al-Malik. Andreas is believed responsible for the deaths of eight Brother Battle warriors, using a smuggled shield damper during a Symbiot blitz. More recently, Andreas addicted Adept Kirman Foley —Lady Theafana's former mentor — to Selchakah, in order that he might influence her away from the emperor. Andreas was discovered by Brother Battle theurges but escaped to Decados space. His present whereabouts are unknown.



Hazat Archons

History

At the height of the Second Republic, information became the most valuable of commodities. While thousands of groups competed for it, especially on Byzantium Secundus, few proved as effective as House Chauki. Its proximity to the capital, its renowned network of freelancers, and its own leaders' abilities gave it insight into the most hidden aspects of humanity's governance. Unfortunately, it took its eyes off its own fief. It never emphasized internal security the way other groups did, and the Hazat rebellion took Chauki leaders by surprise.

The Hazat victory over House Chauki, while not especially swift, was complete. It ended in the elimination not only of the noble house but also most of its householders. Among the householders who suffered at Hazat hands were the Chauki intelligence gatherers — the Hazat wiped out one of the best such organizations of the times. They did this hoping to prevent any insurgence of Chauki allies, but it also had the effect of setting back Hazat intelligence efforts when they most needed them. Despite the Hazats' central role in human politics, they remained oblivious to many of the developments that shook humanity during the Fall. They suffered raids from other groups, lost land to the Church, and proved less effective at dealing with the emerging guilds than did other houses.

The Hazat certainly noticed this failing but had little success in countering it. What success they did have came due to the actions of a few exceptional individuals, nobles with a natural penchant for spying and intrigue. Some of the established bloodlines have continued this grand tradition of death and deceit, including the Castenda and Eduardo branches. Other Hazat efforts either proved ineffective or even counterproductive and embarrassing.

A case in point is the infamous "Operation Catdog," where the Hazat hoped to trick House Justinian and House al-Malik into going to war with one another shortly before Vladimir's rise. They planned an elaborate series of machinations that would appear to be the work of the other house. For instance, they planted stories in the al-Malik press about marital indiscretions involving Justinian nobles. They tried to poison an al-Malik duke's hookah with a powder that would make his finely oiled beard fall out shortly after a meeting with House Justinian. They tried to switch a Justinian baroness' fine oils for one that would make her break out during an al-Malik ball.

Now, perhaps in the hands of more experienced agents — like those of House Decados — something this puerile

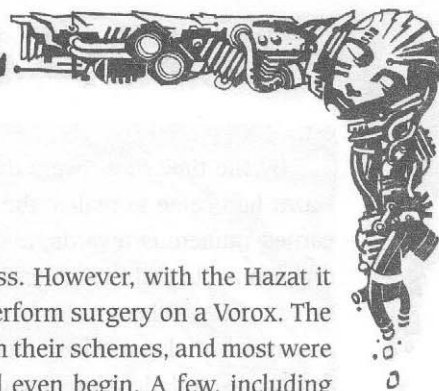
might have had some success. However, with the Hazat it was like having a Shantor perform surgery on a Vorox. The Hazat had few successes with their schemes, and most were uncovered before they could even begin. A few, including the debearding powder, ended up turning against them — Baronet Terrendo Marton Bursandra Hazat had more than a few duels with people who teased him on his new hairless appearance. Indeed, it took quite a few duels and apologies for the Hazat to put that episode behind them.

At the same time the Hazat were botching intrigue after intrigue, another house intelligence agency was making quiet strides forward. The Hazat Armed Reconnaissance Division — or ARCON for short — began as a battlefield scout unit during the rebellion against the Chaukis, but quickly moved beyond that. Early leaders such as Baron Emanuel Raul Jeremiah Zetania de Trieste and Lady Angelique Tessera Dorey quickly discovered that they could do more than just find out how many enemy soldiers were on a battlefield before a fight.

They started with several units of horse cavalry, but upgraded these to include vehicles of all types, especially lightly armored ATVs and flitters. Then they began organizing long-range reconnaissance patrols with some of their best troops. These patrols would range as far behind enemy lines as possible, gathering every kind of data they could. They did not limit themselves to discovering how many troops the enemy had. They also concentrated on enemy relations with the local populace, determining the enemy's level of activity, finding out who its leaders were and how they got along, how the enemy troops were paid and where they went for R&R, along more seemingly useless information.

ARCON's analysts would then combine this information to determine everything about their foe that they could. The Hazat's better military commanders learned to rely on the division's reports for their military tactics, attacking when the enemy commanders were least willing to cooperate or while enemy troops were on leave (or recovering from it). Not all commanders took advantage of this data, but enough did that word of ARCON's effectiveness began to spread.

ARCON made its lasting mark on the house during the wars that followed Vladimir's death. By then they had cataloged countless bits of information on each house's military, and its best minds could make instantaneous deductions about the forces the Hazat military opposed. Hazat special forces used these observations to wreak havoc with the enemy, disrupting their communications at just the right times and raiding facilities when they were at their weak-





est.

By the time these wars dwindled down, most leading Hazat had come to realize the division's value. Its leaders earned numerous awards, and the house established the division as its main intelligence arm. Its agents soon came to be called Archons, an obvious play on their division's acronym but also a telling clue to the reverence in which their eerie battlefield intelligence was held.

During the following years, the division had its ups and downs, coming into favor through its methodical work and preparations and falling out of favor whenever various Hazat nobles tried to use it for their own political goals.

Throughout this period, the division maintained its focus on battlefield intelligence, refining its techniques through countless operations. It maintained its detailed records on each house's leaders, units, weapons and tactics, and it probably has a better military history library than any other group. Only the best students at the Aragon military academy get to study from this library, and they leave it swearing that any battle situation that might come up has already been considered and evaluated.

Despite its efforts to stay focused on analyzing other houses' military might, the division has found itself drawn into the Hazat's internal politics. The house's fractious nature has a way of infecting all its agents, and in the century before the Emperor Wars, the division suffered a number of serious splits. Much of this began when Prince Guatano Michel Rodando Jacobi Eduardo de Aragon established the division's Domestic Observation Group, charged with monitoring questionable Hazat nobles. It did not take long for news of this group to spread through the house, and it became yet another point of controversy in the house's continuing battles.

The Castenda branch of the family lodged the strongest objection about the use of house money to spy on house members. Of course, it was also the family branch undergoing the closest surveillance. The group's activities became another issue in the conflicts that grew within the Hazat, and the current prince's mother almost disbanded the Domestic Observation Group before the Emperor Wars. During the Emperor Wars, complaints about the group lessened, and most of its agents switched to monitoring enemy houses.

The Hazat had perhaps the weakest intelligence force of any of the Royal Houses, and its inadequacies manifested in many different ways. Probably the most famous was its inability to predict either the outrage that the Hazat's seizure of Byzantium Secundus would bring or the speed of the other houses' response. The arrival of Hawkwood, al-Malik, Li Halan and Church dreadnoughts caught Prince Juan's forces by surprise and forced the Hazat to relinquish the planet. This is just one of many setbacks the Archons suffered during the wars, and Prince Juan purged their lead-

ership on several different occasions.

During these purges, Prince Juan accepted one of Duchess Elena Cindias Victoriana Castenda de Sutek's suggestions. He hired a number of Decados advisors to help put the division's intelligence gathering operations into order. They set up the Advanced Monitoring Program to keep an eye on the other factions. The Program did indeed begin to collect far more information about the Hawkwoods and the al-Malik, as well as the guilds and Church. Its observations on House Decados did not match its other output, however, and this weakness has never been properly addressed.

Since the Emperor Wars, the Archons have remained exceptionally busy. The Hazat proximity to Byzantium Secundus gives its agents easy access to Imperial territory, and the new Monitoring Program has been busy recruiting new agents and establishing networks in nearby systems. The Archon's older members grumble that their resources are being used to spy for House Decados, but they have been kept busy as well.

While most other houses relaxed after the Emperor Wars ended, the Hazat have stayed in a constant state of warfare. The Archons immediately went to work on Hira, putting their most experienced units in place to deal with this new threat. Since their databases did not have the amount of information on the Kurgans that they had on the other houses, rectifying this became their highest priority. They have proved very successful in this, and many of the Hazat's military successes on Hira can be attributed to the Archons. However, most of their agents on Hira are aging, and their complaints that they are losing new talent to the Advanced Monitoring Program have validity. When these older agents die or return to their homes, their replacements are unlikely to have the same level of success.

The Archons have also been busy within the Known Worlds. The Hazat recently purged its military of many of the psychic warriors who had fought so well during the Emperor Wars. We know that the Church pressured them to do this, but we also believe that the Hazat feared some sort of rebellion or coup from within its ranks. Since the Hazat came into power through a military coup, they have reason to fear one from their own troops. The Hazat have been very careful to keep news of this rebellion from spreading, and most people have no idea that it ever took place. The Hazat tried to use only its most trusted troops in this effort, and this included many Archons. We know that they succeeded, but we also know that a number of these psychic warriors joined the Archons after the purge.

Observations

The Archons have a split focus, and their various operations operate almost as separate fiefs under their noble commanders. For instance, while the Merchant Section is





supposed to keep watch over League activities, Baroness Rita von Kewlmon Rolas de Assireta's Technology Analysis Committee has gained purview over the Engineers, and she has used her position to gather all sorts of technological wonders. While the Advanced Monitoring Program now has authority over activities in imperial territory, Baronet Macolm Retaro Alendus' Phoenix Court Section has taken special interest in the activities of Questing Knights.

As if this did not make the Archon's activities hard enough to study, numerous Hazat nobles act on their own, sometimes to the Archon's detriment. These nobles seem to believe that it is part of their duty as Hazat to take affairs into their own hands, especially when they do not see the house taking action. Since intelligence operations are at their most effective when no one else knows they are underway, this happens all too often. One recent example involved Don Pedro Denudo Juantano's attempts to recover an Archon codebook lost in Vuldrok territory on Leminkainen. Don Pedro never realized that the division had dropped the book on purpose, hoping to both reveal Hawkwood agents in the area and to broadcast false messages to them. Don Pedro successfully obtained the codebook, returned it to the division, and challenged the woman who had "lost" it to a duel.

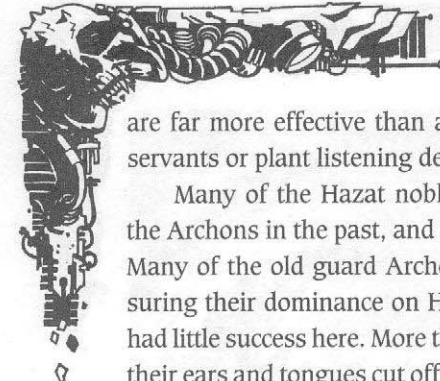
The scattered nature of Hazat territory also makes it hard to get a handle on Archon operations. They can have

operatives on numerous fiefs on numerous worlds. Byzantium Secundus is especially rife with their agents, as is Holy Terra. They can rely on local nobles for support and a safe haven in case of trouble. That the Decados now have access to this network is extremely worrisome. While most Hazat agents do not work for the Decados, we must assume that the Mantis reaches everywhere. Of course, the Hazat themselves would find such allegations offensive.

The Decados are not the only group that has penetrated the Archons. After the Hazat purged its military of the der-vishes — its great psychic warriors — more than a few joined the house's intelligence group. We know that the Hazat put them through extreme tests for loyalty, but they are still suspect. Some of them, including the renowned Don Marchenko Catilla Arronto Justus, proved especially ruthless in hunting down his old comrades. We believe that he recently took over Archon operations on Pandemonium, though we are not positive of his new role. We do know that he has demonstrated exceptional interest in Iver, whose ruling house claims descent from House Chauki.

The battlefield intelligence group — the core of the Archons — remains extremely effective. Its leaders turn down their noses at the Advanced Monitoring Program and its more subtle operations. They prefer the careful investigations and analysis that they carry out, and say that these operations





are far more effective than are attempts to bribe Li Halan servants or plant listening devices in Church confessionals.

Many of the Hazat nobles on Hira have worked with the Archons in the past, and they hold them in high regard. Many of the old guard Archon leaders seem intent on ensuring their dominance on Hira, and Program agents have had little success here. More than a few have turned up dead, their ears and tongues cut off in the traditional Kurgan fashion. This has led the Archons to warn off other agents, telling them not to come to a planet where they do not understand the situation.

The Hazat's recent alliance with House Shelit has also improved its intelligence gathering capabilities. While the Hazat have never been known for the quality of their espionage devices, House Shelit has a great deal of expertise in that area. While only a few of their devices have made it off planet, the Archons has made great use of their satellites, message interceptors and codebreakers on Hira.

Operations and Operatives

The Hazat have often succeeded in spite of themselves, with a few exceptional individuals making up for the failings of others. Their intelligence operations are no different, and more than a few operatives have become legendary. For instance, Gloriana Markusa has gained a great deal of fame as the Vulture, so named for her uncanny ability to pull useful morsels out of a desolate battlefield. It is said that with a glance she can deduce who fought there, what strategies they used, how well supplied their forces were, what their morale was, and what they had for dinner the night before. An older lady, she has begun to work for groups other than the Hazat in exchange for longevity serums or the resources to buy more. She has used her expertise several times to uncover identities behind one fight or another, and Scravers have especially begun to fear that she might

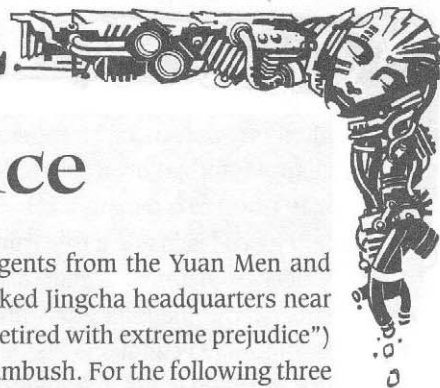
be called to one of their crime scenes. Others have used her services as well, because even if she does not know the identities of combatants, she can create incredibly accurate profiles of them. This has allowed her contractors to track down a number of dangerous freelancers.

We have yet to uncover the name of another legendary operative. Known as the Domino, this agent has appeared on numerous worlds and has engaged in numerous operations. The Domino works in disguise, and various reports allude to him as either male or female. Many of his actions have involved other Hazat nobles, leading us to believe that he primarily works for the Domestic Observation Group. We also believe that the Domino might be an official position held by different agents at different times, but we have never uncovered the identity of any of them.

The Domestic Observation Group does have another very effective set of agents called the Shepherds. Their primary function seems to be extracting Hazat nobles from trouble — guarding their sheep, as it were. Prince Juan formed the Shepherds during the early years of the Emperor Wars to rescue Hazat nobles being held captive by other Hazat. They have since branched out to assisting nobles whenever they are under threat. Of course, rescued nobles then owe them a favor and are supposed to give them constant reports emphasizing internal house matters. Rumors that the Shepherds set up some of these threats in order to make nobles beholden to them surface from time to time.

Not all Archon operatives are this effective. Some people have said that the aforementioned Don Pedro Denudo Juantano is actually an Archon agent, and he has indeed taken a keen interest in spying. His weak efforts have been easy for everyone to foil, but this has lead to a new rumor in the intelligence community. Since Hazat interests rarely end up threatened when he is involved, some have postulated that Don Pedro is really a front for other agents, and that while he attracts attention, they proceed with the real Hazat plans.





Li Halan Intelligence

From its beginnings, House Li Halan relied on secret police organizations to bolster its rule. Originally drawn from the Kish Intelligence Department of the Kish Defense Forces, established in 2703, the secret police expanded under princes Lucifer and Leonardo to incorporate the rule of several planets. In response to several competing agencies, Leonardo created the Red Dragons, a terrifying agency of blackmail and murder. During the Second Republic, the Red Dragons became the Boz Kurt (the Gray Wolf) agency, under the Li Halan prince's Office of State Security. At this time, Li Halan intelligence was the most effective in its history. They helped bring together the great alliance of houses that toppled the Republic.

During the Dynasty of Seven Demons (4023-4337), the Boz Kurt fell to corruption. Agents took bribes to enrich their own pockets but fell behind in exterior, intelligence-gathering activities, causing the ruling princes to rely on Jakovian intelligence. After the overthrow of Princess Desidere (4337), Prince Sanjiro disbanded the Gray Wolves and created the Third Eye, a military intelligence gathering service dedicated to conquest. Prince Cardano later renamed them the Yuan Men, and placed only dedicated Church members in the leadership. He also created the feared Hidden Martyrs. Prince Xiao established the Jingcha out of several small, secret Li Halan patriotic societies to combat Rampart's excursions into Li Halan space.

Jingcha

The Jingcha were formed by Prince Xiao during the First Rampart War. Princess Melissa later attempted to enact sweeping reforms of the agency, pointing them away from domestic espionage and into foreign spying. Today, the Jingcha possess a reputation as being compromised by Jakovian agents. This is both deserved and undeserved.

Part of the Jingcha's mission is to establish contacts with other intelligence agencies when the need for collective action with the Royal Houses warrants, and the Jingcha often exchanged information with the Jakovians on matters beneficial to both houses, such as revealing the placement of Hawkwood Rooks on Decados and Li Halan worlds. Jakovian double agents did, to some degree, infiltrate the Jingcha. After the Decados' capture of Malignatius, much distrust fell on this agency. Duke Yun Cai, Jingcha's director, died soon after the invasion from an unexpected illness, and three of his top four lieutenants followed him with mysterious accidents — a vehicle crash, a sudden fall from a mountain-top, and a fatal drowning accident in shallow water.

Never reported, but factual, is the Day of Three Drag-

ons (May 8, 4992), when agents from the Yuan Men and Hidden Martyrs openly attacked Jingcha headquarters near Escoral on Kish, and slew ("retired with extreme prejudice") some 157 Jingcha agents in ambush. For the following three months, a campaign of terror was waged against Jingcha, and a new director, Count Numakara, was brought in to restore loyalty and discipline.

After the purges, morale plunged, for many good agents died alongside compromised ones. It is thought that Jingcha agents operating on Icon who survived the purges, established the official links between Prince Flavius's brother, Grand Duke Maximino, and the Decados royal family. Duke Maximino, of all the Li Halan, has the greatest anti-Hawkwood and anti-Imperial bias, believing the Li Halan should be theocrats of the Known Worlds. The Hidden Martyrs shattered a plot of his in 4998. Afterwards, even Maxamino couldn't protect the Jingcha agents on Icon: They were rounded up and "disappeared." Prince Flavius strengthened his control of his hot-tempered brother, filling the Grand Duke's household with his own selected advisors.

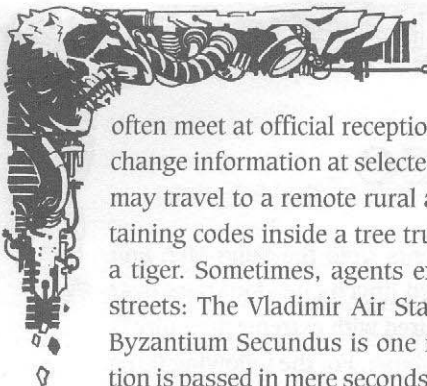
Methodology

The Jingcha, despite their recently compromised history, possess the best information on outside worlds of all the Li Halan agencies. Their exchanges with the Jakovians often brought them reliable, solid knowledge about non-Garden World politics. And despite the Li Halan reputation as insular, the Jingcha have the best maps of any spy agency, often obtaining their information from pilgrims, merchants, Church officials and sleeper agents. The Applied Geography program at Lyonesse University turns out many capable intelligence analysts, able to read images taken from space for military bases, factories and chemical compounds. Their maps of Byzantium Secundus, for example, are allegedly better than any other agency's.

The Jingcha also have a branch that deals in economic forecasts. Its agents are surprisingly good at forecasting correlations between military, political and economic power. Forecasting the recession which hit the Istakhr Market during the Emperor Wars, the Li Halan moved some key investments out just before the economic crash. They also predicted that the al-Malik would ally with Alexius Hawkwood, mainly out of economic concerns. They could not afford to float the market and fight the Symbiots, Hawkwood and Decados, all while making a play for the Imperial Throne.

Jingcha cover agencies are found in the Li Halan diplomatic service, trade and friendship delegations, and especially the Li Halan news-reporting agency, Xiao, which has offices in the capitals of all the major Known Worlds. They





often meet at official receptions to establish contacts or exchange information at selected areas. For example, an agent may travel to a remote rural area and leave a package containing codes inside a tree trunk marked with a drawing of a tiger. Sometimes, agents exchange information on busy streets: The Vladimir Air Station near the Imperial City of Byzantium Secundus is one meeting place where information is passed in mere seconds between seemingly busy commuters.

Agents

The best known agent is Sir Lu Dong-Bin, head of the Xiao News Agency on Byzantium Secundus, whose tie to the Jingcha is an open secret. On the Hazat worlds, Countess Tian, in charge of diplomatic protocol, is the senior agent; she is well versed in the martial arts. Perhaps the most dangerous agent is Jiao Li Halan — the Black Dragon — a known killer specializing in poisons. Also a martial artist and swordmaster, Jiao is in his late 20s, adept at disguise, and is believed to have gathered Imperial code secrets.

Yuan Men

The Li Halan military intelligence service — staffed by diplomatic, commercial, military and clerical personnel — known as Department Two, or Yuan Men, falls under the prince's Combined Military Headquarters Operations (CMHO). Recently, many feuding elements within the Li Halan army and navy used the intelligence operatives to further their own goals, and not necessarily in the coordinated effort desired by Prince Flavius during the Emperor Wars.

When working in harmony, the Yuan Men are highly advanced at cloaking their intentions. They pulled off the invasion of Rampart with great effect. Agents on Rampart, using Lyonesse technology, jammed signals and blew up power generators hours before the fleet attack. They even armed Rampart guild traditionalists and coaxed them to attack the planet's ruling reformist party. The seizure of Rampart was their greatest success. While the Rampart security agencies had some indication of Li Halan plans, they were still unprepared when the moment arrived.

Yuan Men also ran a successful network on Holy Terra and Leagueheim during the conflict. Yuan Men agents received information by monitoring rival military communications. Once they reorganized after their greatest error — failing to anticipate the Decados' seizure of Malignatius — they performed their tasks with a high success rate. Even without breaking Decados/Hazat codes, they were able to predict bombing attacks against Li Halan targets the majority of the time, mainly by monitoring the concentration of sub-space radio traffic coming from their enemies. One Jingcha officer, Colonel Shen Weng, had the uncanny ability

to predict Decados attacks with unerring accuracy, for which he received the name "Prince Hyram's Confessor." Monitoring and intuition played a large part of the Yuan Men's successes, even though the Hazat had broken some of their codes.

The Yuan Men welcome defectors from rival agencies, and have well-trained psychologists to interview them. According to internal Yuan Men reports, the majority of spies who defect to the Li Halan come from shattered homes or disjointed family backgrounds. Their defection often plays out an unresolved conflict of adolescent behavior against a parental authority. Nonetheless, agents of considerable intelligence and conscience from other agencies often pass information to the Li Halan or defect to join them. These agents see the Li Halan as ideologically indistinguishable from the Church, but better able to use physical strength towards moral ends. This ideological idealism aided Li Halan efforts on Hazat and Hawkwood worlds, such as when Sir Brian Hawkwood felt the emperor was moving too far from the Church. He first made some attempts to reach Church intelligence, but failing that, he spied for the Li Halan, eventually defecting to Icon.

Agents and Methodology

Baron Yuan, a close associate of General Ijirir, heads the Yuan Men. Throughout the Known Worlds, their best-known agents are: Major Namakura, now stationed on Byzantium Secundus but who formerly served on the Decados worlds, and Admiral Valentinian Yong-Le, now stationed on Leagueheim, formerly serving on the Hazat worlds. Both coordinate numerous agents, utilizing Li Halan and local spies in their networks. They tend to meet in clandestine places and operate prostitution rings in foreign capitals for blackmail purposes. They also fund various dummy corporations. A small equipment store near Hazat fleet headquarters was found to be a monitoring station for Yuan Men agents.

The Hidden Martyrs

The Hidden Martyrs are the most mysterious and elusive of the Li Halan intelligence agencies. They do not officially exist. Their power comes from the fear they inspire in their enemies. When they strike, it is sudden, often at unexpected times and places. They have been known to interrupt weddings, funerals, and even child birth, leaving a trail of death. They dress on these occasions in black, hooded robes, resembling fanatic penitents — which, in a sense, they are. It is rumored that they utilize psychics, Ukari, Vorox shamans, and even underground covens toward their ends. They have access to Manja worshippers and utilize intelligences



frowned upon by the Church in service of prince and Pancrerator.

Prince Cardano Li Halan created the Hidden Martyrs after his conversion, chartered to root out his domestic enemies within the Garden Worlds. He handed the agency to his trusted bodyguard, Lin Xiao, a former Orthodox priest, who devised the agency along Church lines. The cultural purity of the Li Halan worlds falls under their domain. Hence, they or their sympathizers control most of the official publishing or information services, and even the Xiao News Agency — despite the Jingcha filling the ranks — is ultimately answerable to the Hidden Martyrs.

They have no official budget since they do not officially exist. However, agents are paid from the reigning prince's wealth, usually listed as "Interior Expenditures," which normally covers the upkeep of parklands, gardens and scenic areas. Agents also own and run legitimate and fake corporations, the largest being Imperial Dragon Delivery Services, which has a monopoly on most mailing, delivery, and information/communication calls made in the Garden Worlds.

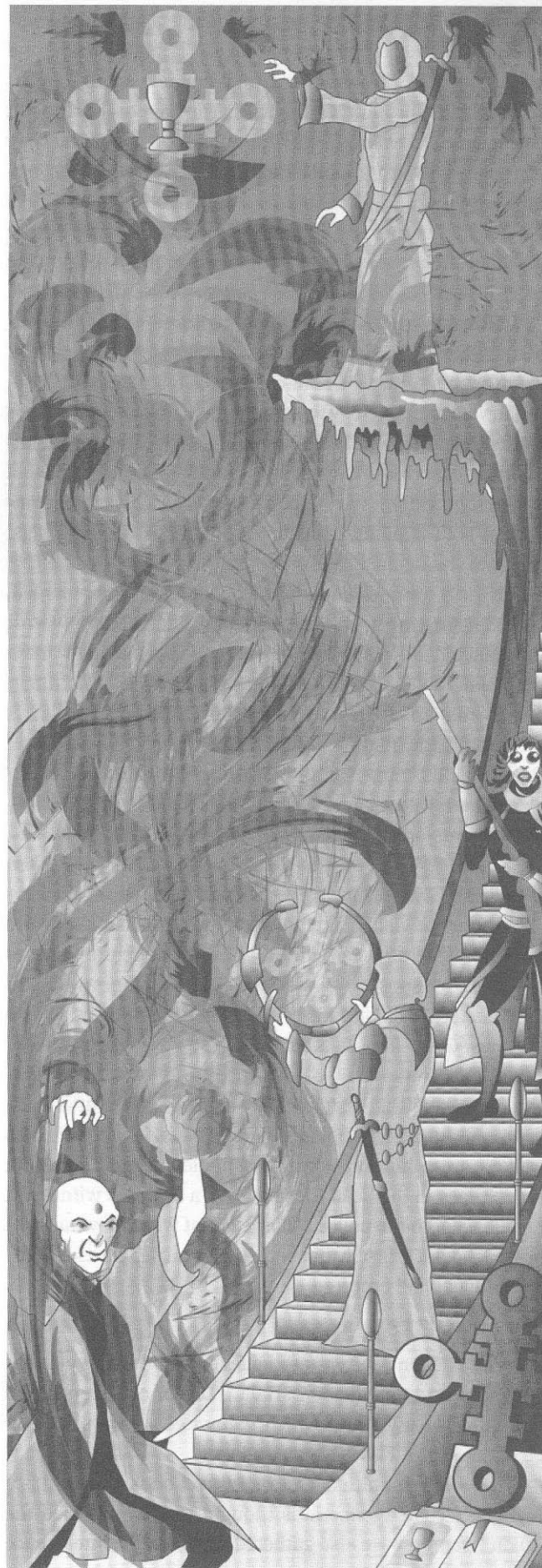
They maintain several training/indoctrination centers on Kish, Icon, and Midian. These are run like monasteries — and are often hidden in old monasteries. Agents are trained at these facilities in combat techniques, spying and infiltration. Their morale is extremely high. They believe they are agents of the Pancrerator and the prince, the saviors of the Garden Worlds from hidden enemies and demonic chaos.

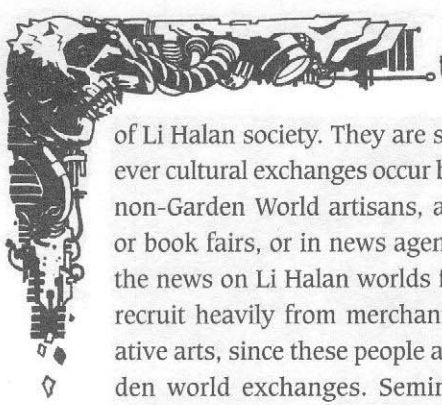
They have, from time to time, combined efforts with the Syneculla and Kalinthe Church agencies, usually for work directed against supernatural ends. Other spy agencies fear their fanaticism, and rightly so: One agent walked into the Decados Embassy on Rampart during the Li Halan invasion and detonated a high explosive device hidden under his robe, blowing himself and the embassy sky high.

Some believe the Li Halan princes have utilized aspects of Ur technology to bind the agents to them. Whispers speak of the Ceremony of the New Name or the Night of Blood Baptism, wherein Hidden Martyr initiates pledge themselves to the prince. Candidates for the elite Hidden Martyrs supposedly undergo a sort of hypnosis during the ceremony, activated by an Ur artifact that imprints fierce loyalty onto their minds. Imperial Eye agents have demonstrated that this can be done under hypnosis, but Ur-hypnosis may produce a fanaticism deeper than the Eye could mimic.

Methods

The Hidden Martyrs update their codes annually, and are very clever at this. New recruits possess little contact information so as not to blow their cover if captured. Some have operated as priests out of Church monasteries. It is hard to identify Martyr agents when they do not wear their robes. However, they are mostly drawn from the upper tiers





of Li Halan society. They are sure to have a presence wherever cultural exchanges occur between Li Halan artisans and non-Garden World artisans, at universities, entertainment or book fairs, or in news agencies. They almost surely edit the news on Li Halan worlds for public consumption. They recruit heavily from merchants those involved in the creative arts, since these people are often involved in non-Garden world exchanges. Seminary schools are also fertile grounds for recruitment. Clandestine meetings often take place in seedy areas where even police agencies fear to tread.

The Martyrs' greatest success occurred during the Emperor Wars when they launched the Seven Dragons Campaign against a Hazat-Decados-supplied rebel army in Zujan. Zujan was then ruled by the al-Malik, but the Hidden Martyrs looked to destroy all three factions. Overthrowing the al-Malik leader with two small but wealthy families (the Javak and Matyas clans), the Hidden Martyrs assassinated members of both families, causing the Hazat/Decados-supplied rebels to war against each other. On the night of October 10, 4992 (Holy Terra calendar), the Hidden Martyrs emerged, assassinating members of both families in an orgy of terror that pacified the region for two years. Prince Flavius wanted the Zujan region. The Hidden Martyrs delivered it to him.

Agents are often drawn from the Li Halan families or the aristocratic, highly placed freemen families from the Li Halan worlds. However, on occasion, peasants with valuable military/intelligence backgrounds have entered the service. Agents are trained as part of an elite religious order; their oaths of loyalty to the prince and Pancreator are taken most seriously. Few have ever defected to other agencies.

The more visible agents often have unassuming roles — a professor of calligraphy, a writer of adventure stories for children, a popular singer. All have been known to don the sinister robes and kill whomever the prince names as enemies. Other houses are not exempt from assassination: Count Fasil al-Malik, who ran a successful Mutasih spy network on Kish, was killed one day sipping his tea at an outdoor café in Escoral when two robed and hooded figures walked up to him on a crowded boulevard and shot him seven times in the head. Despite over a hundred witnesses, no one went to the police. All knew that what they had witnessed did not officially happen. People carried on as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Agents

The Hidden Martyrs are believed to be lead by Count He-Shang and Sir Hikado Li Halan, Doctor of Letters at the Escoral Academy (from which many agents are selected), all under Prince Flavius's supervision.

- **Ryohei Suzuki:** A writer of travel books, Suzuki is a highly effective agent. He is thought to have planned the Zujan Operation. He also gathered considerable intelligence

on the al-Malik and Decados worlds. A tall, thin man with a dueling scar, he is charismatic and often obtains information by disarming people with his charm over drinks. He now operates on Byzantium Secundus, under an alias.

- **Countess Mian:** Although small and unassuming, the countess is a dueling master. She personally saved a Ravenna bishop from a Vuldrok attack while stationed in the Hawkwood worlds. She travels under a number of aliases.

- **Others:** On Li Halan worlds, the agent known in dispatches as "Xin" successfully destroyed a Javokian-Jingcha alliance involving Grand Duke Maxamino.

Revealed Agents

- **Hu-Die ("Butterfly"):** A popular singer of ballads among youths, she made her way to Byzantium Secundus during the Emperor Wars and used her talents and charms to learn about Imperial/Vuldrok relations. Hu-Die made her way to the beds of visiting Vuldrok trade delegations and even one of Alexius's top Questing Knight surveyors. When he suspected what she was after, he reported his suspicions to his superiors. When Imperial Eye agents tracking her heard shots from his house, they moved in. A black robed figure walked confidently out, shot at one of the Eye agents (who received minor injuries), and swiftly fled to the Li Halan Embassy. There was no doubt that Hu-Die realized her cover was blown. She managed to escape, however, with a map of the Vuldrok worlds.

Lyonesse Survey Intelligence

The LSI is a small organization dedicated to espionage and counter-espionage on Lyonesse, on the planet of Midian, as well as gathering technical and military industrial secrets on non-Garden, "rival" worlds. Since the island-continent is ruled by a constitution under the protection of the Li Halan prince, the LSI reports both to the First Minister of Lyonesse and the prince.

They are very capable with high-tech listening and surveying equipment, and were the first branch of the Li Halan intelligence agencies to infiltrate Rampart. Under the current leadership of Director Hanslo Gardner, the LSI has extended its operations to Rampart, and building an agency of Rampart Li Halan loyalists in conjunction with the Yuan Men. These are most often recruited from the conservative to moderate elements of the old Rampart society, and the agency is titled the Rampart Survey Intelligence (RSI).

Aside from gathering counter-intelligence, the LSI acts as the ultimate law enforcement agency on Lyonesse. Their recent crackdown on illegal criminal gambling operations in Vasaria is an example of this. The upper tier of the LSI, the Security Operations Directive Department, deals more with



catching foreign spies, and works closely with the prince's intelligence apparatus. They run three front corporations, the greatest being Lyonesse Technologies, centered in Vasaria.

Although small in comparison to other agencies, morale is extremely high in the LSI. Agents' training and esprit de corps is excellent, for they believe themselves to be the upper tier of the Li Halan worlds (economically and socially, they are, standing only below the ruling royal families).

They can be identified by their *modus operandi*: They usually travel in teams of two agents, male and female, and can be found "off duty" in the most radical bars, such as the Hanging Rebel pub in Vasaria. They are often highly educated. Anti-political graffiti in the current street slang — such as the current slogan, "Off the Oligarchs," directed against Lyonesse's wealthy families — often identifies a meeting place for LSI agents. On foreign soil, they often hang out in bars and pubs near high-tech institutions, observing and taking profiles of high-tech employees. Two such LSI agents stole a great deal from one of the Charioteer Doge's trusted lieutenants just by watching his drinking habits and where he left his small think machine. Of all the Li Halan agencies, the LSI blend more easily into League populations, for they have a very un-Li Halan sophistication about them.

Agents

Dane Cywulf is President of Lyonesse Technologies; Shannon Chime is Director of the Imperial Hotel, Imperial City, Byzantium Secundus; Johnathon Ghent is a trade representative from the Manana Corporation, based on Avancier, Rampart. "Mister Seven" is the most mysterious agent; some believe he is a former Hazat dervish who found sanctuary with the LSI.

General Assessment of the Agencies

Overall, the Li Halan intelligence agencies are primarily concerned with internal loyalty. They can easily root out those who don't properly bow to the prince, but are less proficient at dealing with external threats and intelligence. They use non-Garden World operatives, as do other agencies, but do not trust them. This is the inherent cultural flaw of many Li Halan operatives: They feel an innate sense of superiority to non-Garden World peoples, bordering on xenophobia, and this hampers their intelligence gathering efforts away from Li Halan worlds.

Except for the high quality of the Lyonesse Intelligence Agents, and certain individuals within their agencies who have lived and traveled to non-Garden Worlds, other agencies' estimates of their abilities are rather low. For example, both the Jingcha and Yuan Men misread Decados plans for the invasion of Malignatius. An analysis paper dealing with Decados military preparations and threats to Malignatius prepared by the Yuan Men operative Lin Zhu predicted that the Decados military would not threaten Malignatius for a decade. Three months after the report was issued, the Decados struck. A low-level director in the Yuan Men, worried a month before the attack at the size of Decados trade missions "visiting" Malignatius was able, despite the active discouragement of his superiors, to move some military units onto the world. His action prevented an easy capture by the Decados, and created the long war that ate up Decados resources.

Prince Flavius is intent on slowly but competently rebuilding the Li Halan military and intelligence services. He modeled the former after the Hazat military; the latter he is reorganizing to report directly to him. The Yuan Men to report directly to him instead of the various dukes and counts in the army and navy. Unfortunately for the Li Halan, this move came at the end of the Emperor Wars.



al-Malik Mutasih

According to an old al-Malik proverb, the universe is divided between Dar al-Harb, the House of War — those areas outside of al-Malik control — and Dar al-Islam, the House of Submission, meaning those areas under the enlightened reign of the al-Malik. Their strange blend of mysticism, royal and Republican rule is meshed into the Way of the Three Mountains, colored by the Graceful Tongue. These threads run through their aristocratic culture in strange weaves — their unique destiny is both accepted and ridiculed in the same breath by individual family members, causing some concern among the other houses. What arrogant, mystical path guides the al-Malik? More metaphorically: What strange star guides their destiny? Their own history speaks of various paths incorporated into their house. What is certain is that the al-Malik have been served by capable intelligence services throughout their long history.

History

The early al-Malik intelligence services often specialized in technical and industrial espionage, utilizing the vast resources of the Bashshar Corporation, centered on Criticorum but in control of large areas of the Aylon and Istakhr economies in pre-Republican times. Before inheriting this gigantic corporation through marriage, the al-Malik relied on local Istakhr secret brotherhoods, such as the Mawla (white dancers), who aided them in their path to power. With the inheritance of Shaprut — also through marriage — the Ramakrishna intelligence agencies fell under al-Malik control. In addition, many Republican intelligence agents fled to al-Malik space when the Second Republic was overthrown (4000), seeking to escape certain death at the hands of the royalists. They brought their knowledge with them, helping the al-Malik to begin the post-Republican era with some of the greatest information caches available.

Unfortunately, the family fell into a premature decadence, and the quality and morale of these agencies soon failed. Rahimat al-Malik, the Lion of Shaprut, revived the fortunes of the family and instituted the Altair, a group of dedicated agents who infiltrated his enemies and raised intelligence-gathering to a sophisticated science. However, upon his final death, they fell in status, becoming just one of numerous competing intelligence factions.

The Mutasih was formed in 4552 by Duke Tahir Majnun al-Malik the Doomed, when he combined several of the Istakhr Market policing agencies into one. The Altair and numerous sister agencies also fell under the new agency, which was loyal solely to the reigning head of the house. The Mutasih outlasted the fall of their patron. Their experi-

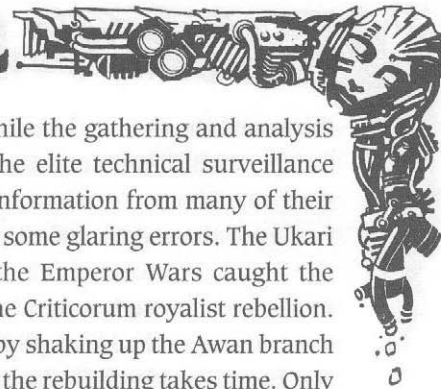
ence in combining economic espionage with other aspects of intelligence gathering was invaluable. Many agents still operate incognito out of the Istakhr Market, listening for plots against the regime and uncovering hidden contraband or illegal shipments. The Shaprut saying, "He who has the ear of Istakhr Market has the ear of the duke," illustrates how deeply tied al-Malik power is to the wealth of the Istakhr Market.

During the reign of the Criticorum Dukes (4593-4827), the Mutasih split into two branches: The Awan, or active undercover agents who policed the Istakhr Market and al-Malik fiefs, and the Mahir, those involved in high-tech information gathering. Many Mutasih agents operate openly — the Market Police, the Samarkand Police, and the Acheon Police are all under the Mutasih authority, as is the Market Import/Export Exchange Division, which monitors all goods sold in the Istakhr Market and collects the market tax that bolsters the house's wealth.

When the Criticorum line fell into decadence, the Mutasih had largely fallen to blackmailing and extortion, becoming just another corrupt government organization. Although they monitored Al-Abbasah "Claudia" al-Malik's growing rebellion in Hazat space, the agency did not respond in a coordinated fashion, and factions within the agency, tired of the internal weakness and corruption of Duke Sufyan al-Malik, joined her rebellion. Claudia's victory over Duke Sufyan was swift. She considered abolishing the agency, but her vizier, Sorhab, convinced her it could be salvaged. Given new management and morale, the Mutasih rose again.

Under Claudia's son, Duke Jabir al-Malik the Golden (4850-4940) funding for the technical division rose, creating one of the best technical gathering intelligence agencies in the Known Worlds. However, the Awan divisions — the field agents — were neglected, despite their reliable service. The Mahir gained the bulk of funding during the Symbiot invasions of the early 4900s. Since contact with the Symbiots proved fatal, swift identification and destruction of their ships became a necessity, something the Mutasih became quite adept at. Indeed, fighting the Symbiots changed both the nature of al-Malik intelligence gathering and warfare. The house retreated to a defensive stance against an enemy that spread like a virus, a tactical decision that would have historic consequences during the Emperor Wars. Prior to 4900, the al-Malik possessed a strong strike capability. After the Symbiot invasions, their defensive technology increased at the expense of their offensive capabilities. The house's early abandonment of an Imperial bid in the wars demonstrated this weakness. Steps were taken to rectify this by bolstering





the military, but the intelligence services still have yet to see a consequent rise in field agent funding; technical services still hold the greatest sway within the Mutasih.

During the Emperor Wars, knowledge utilized from a pilgrim on the First Journey exposed Duke Hakim's vizier, Uljatyu, as a Javokian agent. Uljatyu was hung without trial and the Mutasih immediately began a series of mass arrests and code changes. The vizier had compromised two of their top three codes, helping the Decados to successfully stir revolt among the Aylon Ukari. The Mutasih's second-in-command, Rashad, half-brother to Katib aswad Ben zahid al-Malik, the agency's head, was found dead of knife wounds in the Istakhr Market. No one believed this was an accident; rumors abound that he was in Jakovian pay.

Katib aswad Ben Zahid, realizing the agency was compromised, offered his resignation in the face of these massive setbacks. Duke Hakim refused, but took an active hand in recruiting new agents and reviewing the agency's mistakes. He discovered that most of the field agents covering the market and al-Malik fiefs were passing good information, but the Jakovians had breached the upper-level security apparatus. They operated a blackmail ring out of the Market, hidden through a corporation with Mantis League connections. Orchestrating situations that drew Mutasih supervisors into questionable acts, they then recruited them with threats of discovery. The Jakovian front corporation was subsequently shut down.

Mutasih victories during the Emperor Wars period were of a high-tech nature, including the monitoring of Hazat/Decados think machine transmissions. These hidden monitoring devices, planted deep in Hazat space, alerted Duke Hakim and Emperor Alexius as to when and where the Hazat/Decados were planning to attack. This crucial information gave the emperor time to prepare for the defense of Byzantium Secundus, and time for the al-Malik to rush in elements of the duke's 1st, 3rd and 4th legions.

Observations

The giant, 300+ acre, Second Republic maxicrete building located within the Istakhr Market is the most visible component of a vast information network that includes stations on Criticorum, a sprawling communications center on Shaprut, and smaller listening posts on Aylon. Al-Malik pilots sometimes skim the borders of Decados, Hawkwood and Li Halan space to gather electronic and communications intelligence from other houses. Due to the Symbiot invasions, the Mutasih has become too enamored of gadgets and distrusts human intelligence gathering. This gives them superior technical surveillance but poor field agents.

The Planetary Surveillance Division of the Mutasih is able to spot weapon factories and troop concentrations, and monitor coded conversations through a variety of listening

and surveillance devices. While the gathering and analysis of the data has produced the elite technical surveillance agency, the lack of reliable information from many of their ground agents has produced some glaring errors. The Ukari uprising on Aylon during the Emperor Wars caught the agency by surprise, as did the Criticorum royalist rebellion. Duke Hakim has responded by shaking up the Awan branch and adding more agents, but the rebuilding takes time. Only the Awan agents on Istakhr, and particularly the Istakhr Market, retain high morale and competency.

The Mutasih often trade information with Hawkwood and Imperial intelligence agencies. Imperial Eye agents have on three occasions advised Duke Hakim on methods to revive the field agent program. This does not mean, of course, that the al-Malik stand in full agreement with the emperor. The Mutasih distrust Alexius' seeming interest in alien rights for the Shantor and Ukari, and agents have been known to shadow Imperial Eye agents investigating these conditions. Many of the emperor's most vocal critics in this area are al-Malik with financial interests in deep mining on Aylon, where Shantor prison labor is still used.

The Mutasih are perhaps the best disguise experts in the Known Worlds. Agents are often drawn from the ranks of al-Malik royals on their journeys to the Three Mountains. Synthfaces, manufactured by a Mutasih front corporation, allow an agent to change facial features and become virtually unrecognizable. When Hazat agents followed "Fasil" to a bar on Aragon and surrounded the place, they entered and cleared the bar of its regulars, including an old Obun woman. Captured on holovid, the scene has been analyzed by both Hazat and Imperial intelligence. The old Obun woman was undoubtedly "Fasil," whose quick and convincing change of appearance, mannerisms and walk, allowed him to slip past the net. Mutasih agents can hide in plain sight.

The Graceful Tongue has proven a great weapon for the Mutasih. Poetic and ever changing, by the time outside agents have mastered it, the Graceful Tongue has evolved into new poetic forms. Its linguistic terrain is filled with mines and contains many traps that can root out double agents. The tongue allows information to pass in subtle ways. Certain intonations convey meanings that have been deciphered by Imperial Eye specialists.

Off the al-Malik worlds, the Mutasih operate out of embassies. Sometimes, sympathetic guildmembers and political organizations of a decidedly Republican bent will aid them. The Mahir branch operates out of Mutasih front corporations and real estate investments, or from al-Malik fiefs on other worlds, utilizing sophisticated intelligence gathering machinery. A chair with a golden dragon motif given to Grand Duke Maximino Li Halan of Icon by a group of Ram-part traditionalist admirers was found to have a transmitter hidden in the dragon's jeweled eye. The admirers had com-



missioned the chair to be made by Morris Furnishings on Rampart, which was soon discovered to be a Mutasih front company. Even more embarrassing, a transmitter was found in the prosthesis device of a high-level Jakovian agent. Once the Decados discovered this, they attempted to pass false information through it, but the damage had already been done. The agent had been present at the highest councils of the Hazat/Decados military strategy sessions during the Emperor Wars.

The Mutasih are also involved in counterespionage against the Shantor and Ukari independence movements. With the Ukari, it is largely a pattern of favoring certain clans over others — divide and conquer. The Ukari Freedom Movement, however, proves to be a thorn in the agency's side, for it is difficult to infiltrate. Bombings in the Istakhr Market have caused increased security crackdowns, and Duke Hakim has even approached the emperor about the problem. The Shantor are easier to monitor.

Counterespionage is also used in the Istakhr Market and in the Sarmarkand and Acheon shipyards against foreign agents, notably Lyonesse agents from Midian attempting to steal technical or industrial secrets. An entire counterespionage division shadows these foreign agents, looking for their drop points, finding out who they meet with, and foiling their activities.

Schemes

Mutasih agents seem to enjoy irony or ridiculing hypocrisy. On Decados worlds, they will gather at Church meetings against vice to pass information among themselves. On Li Halan worlds, they might favor places known to peddle pornography. On Hazat worlds, they espouse non-violence while mocking the military rigor and discipline of those around them. On Hawkwood worlds, they sometimes pose as stereotypical foreigners. They seem to view espionage as a game. Agents posing as aristocrats often deliberately draw attention to their spying, and then disappear just before counterintelligence agents appear. These obvious spies help divert attention from the more common, incognito spies burrowing themselves deeply within a particular society. The al-Malik Path of the Three Mountains teaches agents to explore all aspects of creation; changing identities becomes an easy task. When Sir Gregory Hawkwood's faithful valet of 35 years, Julius Bridgemoor, died, it was discovered that he had been a Mutasih agent. Sir Gregory was a highly placed Rook on Gwyneth, and the valet he took to be a native was actually an Aylon operative.

The Graceful Tongue makes royal agents the hardest to pin down. When discussing their meeting places, they may agree to meet at the "Eternal Flower," a code for the city sewage plant. Overall, Mutasih agents are usually very po-



lite — a trait which can give them away. Their synthface disguises and flawless acting abilities make them difficult to detect without a deep background check.

However, these expert agents are rare, for most of the agency's budget is still devoted to high-tech communications monitoring, agents who sit at desks or listening posts, deciphering transmissions or communiqués — not the sexy, exciting sort of work one usually associates with spies.

Some of their field operations have been identified. They profit from the banks on Madoc, gambling casinos on Aylon (The Blue Djinn), and expensive courtesan services on Criticorum, including the Golden Braid. They are suspected in drug trafficking on Criticorum and Byzantium Secundus (smuggling "Red Lotus," a mildly hallucinogenic plant grown in remote mountainous regions of Aylon), and have a hand in financing and reaping rewards on trade in Vuldrok space. Profits from these ventures maintain the agency's cast network of monitoring and communications equipment.

Known Agents

- **Khalidah the Red:** Working out of a replacement body-parts shop on Byzantium Secundus, Khalidah set her spy network of three undercover techs into intercepting and receiving signals from the Decados embassy. Physically stunning in appearance, with long red hair and an aristocratic personality, Khalidah made no secret of her connection to House al-Malik, and many assumed she was with the Mutasih. So engaging and charismatic a figure was she that her very enemies begged her company in the planet's whirlwind of social events. While she played off Decados, Li Halan and Hawkwood suitors, her staff planted microscopic listening devices upon her person and the grounds she visited. Thus, al-Malik intelligence was aware when the Decados sent a female agent to win a certain Hawkwood ally's favors — and they responded accordingly. Word got out of these dalliances, ruining the Decados' plans to woo the noble.

Surprisingly, no one blamed Khalidah. Her engaging personality admitted her spy status quite openly, and like a fool in a murderer's court, somehow no harm befell her. To have killed her would have been out of style, even gauche, for Byzantium Secundus's elite social circle. Other intelligence agencies kept trying to recruit her. She rebuffed them all with just enough ambiguity to keep them returning. When a rival finally sent assassins against her, she pummeled them with such style and grace that the slogan "a Khalidah performance" has come to mean defeating someone with flawless style and the most up-to-date techniques. The party responsible for the attack, upon witnessing her prowess and losing social favor, profusely apologized with twelve golden roses, which she handed to a starving street urchin in a gesture of grand forgiveness.

She had the good sense to move on to "the path to the

Second Mountain" before she became last season's celebrity. To this day, high society in the Imperial City speaks of her with a sigh and genuine longing: Now there was a spy! It is rumored that she has surfaced, under another name, on Leagueheim.

- **Dr. Jamsheed:** Trained by the Amaltheans (or so he claims, and with some credibility), Dr. Jamsheed is the only dentist to show up on the world of Stigmata. He used a sophisticated gas on patients during dental surgery and learned much from talking to his etherized patients. During the Emperor Wars, Dr. Jamsheed learned that the Decados Stigmata Garrison Commander planned to attack Criticorum; he forwarded the information to Duke Hakim. When the Stigmata troops landed on Criticorum, the readied Fifth Dark Legion defeated them. Dr. Jamsheed left Stigmata soon after. His current whereabouts are unknown.

Revealed Agents

- **Sir Kaveh Dastan:** The most famous case of a captured agent is that of Sir Kaveh Dastan. Kaveh ran a successful operation on Sutek that attempted to drive a wedge between the Castendas and the other Hazat branches by planting forged documents and false information about an immanent attempt to reappropriate Sutek from the Castendas. Due to the already strong feelings of the Castendas against their brethren, the information was not difficult to believe.

Sir Kaveh, posing as a political refugee from the al-Malik worlds, had his hands full during the Emperor Wars. Kaveh's second plan was to sow mistrust between the Decados-Hazat alliance through subtle means, including forging Jakovian documents pertaining to arms drops intended for the Castendas in the infamous "Rebellion Map," an incident that caused consternation among both the Hazat and Decados leaders. Ironically, Kaveh was not suspected by counterintelligence, since he came from a family long at odds with the al-Malik on Criticorum. When the fighting ended, Kaveh's propaganda enflamed the Castendas to rise and seize Byzantium Secundus themselves. Only with the greatest difficulty did the rest of the Hazat put this down.

Kaveh continued his work in the years following the peace but was discovered when he absentmindedly gave a small coin-shaped communication device as change to a young boy when purchasing his morning tea. The boy showed the strange device to a member of the police, who contacted the Hazat military. They moved in and seized Kaveh the next day. The communication device had enabled him to receive instructions and pass information to the local al-Malik trade mission. The Hazat long suspected that an enemy spy had dwelt deep under cover. The man their codes referred to as "Agent 9" was finally caught. Sir Kaveh was shot the following day. The Hazat seized many important items from his home, including a list of 15 spies he employed.



The Synecullum

The Synecullum is one of those groups within the Universal Church whose existence is widely known, but whose exact purpose and authority are not. The security apparatus of the Syneculla, the Patriarch's deputy, this agency operates as an ecclesiastical secret police force, ardently defending the Church's temporal interests.

History

The history of the Synecullum is largely unknown — even to members of the Orthodoxy, which it directly serves. To the extent that anything is known of its origin, it is intimately tied up with the history and development of the office of the Patriarch's Syneculla. As every school child knows, the Syneculla is the Patriarch's closest advisor and confidant. He is responsible for the most immediate of the Church's responses to events and crises in the Known Worlds. The Syneculla also formalizes the Church's position on ecclesiastical policy and shoulders the daily administration of the Church and the Holy See. In this way, he is the Patriarch's "mirror image" in the realm of temporal affairs. By tradition, the Syneculla can never be elected Patriarch, which is both a blessing and a curse, depending on who occupies the position.

As a position, the Syneculla evolved over time. The earliest Patriarchs had no single counselor of similar importance, at least in the formal sense. However, many Patriarchs — including Palamedes Alecto — created "cabinets" on the model of secular governments. These cabinets included several advisors, each of which was given a different area of jurisdiction. Some of these, such as the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints and the Prophetic Penitentiary, still exist to this day and have important roles in the Church. Yet, it was not until the reign of Adrian II (3977-3999) that the Synecullar office was formalized. Best known for creating the College of Ethicals in 3986, Patriarch Adrian found the Church had grown too large to be effectively managed by his own office. Moreover, the centralizing tendencies that led him to create the College also compelled him to create an advisory office that would both oversee administrative matters on Holy Terra and tend to the Church's worldly affairs. Thus, in 3989, the position of Syneculla was created.

The first Syneculla was Archbishop Ajaz Nasim-ul-Ghani, a native of Holy Terra whose family had ancient ties to the Orthodoxy. He served Adrian well, functioning as the old Patriarch's eyes and ears — as well as his fist. Under Nasim-ul-Ghani, the Church began the process of securing control of Holy Terra from the noble houses who competed

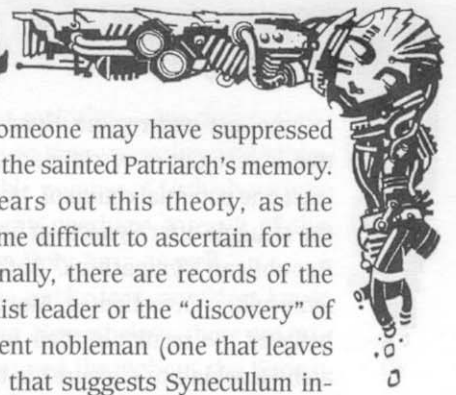
for this control. Lacking much temporal power, the Syneculla instead waged a smear campaign with threats of excommunication (along with actual excommunications, just to prove he could), and every other means available to claim humanity's cradle for the Church. The plan worked brilliantly, as more nobles withdrew from overt attempts to rule Holy Terra. By the time of the Fall, the Church possessed even greater control of the planet, paving the way for the eventual transfer of many lands into the Patriarchal See.

In the process of his operations, Nasim-ul-Ghani used both new agents — whom he recruited specifically for the assignment — as well as other members of ecclesiastical security details. This latter group was a hodgepodge of clerical and lay enforcers, ranging from Church guards to reformed criminals laboring under penance. Nasim-ul-Ghani used these people in a variety of ways. Some simply protected senior clerics on Holy Terra. Others used their command of bureaucracy and politics to do battle with the noble houses that vied with the Church. There were also certainly agents who used blackmail and thinly veiled threats to keep the nobles in line. Coupled with public bulls of excommunication, the Synecullum quickly became invaluable to the Patriarch as a means of asserting the Church's claims over the birthplace of humanity.

At some point after 4000, the jury-rigged agency that Nasim-ul-Ghani had created coalesced into the beginnings of the contemporary Synecullum. The exact date and circumstances of this transformation are not known, although it's almost certain that a primitive form of the agency existed by the reign of the Jacobean Patriarchs in the 44th century. As best as anyone can ascertain, there are two events that encouraged this development. The first was the fading suns phenomenon, which increased in intensity in the 41st century. This frightening turn of events lent credence to calls within the Orthodoxy for the means to suppress "other voices, drowning out the wisdom of the Prophet." The second — and more important — was the entry of the legendary Milana Decados into the Church. Many historians, including some within House Decados, question the existence of this woman, arguing she is a fictitious character modeled after Cardano Li Halan. Like the certifiably historical Cardano, Milana Decados was supposedly a debauched libertine who converted to the faith after having a vision of the Pancreator.

Whether true or not, there can be little doubt that the patchwork agency of the past became much better organized by the beginning of the 44th century. It is possible that Milana Decados is simply an invention of a later historian, used as a convenient explanation for the nascent Synecullum's seem-





ingly sudden rise to prominence. That the agency uses tactics much like those of the Jakovian Agency probably made the figure of a Decados convert seem all the more attractive. After all, what devout cleric wants to believe that his Church decided to use a network of informers and snitches of its own accord, when it's so much easier to believe that a convert from a decadent noble house brought those tactics with her upon her conversion? Of course, other historians disagree with this cynical view and offer up proof that Milana Decados actually existed in the 43rd century, when she served in the Synecullar office.

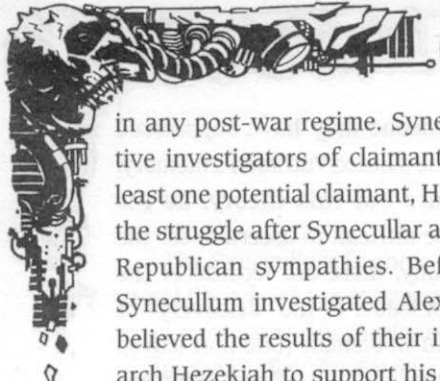
Under the Jacobean Patriarchs — especially Nadrim and Cassia II — the Synecullum came into its own. The agency took on something of its present shape and responsibilities, but was wielded with little concern for the propriety of its actions. Indeed, the Synecullum's willingness to blackmail nobles and murder heretics only added to the disrepute in which the Church was held in those days. Matriarch Cassia was even so bold as to use the Synecullum to attempt to damage the reputation of her opponent (and successor), Archbishop Questor of Byzantium Secundus. Though a reformer, Questor made no overt moves to abolish the Synecullum, because even he recognized its potential usefulness as an instrument of policy. We lack evidence that Questor ever used the Synecullum, but that doesn't mean he didn't. Records from that time are strangely silent on the

question, which suggests someone may have suppressed information that would harm the sainted Patriarch's memory.

Subsequent history bears out this theory, as the Synecullum's activities become difficult to ascertain for the next few centuries. Occasionally, there are records of the mysterious death of a Zuranist leader or the "discovery" of a "revised will" of a prominent nobleman (one that leaves his lands to the Orthodoxy) that suggests Synecullum involvement — but that is all. Between 4665 and 4900, the Synecullum seems to have faded from official history. Even the *Acta Synecullae*, the official archives of the Patriarch's advisor, contain only the scantest references that even suggest the continued existence of a Synecullar intelligence agency. This has led many to believe that the Synecullum is an ad hoc agency, one the Syneculla has the authority to create at his discretion. Others instead argue that the Synecullum operates independently even of the Syneculla, making it a rogue faction within the Orthodoxy's bureaucratic apparatus.

The ad hoc theory has gained some credibility in the last century, if only because the closing days of the Emperor Wars proved an especially trying time for the Church. Various contenders for the Phoenix Throne appeared, almost all of whom threatened to undermine the Church's place of prominence. Consequently, the Synecullum was needed more than ever — if only to secure a future role for the Patriarch





in any post-war regime. Synecullum agents were very active investigators of claimants to the throne. It is said at least one potential claimant, Hakim al-Malik, withdrew from the struggle after Synecullar agents threatened to reveal his Republican sympathies. Before becoming emperor, the Synecullum investigated Alexius Hawkwood as well. It is believed the results of their investigation convinced Patriarch Hezekiah to support his bid for the throne. Nevertheless, there's no question the Synecullum remains active in the Known Worlds — perhaps its highest level of activity since the days of the Jacobeans.

Known Operations

As currently structured, the Synecullum answers directly to the Syneculla (and, by extension, to the Patriarch). No other cleric within the Church has any authority over this agency. Thus, Synecullar agents are free to travel anywhere or do anything that is consistent with their mandate. Precisely what constitutes their mandate has always been a slippery question and continues to be. Officially, the Inquistorial Synod has total jurisdiction over the investigation and prosecution of heretics and sinners. Likewise, the Kalinthe have authority over the investigation of supernatural threats, such as demons and Antinomists. Consequently, this leaves a very narrow area of authority to the Synecullum — at least officially.

According to the 4998 edition of the *Acta Synecullae*, the Synecullum exists “to defend the temporal rights and privileges of the Church, particularly against those who would usurp them.” The passage does not elaborate on this definition. From its actions to date, it's clear that the agency concerns itself primarily with *political* threats to the Church, such as the guilds and the nobility. It also concerns itself with heretics and aliens to the extent that these groups infringe upon the perceived “rights and privileges of the Church.” Thus, any attempts to institute religious toleration laws on a world might well draw Synecullum attention, as would organizations like FAR.

At present, the Synecullum spends most of its limited resources investigating both the guilds and the emperor. In the case of the guilds, it's because there is suspicion among the Hinayana that the Merchant League plans to fan the flames of Republicanism within the Empire. These conservative clerics point to persistent rumors about guildsmembers, such as Doge Zale Gailbreath of the Charioteers, as “proof” of the League's revolutionary intentions. In this respect, House al-Malik falls under similar suspicions, although the Synecullum simply lacks the resources to investigate them adequately. The investigation of the emperor follows rather different lines. The Church worries about the emperor's choice of a future empress, believing that Alexius' decision could easily upset the balance of power

in the Known Worlds — to the Church's detriment. Rumors continually link the emperor with Salandra Decados, a woman the Synecullum considers extremely dangerous to the Orthodoxy's position. Tales of illegitimate heirs likewise concern the agency, as they represent an “X factor” that cannot be predicted.

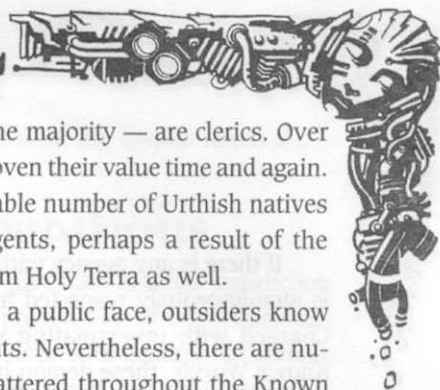
Finally, the Synecullum seems to have developed a small corps of agents devoted to keeping tabs on prominent contenders to the Patriarchal dais. Because he himself cannot succeed Hezekiah the Elder, the Synecullum's leader, Archbishop Sigmund Dual, appears to be paranoid about the possibility of a Mahayana resurgence. To that end, Dual has developed close ties with Archbishop Marcion Li Halan of Kish, a cleric who shares his views on most matters. Meanwhile, he keeps tabs on other potential contenders, lest an unworthy candidate advance too far without their failings being made known to the Church as whole.

The Synecullum is primarily an information-gathering agency, which relies heavily on networks of informants. In this respect, its information is only as good as the informants it employs. Because many of them cooperate with the agency under threat of excommunication or because of promises of ecclesiastical boons, the integrity of the Synecullum's network is probably less than many outsiders would believe. Archbishop Dual is as aware of this as anyone, which is why he has authorized the creation of a more insidious — and effective — network for use by the Synecullum. This network consists of confessors — most of them die hard believers in the Church's right to institute a theocracy — who break the seal of the confessional in order to pass along sensitive information. Dual tries hard to place these confessors in the retinues of powerful nobles, guildsmembers and even other clerics. By doing so, he more than makes up for the somewhat slipshod network the Synecullum has used in the past. Yet, he also places his agency and himself in grave danger. Were this secret ever to be made public, it would do far more damage than the revelation that Valentino Keddah ratted out his cousin Maraza in order to beatify his great-grandfather. For now, this dark secret is best kept hidden by those few outside the Synecullum who know it; its usefulness against the Synecullum is only increased with time.

Observations

The Synecullum is largely a cipher. Its membership is small and its agenda is unclear. Beyond knowing that it seeks to shore up the Church's position within the Known Worlds, there's relatively little to know. That makes the agency potentially dangerous — at least if Sigmund Dual has plans beyond the internal politics of the Church. To date, there's no strong evidence the Syneculla wants anything more than to assure continued Hinayana ascendancy, as well as a





prominent place for the Church in corridors of power. If this is all the Synecullum serves, it poses relatively little threat to the emperor or his posterity.

However, history suggests that the Synecullum could well have another agenda. There's little doubt that the agency rose to prominence under the corrupt Jacobean Patriarchs. Moreover, the legend — even if untrue — that a "reformed" member of House Decados taught the agency some of its methods is a disturbing one. When coupled with the fact that Dual has ordered confessors to break their sacred vows to serve his information-gathering needs, it does not paint a pretty picture. The Synecullum may have been a small and limited-purpose agency in the past, but it may not remain so forever. Indeed, its activities over the past few years suggest otherwise.

A lingering question is how much Patriarch Hezekiah — or anyone else in the hierarchy — knows about the Synecullum's dubious activities. There is very little evidence to suggest the Patriarch knows about the broken seal of confession. Since the creation of the Synecullar office, the Patriarch has delegated more and more responsibilities to his advisors, leaving him time to concentrate on more spiritual matters. In addition, most Syneculla show remarkable streaks of independence. Sigmund Dual is no different. At the same time, some consider Hezekiah a better politician than a spiritual leader, making it possible he knows more than it might appear. The Patriarch's laxity in using the Inquisition to combat theological threats can thus be seen as either confirmation or denial of this charge.

The Synecullum is also surely involved in recent ecclesiastical debates regarding the wisdom of calling a crusade against the Kurgans. To date, neither Dual nor the Patriarch has made an unequivocal public statement on this matter, which leads some to believe there's a rift within the highest levels of Church authority. These observers argue that the Syneculla is by nature a cautious man who worries that a crusade could horribly backfire, creating not only a wider war but also bolstering the power of the nobles who prosecute the crusade. If true, the Patriarch may never proclaim a crusade out of fear for the possible consequences. It is uncertain whether this supposition is correct. It is only by watching ecclesiastical politics over the next year that some insight into this matter may be gained.

Agents

The membership of the Synecullum is small, especially when compared to other Church agencies; this is by design. The agency exists to serve the Syneculla, who is the closest and most trusted advisor of the Patriarch. Thus, it is seen as only reasonable to limit the Synecullum's membership to a small number of well-trained and trustworthy individuals. These individuals are always members of the Orthodoxy,

although not all — merely the majority — are clerics. Over the years, lay agents have proven their value time and again. Interestingly, there are a sizable number of Urthish natives among the Synecullum's agents, perhaps a result of the Syneculla's always being from Holy Terra as well.

Because the agency has a public face, outsiders know quite a few Synecullum agents. Nevertheless, there are numerous unknown agents scattered throughout the Known Worlds. These agents use code names based on passages from the Omega Gospels or other holy texts. In most cases, the passages have little or nothing to do with the identity or mission of the agent. In others, unconscious connections exist, which have proven useful in determining the true identities of these agents.

A few of the more important Synecullum agents currently operating in the Empire include:

- **Maghor Mylchreest:** This agent is well known as head of the security detail protecting the College of Ethicals. What's less well known is that his actual job is to spy on the members of the College, particularly those belonging to non-Orthodox sects like the Amaltheans and Eskatonics. Although only a deacon himself, Mylchreest's Synecullar authority allows him free access to the corridors of power — a perk he makes good use of.

- **Ellaise Lanquetot:** Assigned to the Church delegation at the Imperial Court, Lanquetot uses her proximity to the emperor to pry into Alexius' personal affairs. She's taken particular interest in whomever the emperor might choose as his empress. Thus, Lanquetot gathers information on Salandra Decados, Theafana al-Malik and any other woman who gets very close to the emperor. For now, this is simple intelligence gathering, but there's no doubt Lanquetot sees it as potentially useful blackmail information, should the need arise.

- **Terjo voManta:** Unusual because of his Obun heritage, this agent is nevertheless a ruthless investigator of those deemed dangerous by the Church. He naturally spends most of his time looking into clerics overly enamored of the ancestral Obun faiths. His own knowledge of Bintaru and Voavenlohjun is exceptional, making it easier to recognize when a supposedly Orthodox bishop has come under the sway of theologians seeking to introduce animism or metempsychosis to the Prophet's holy faith.

- **Revealings 12:** This agent is believed to be the ring-leader behind the compromised confessors. His choice of codename suggests he sees himself not as perverting the law of the Church but merely "seeking what lies hidden within the hearts of men for the glory of the Pancreator," as the scripture says. He is thus either a fanatic or a cynic — either of which would make him very dangerous.



Kalinthi

If there is any agency within the Universal Church that is simultaneously respected and pitied, it is the Kalinthi. Charged with investigating supernatural threats to the Known Worlds, these demon hunters have a well-deserved reputation for erudition, courage... and short life spans. During the Emperor Wars, large numbers of Kalinthi agents disappeared or died horrible deaths at the hands of unknown enemies. Strangely, that trend did not end with the conclusion of the Wars, suggesting something far more sinister than politics is behind these tragedies.

History

The origins of the Kalinthi begin on the planet Sutek (then called Sathra's Boon) during the days of the Diaspora. The earliest colonists recognized that Sutek showed clear signs of Anunnaki inhabitation. Artifacts and relics of the Ur were frequently found, leading to disputes between various groups over who should be granted ownership of them. House Chauki — who ruled the planet at this time — typically settled these disputes and, in the process, some of its members acquired a genuine interest in unexplained phenomena. While the world-weary and relativistic Republic investigated psi powers, it ignored unusual religious phenomena and miracles, believing them to be the ravings of the simple minded. However, Roderick Chauki didn't share this view. With the blessings of his house — and probably their resources as well — he set about investigating these matters for himself.

A devout man, Roderick began to worry that Sutek might fall prey to the Dark, the malignant forces the Prophet had warned the Known Worlds about. Using his own knowledge, Roderick created a small group dedicated to determining whether his worst fears were indeed true. Calling them the Kalinthi (from an ancient Urthish dialect, meaning "beautiful souls"), he inducted a small number of colleagues into the group before setting about his task. Between 3892 and 3901, the Kalinthi grew in size and power. This growth couldn't have come at a better time, since the Church was beset on all sides by the open acceptance of Anunnaki cults and other religious oddities. Indeed, several members of the group — although not Roderick, interestingly enough — exhibited signs of the Pancreator's blessing, mostly in the form of theurgic abilities untaught to them by the Church. Clearly, the miracles Roderick sought out were more than the delusions of the common folk.

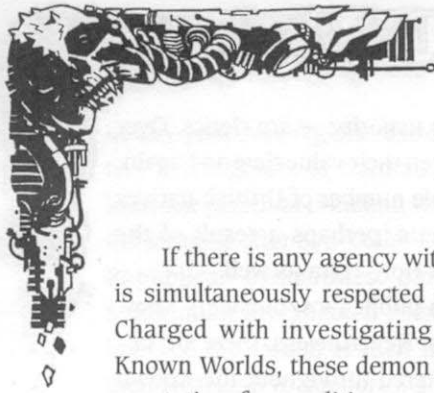
In 3902, on the anniversary of the group's founding, Roderick was found dead — murdered in his home in Djehut. Because the early days of the Kalinthi were largely a mys-

tery to the population at large (who still considered them a bunch of crackpots), Roderick's death raised many questions. If nothing else, it suggests his murderer knew a great deal about the group — evidence either of extreme power or an inside job. Roderick's successor was Karoniaktejah Hauptman, a mystic who'd demonstrated remarkable theurgic powers over the last few years. Hauptman's zeal held the Kalinthi together after Roderick's death, a move that allowed the group to survive in the face of the Fall.

As the Second Republic collapsed, Antinomist cults became more and more common. The Kalinthi investigated these cults with remarkable thoroughness, but found far fewer instances of real demon worship than one might expect. Even so, the group caught the eye of Bishop Thurka Bhattacharya, a learned woman with a reputation as a seer. She approached Hauptman and revealed that she had had a vision of the future, one in which the Known Worlds were engulfed in a great darkness and the suns finally went out. Bishop Bhattacharya explained the she believed the Pancreator had granted her this vision so that something might be done to prevent it. Therefore, she turned to the Kalinthi in the hope that their skill in dealing with demons and their mortal servants might be put to a larger purpose. Hauptman readily agreed.

Using her own funds, Bishop Bhattacharya sponsored the Kalinthi on several missions beyond Sutek. She had heard tales of demonic possession, hauntings and Antinomy on several nearby worlds. She reasoned that the cause of the Church was not served by allowing such tales to go uninvestigated. Indeed, she felt, as did Hauptman and Roderick Chauki before him, that true investigation requires equal parts open mindedness and skepticism. No one benefits from unsubstantiated stories of demons or miracles. Likewise, nothing is gained by denying genuine instances of divine power, as the Republic once had done. In small groups, the Kalinthi fanned out across space, investigating reports of the supernatural and dealing with them if they proved dangerous. Their exploits during this time largely remain a mystery, although we assume they uncovered enough genuine examples of supernatural activity to retain the support of Bishop Bhattacharya.

By around 4100, although few of Roderick Chauki's original followers remained, the Kalinthi survived. As the Republic faded into memory and the stars faded, the desire for the Kalinthi's services grew among clerics and ordinary believers. However, the strenuousness of their training — especially its emphasis on using scientific as well as theurgic methods — always kept their numbers low. Indeed, some



prelates looked askance at the Kalinithi, seeing them as neither true children of the Church (because of their use of scientific methods) nor the heretics some accused them of being. Thus, their numbers stayed small for many decades.

Universal recognition of the Kalinithi did not occur until 4269, during the reign of Matriarch Alethea. Alethea issued a bull in which she outlined the authority and jurisdiction of the Kalinithi. She also provided funding for the group, including the grant of several small monasteries on Holy Terra, Byzantium Secundus and Icon. The group retains them to this day, although Icon remains the most populous. From that point on, the Kalinithi found that demand for their services rarely waned. The peasantry continued to report dark goings-on, including the appearance of husks and other minor supernatural threats. In addition, clergymen saw Antimonists everywhere, including within the Church itself.

Over the centuries, the Kalinithi have been involved in several high profile investigations, most notably the mysterious assassination of Vladimir Alecto. Although the group never officially ruled on the matter (the case is still considered open), most Kalinithi believe there is sufficient evidence to attribute demonic influence to that tragic event. The group likewise sees evidence of dark forces behind the equally mysterious death of Jian-zhang Li Halan during the Emperor Wars. Although Alexius ascended the Phoenix Throne successfully, supernatural threats seem to be increasing in

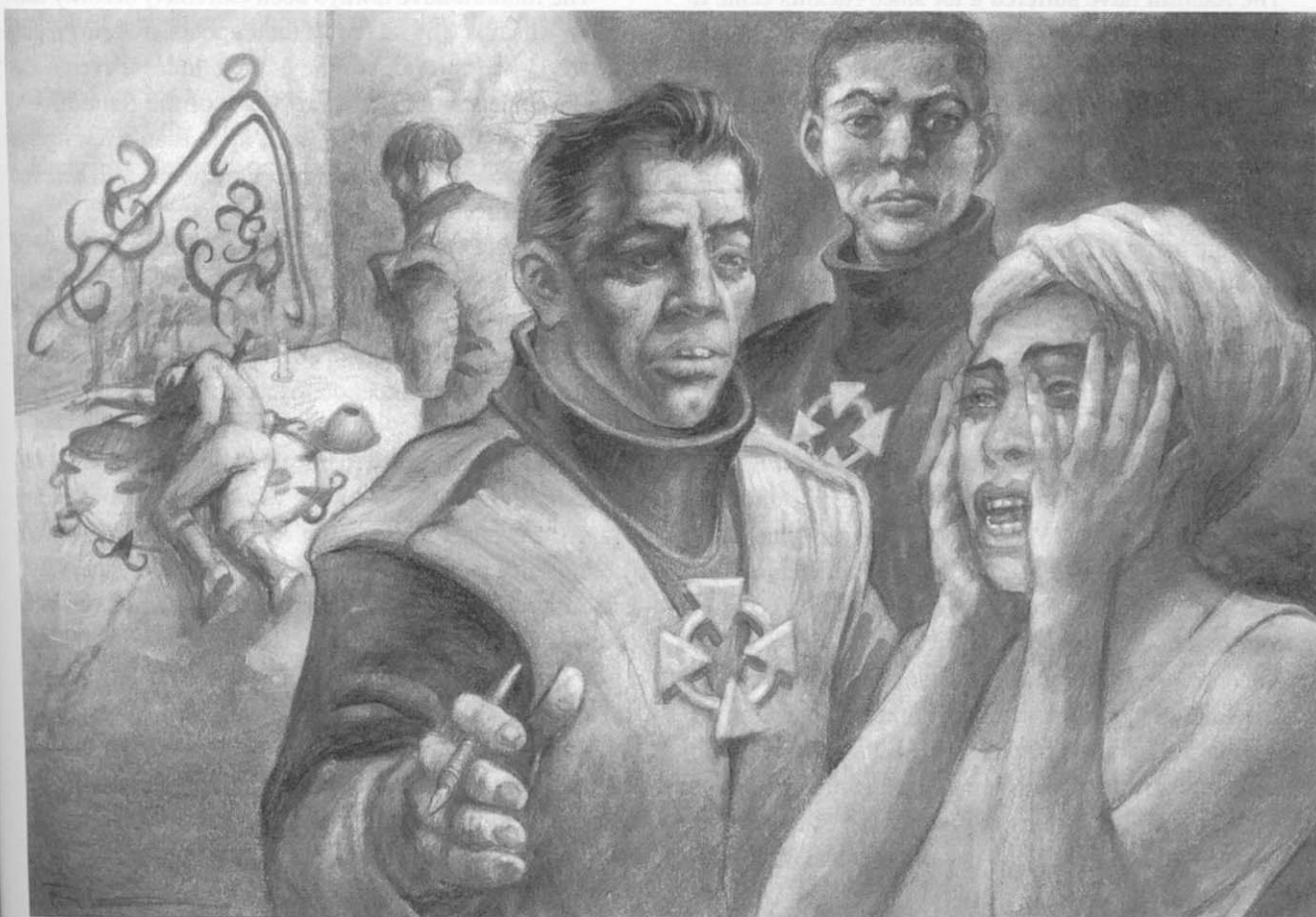
recent years. Now more than ever, the Empire needs these stalwart demon hunters.

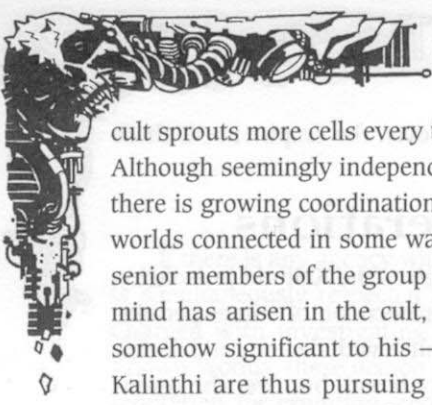
Known Operations

Matriarch Alethea's bull gives the Kalinithi jurisdiction over "the investigation and prosecution of crimes pertaining to or deriving from intercourse with demons or demonic powers." This mandate is very broad, but over the centuries, it has evolved into a very specific range of cases. Thus, the Kalinithi do not trespass on the realms of either the Synecullum or the Inquisition, although they sometimes liaise with them when a case is shown to involve either political or theological matters respectively. In practical terms, the Kalinithi only investigate cases in which there is evidence of the involvement of supernatural beings or powers.

Since Alexius' coronation, the Kalinithi have been very busy. Their two primary areas of operation at the moment are zombie plagues and the Ordo Draconis Tenebris. Zombie plagues enjoy a lower level of concern; novice Kalinithi who are becoming acquainted with the group's ways frequently investigate them. This doesn't imply the group places any less concern in night-cracker sightings, it simply means that the senior Kalinithi believe they have more pressing concerns.

The Antinomist cult known as the Ordo Draconis Tenebris is one such concern. Like the mythical hydra, the





cult sprouts more cells every time the Kalinithi destroy one. Although seemingly independent, the Kalinithi suspect that there is growing coordination between them, especially on worlds connected in some way to Grail. This has led some senior members of the group to suspect that a new mastermind has arisen in the cult, one who sees that planet as somehow significant to his — and the cult's — goals. The Kalinithi are thus pursuing closer relations with House Keddah to gain a better foothold in the corridors of power on this world, in case they need to call on the sorts of local military resources available only to noble houses.

Because of their well-known skepticism and objectivity, the Kalinithi also investigate cases of miracles attributed to alleged saints. The Patriarch employs this group as a check against the zeal of devotees of would-be saints. He believes the Kalinithi are above the sway of petty politics and thus will look into these matters with open minds. If the Kalinithi rule in favor of a miracle's validity, the prospective saint's cause gains great weight in the hierarchy. If they rule against it, the cause almost always dies. As a result, the Kalinithi have enemies among the supporters of deceased clerics, such as those devoted to the memories of Haruki Sono and Issen Romel, who'd previously been considered for sainthood. Now, their causes are no more but the hard feelings remain.

Observations

The Kalinithi have suffered a lot since Alexius came to the throne. The group now loses almost as many agents as it sends out. The rate of attrition is horrendous — literally. Far too many Kalinithi are ending up dead for anyone's liking, whether they be noble houses, the Church or the Kalinithi themselves. There's no clear indication of who is responsible for the sometimes-horrifying deaths of their agents. The fact that many of them end up killed in what appears to be a ritualized fashion suggests that Antinomists may be involved, perhaps even the Ordo Draconis Tenebris.

Of course, when some of these deaths have taken place within Kalinithi-held monasteries, there's every reason to take note. In 4998, for example, Alvir Spakr was founded murdered within his cell on Byzantium Secundus. Spakr's body was covered with Anunnaki-inspired glyphs drawn in his own blood. In addition, certain vital organs — including his heart — were missing. Yet, no one within the monastery saw anything out of the ordinary. A similar death occurred on Icon six months later.

There are few facts in these strange deaths, which is why the Kalinithi's grand master, Nuru Tulun, is so concerned. He sees certain parallels between the recent spate of murders and the unsolved murder of the group's founder, Roderick Chauki. He worries that either the Kalinithi have been subverted from within — a terrible possibility — or

that the forces they face are so powerful that they can get access to the Kalinithi with ease. In either case, Tulun fears that the Known Worlds are about to suffer from an increase in supernatural activity, one for which even his own group may be ill-prepared.

Agents

The Kalinithi is a small and tightly-knit organization whose agents are nevertheless given wide latitude in the pursuit of their duties. Agents are almost always drawn from the Orthodoxy, although some exceptions have been made for particularly like-minded members of other sects. Although the occult lore of many Eskatonics often proves valuable, Kalinithi dismiss the majority of that order's beliefs as quackery.

Most Kalinithi work in pairs, with at least one member skilled in theurgy. These pairs are either assigned to a specific duty (such as a bishop's bodyguard) or roam freely within a given territory (such as Decados worlds) in search of supernatural threats. All Kalinithi agents are skilled in the use of the *Kalos Logos*, a secret code devised by Roderick Chauki. The *Kalos Logos* isn't a complete language, but a collection of verbal cues that can be interspersed into normal Urthish speech so as to convey information to a fellow Kalinithi without anyone even being aware that information has been exchanged.

The Kalinithi have always been extremely security conscious, which is why so few of their agents are known outside the closed corridors of the Church. Indeed, even many high-level clerics have no knowledge of the Kalinithi — a fact that has preserved the lives of more than a few agents over the years. A few of the known members still believed to be active are:

- **Tharbis Pereira:** Assigned to al-Malik space, this agent specializes in the solving of murders in which supernatural powers or beings may have been involved. In 4996, she uncovered the involvement of an Antinomist cult in the death of Baron Hahagiri Ankusi on Criticorum. She is now seeking out other members of the same cult.

- **Audemar Renfrew:** This old Kalinithi is currently stationed on Byzantium Secundus, where he seeks out threats against the emperor. He is the Kalinithi's most public face, leading some to believe that his primary purpose these days is to draw attention away from the other Kalinithi within the court.

- **Quentin Greslet:** This agent is the Kalinithi's liaison on Grail. He works with Marquis Haroun Keddah and his son Harken to determine why the planet is so significant to the Order Draconis Tenebris. Greslet has a reputation for being something of a flamboyant sort, making him a popular figure among the youth of Grail, who see him as a hero.



Penitents

For as long as psychic phenomena have existed, humanity has treated them with a combination of fear and fascination. Since the Fall of the Second Republic, the former has held the greatest sway, especially within the corridors of the Universal Church. Like technology, psychic abilities are far too useful simply to discard, even if doing so would serve the agenda of many clerics. Consequently, another option had to be explored, one that allowed the Church to condemn psychic abilities while at the same time taking advantage of their full potential. That option is the Penitents.

History

Zebulon the Prophet said very little either in his public life or in the Omega Gospels about the sinfulness or righteousness of psychic abilities. In part this was because these talents were still poorly understood during the Prophet's lifetime. Consequently, his disciples and those who came immediately after him had no coherent opinion of psychic powers, except for the positive remarks of Ven Lohji, whose opinions have been largely sidelined by the Orthodoxy due to her alien background. Because of the lack of a definitive teaching on the matter, it took some time before the Church formulated a position, leaving it largely to the consciences of individual priests and believers. Even Palamedes Alecto, renowned for his typically stern moral denunciations, said "all who reflect the Pancreator's light are fit to be called his children, provided they do so as the Prophet taught us."

While the first Patriarch may well have intended his words to be a broadly based acceptance of any who earnestly seek the Pancreator with a humble heart, they have become the basis for later attacks on psychic abilities and those who possessed them. The Phavian Institute was founded in 3760 to promote the scientific study of psychic powers. Its appearance just as the Second Republic began its slide into decadence was fortuitous for reactionaries within the Church. The Institute's materialist model of the human mind, as well as its disdain for the Church's "quaint mythology" (to quote Mifsud Caruana, an important Phavian) made it a perfect target for the demagogic priests who became popular in the latter days of the Republic.

Drawing inspiration from teachings like the Doctrine of the Unethical Alien, these rabble-rousers whipped up public fear and hatred against the Institute and those who practiced psychic abilities. The fear so generated culminated in attacks against the headquarters of the Institute on Gwynneth in 3873, as well as lynchings and riots on other worlds. By the time the Republic finally fell, attitudes against psychics

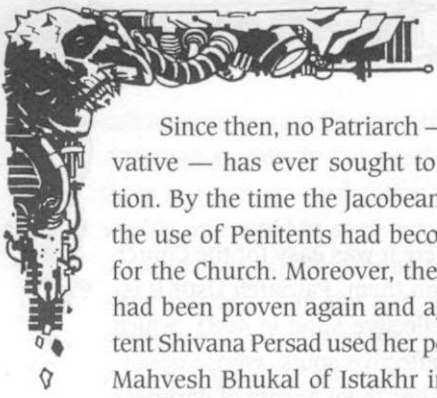
had hardened to the point where it was easy for the Church to find justification to condemn them. Patriarch Ustir II issued the Doctrine of the Unreflective Mind in 4081, which condemned psychics as "unreflective souls, whose obsession with their own power makes them agents of darkness and occasions of sin for others." The doctrine banned the use of psychic powers and mandated that psychics turn themselves into the Church for "penance."

Not many psychics heeded Patriarch Ustir's call — but some did. Drawn mostly from the ranks of the unlettered peasantry, as well as others who believed the Fall of the Republic signaled the beginning of the End Times, these psychics approached the Church in hopes of receiving forgiveness for the "sin" of being psychically endowed. What they received instead was a lifetime within the confines of monasteries and abbeys, where they were daily subjected to manual labor, regular confession and various forms of physical discipline in hopes of "cleansing" their souls of the taint they bore. In most cases, the Church's approach did little to help these unfortunate psychics. In a few instances, though, the psychics developed a weird devotion to their captors, whom they saw as saving them from themselves.

Consequently, it's no surprise that at some point — no one is sure precisely when — a priest or deacon at one of these monasteries realized that the Church possessed an extraordinary resource. Because psychic powers had been outlawed, their use was forbidden. Yet, one of these priests must have reasoned that the same Privilege of Martyrs that allowed the Church to continue to use technology to defend the faithful might also apply to the matter of psychic powers. By 4500 or so, the first reports began to circulate of "Church psychics," some of whom passed themselves off as theurges in order to avoid a fearful reaction from the peasantry.

Of course, not all clerics agreed with this interpretation of the Privilege of Martyrs. These extremists attacked their fellow priests for employing psychics, even for holy ends. On Aylon, for example, there was running "battle of the sermons" between adherents of Father Jehan Arcand, who supported the use of psychics, and Bishop Maryan Sforza, who did not. Ironically, events on Holy Terra supported the pro-psychic side in unexpected ways. Patriarch Nadrim extended the Privilege of Martyrs to include the nobility in 4545 and the Merchant League in 4560. Consequently, it came as no surprise when he authorized the use of the first "penitent psychics" (as they were originally known) in 4569. Immediately thereafter, their use spread quickly throughout the Known Worlds.





Since then, no Patriarch — even the staunchest conservative — has ever sought to rescind Nadrim's authorization. By the time the Jacobean era came to an end in 4665, the use of Penitents had become an established fact of life for the Church. Moreover, the usefulness of these psychics had been proven again and again, such as when the Penitent Shivana Persad used her powers to save the life of Bishop Mahvesh Bhukal of Istakhr in 4633. Now, only Avesitites and radical Inquisitors question the wisdom of using Penitents; they appear to be an element of the Church that is here to stay.

Known Operations

Unlike other groups within the Church, the Penitents have no formal organization. All Penitents operate under the strictures established by the Doctrine of the Unreflective Mind and the Privilege of Martyrs (amended 4569). These strictures require the psychic to wear a distinctive badge indicating his status as a "reformed psychic" and to use his powers only in defense of the Church and the faithful. In addition, Penitents are bound to obey the orders of any Orthodox cleric of higher ecclesiastical rank than their own master. The penalties for going against these restrictions are severe: public torture and execution under the "care" of specially trained theurgues.

Consequently, Penitents are organized only on a local level. Psychics who turn themselves in to the Church for extreme penance and reform fall under the authority of the priest to whom they do so. The same holds true in the case of psychics who are awarded to a particular monastery after having been captured by Church authorities. Therefore, the single most important determination about how and when a Penitent will be used is the cleric who has authority over him. If the cleric is just, the Penitent can expect good treatment. He may become a trusted ally of the cleric. However, if the cleric is narrow-minded, reactionary or politically motivated, the Penitent may find himself suffering a horrible fate. In these cases, the cleric may use a Penitent as an expendable resource for the achievement of his own agenda — a terrible fate.

Speaking about Penitents as a group is thus a difficult thing to do. However, a few generalities can be made. First and foremost, few monasteries in the Known Worlds possess more than a handful of Penitents under their control. Interestingly, those that do are usually on worlds like Leminkainen that possess significant populations of rural peasants, for whom fear of psychic powers remains strong. More sophisticated worlds have fewer psychics who consider their unique abilities sinful and therefore are proportionally less likely to have a large contingent of Penitents, despite their larger populations.

Penitents are most common in Hawkwood and Hazat

space, with a fair number coming from Li Halan worlds as well. Few come from al-Malik planets and even fewer from Decados worlds. The League does not tolerate Penitents officially, although it has made no moves to restrict their operations. House Keddah of Grail holds the same position. Baron Harken Keddah has spoken out against the practice on several occasions. That his cousin Ricardo is an Orthodox Inquisitor has helped him to avoid ecclesiastical harassment for his stance. Nevertheless, it has led to rumors that Harken is himself a psychic, a story he has neither confirmed nor denied over the years.

Penitents are used in a wide range of missions. In most cases, they act simply as couriers and investigators, using their abilities to achieve their master's goals more easily. Some are used in ecclesiastical courts to determine the veracity of witnesses and defendants. The same practice is even carried over to other interpersonal dealings, to the dismay of more sober clergy. In the end, though, Penitents follow no set pattern, which is why they could pose a threat if an unscrupulous cleric chose to use them in a way unsuspected by his enemies.

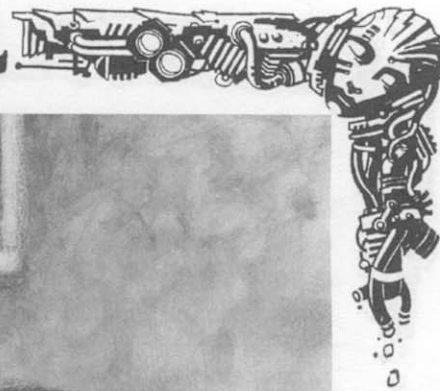
Observations

The existence of Penitents could ultimately prove to be an Achilles heel for the Church. Firstly, many conservative Hinayana clerics look on Nadrim's extension of the Privilege of Martyrs as illegitimate and wish to see Hezekiah the Elder overturn it. That he will not do so fans the flames of schism on many worlds, such as Kish and Vera Cruz, whose priests consider Penitents "abominations." Beyond that, the practice draws the ire of psychic groups like the Invisible Path and Favyana, both of which view the Church as the enemy in their respective quests. In the last decade alone, there have been nearly a dozen raids on Penitent monasteries by psychics hoping to "liberate" their fellows from the clutches of the Church. The most recent was in 4999 on Byzantium Secundus itself — a testament to the hatred these groups have for the Church's use of Penitents. Despite this, it's unlikely the Church will disavow the practice after so many centuries. Moreover, enough clerics have a vested interest in not freeing their stable of Penitents that there's little hope anything will change in the near future.

Agents

As noted above, there is no central organization or training program for Penitents. Beyond the basic strictures laid down by the Church, individual priests are left to their own devices about the reformation process that transforms a sinful psychic into a Penitent. Consequently, Penitents (and their operations) are exceptionally diverse in the Known Worlds. The following are but a handful of some of the more active Penitents within the worlds of the Empire.





• **Bassim Rodrigues:** In the employ of Bishop Reynaldo Mabel of Criticorum, this Penitent functions primarily as a "psychic bodyguard." The bishop has been the subject of three assassination attempts by the Invisible Path since 4998. Rodrigues offers the bishop protection and piece of mind — he is a "reformed" member of the coven himself.

• **Rakman jo Sklova:** Based on Aylon, this Penitent is a true rarity: an Ukar who uses his psychic abilities in service to the Church. Rakman's abilities manifested early, drawing the attention of clerics on his homeworld, who abducted him from his alien family and raised him to be their agent. Now serving Mother Judyta Cherkis, Rakman is an affront to many Ukari, who consider him a traitor to his people.

• **Jaak Rajandi:** Operating on Leminkainen, Rajandi is a frightening Penitent. Of peasant stock, his powers and abilities are remarkable — so much so that he has slowly

used them to usurp the place of his master, Bishop Matti Merikanto of Nyrak. Rajandi uses the bishop as his tool, making himself both influential and wealthy at the same time. What makes his actions all the more horrific is that he truly believes the Pancreator has ordered him to do so — the result of a botched "cleansing" at the hands of his trainers.

• **Sir Geraint Hawkwood:** A Van Gelder agent revealed Sir Geraint's psychic abilities to the Church. When the Hawkwoods would not protect the brash and headstrong Questing Knight, Geraint found himself subjected to penance. He emerged a year later, a wholly different man. His closest friends do not recognize him and complain that his punishment was too harsh. For his part, Geraint seems happy with his new role as a psychic investigator for Bishop Grigorii Decados on Cadavus.



Charioteer Killroys

The largest, most powerful and most extensive intelligence agency in the Merchant League, the Charioteer Killroys are what outsiders immediately think of when they hear the words "guild spies." It's not hard to see why: the Killroys take their mandate very seriously. Without their efforts, the Charioteers would have an even more difficult time maintaining their monopoly — which is already threatened by almost every faction in the Known Worlds. That they have succeeded to the extent they have is a testament to the Killroys' skills and dedication.

History

The precise origin of the Killroys is lost in the mists of time. Even contemporary members of the agency are uncertain how their organization came about. Within the Killroys, there are two competing theories as to the birth of the agency. The first suggests that the original Killroys were employees of Apollo Industries loyal to its chairman Nils De Vatha. This theory goes further by saying that these loyalists helped the De Vatha family in collecting and transporting the jumpkey coordinates off Byzantium Secundus in 4015. At that time, a coalition of noble forces planned to sack Apollo's headquarters in an attempt to seize the coordinates for themselves. By the time they reached the headquarters, however, there was no trace of the valuable information. Every last bit of data had been wiped from Apollo's think machines.

Such an undertaking would have required remarkable facility both with think machines and with the mathematics behind jumpkey coordinates. That both these skills remain the trademarks of the Killroys even since the Fall of the Republic is one of several reasons this theory is so compelling. The theory continues by arguing that these De Vatha partisans escaped Byzantium Secundus with the family and fled to other worlds, coming eventually to Liberty, the planet that would one day be known as Leagueheim. As the Charioteers guild took shape and found allies among other merchant families, the proto-Killroys expanded their loyalties beyond the narrow confines of the De Vatha family. Instead, they became agents of the entire Charioteers guild, working to preserve its jumpkey monopoly just as they had aided the leaders of Apollo Industries to escape the wrath of their noble antagonists.

The second theory follows a different line of reasoning. It suggests that the Killroys are a much later addition to the guild, first appearing shortly after Vladimir Alecto made his bid to become emperor of the Known Worlds. According to this version of history, the Killroys were formed as a precaution against the possibility that Vladimir might attempt

to reopen the jump routes by breaking the Charioteers' monopoly. "Proof" of this second theory rests in the fact that the guild officially supported Baron Nicolai Decados rather than Vladimir. Its supporters claim that a unified empire represented the single greatest threat to the guild since the days of the Ten. Had the emperor not been assassinated, they argue he'd have tried to wrest control of the jumpcodes just as the Ten had attempted centuries before. The Killroys thus came into being once the Charioteers realized the need for increased security.

Neither theory truly explains the current nature of the agency. As it currently exists, it is neither a tool of any single hong — certainly not the De Vathas — nor is it opposed in principle to interstellar governance. Indeed, the Charioteers remain cautious supporters of Alexius, believing his rule to be preferable to that of any other noble. Furthermore, there are less coherent reports of Charioteer teams tasked with the recovery of jump codes from ancient sources, as well as agents whose duty is to seek out Lost Worlds. In all likelihood, the contemporary agency known as the Killroys is the result of a confluence of all these theories and more. Over time, the Doge and the Governing Board must have seen the need to protect their monopoly more actively. Whether because of competition from the likes of Vladimir or a Royal House or other sources, an organized enforcement division became a necessity. Thus was born the Killroys.

Despite this uncertainty about their origins, the Killroys — or their predecessors — made a dramatic appearance in the affairs of the Known Worlds in 4591. At that time, House Keddah was still a Royal House possessing a vote scepter and ruling more than one world. Its prince, a schemer by the name of Yacob, had uncovered technological devices on Grail that would allow him to create jumpkeys with the same skill as the Charioteers. Yacob wisely understood that this technology would lift House Keddah to the front rank of the nobility, perhaps even propelling himself to the imperial throne vacated by Vladimir just a few short decades before.

Somehow, the Charioteers learned of Yacob's plans. Most likely, the Killroys used their famed information network to uncover the plot. The guild thus revealed that they knew of his plan and offered the prince the opportunity to profit from his discovery — if he would give up the technology to the Charioteers. Apparently, Yacob didn't believe the guild had offered enough for his remarkable find; soon thereafter, House Decados made an offer as well. While this new offer made Yacob Keddah extremely pleased, it frightened the Charioteers into action. They immediately broke off negotiations with the prince. Within a week, the Keddah's

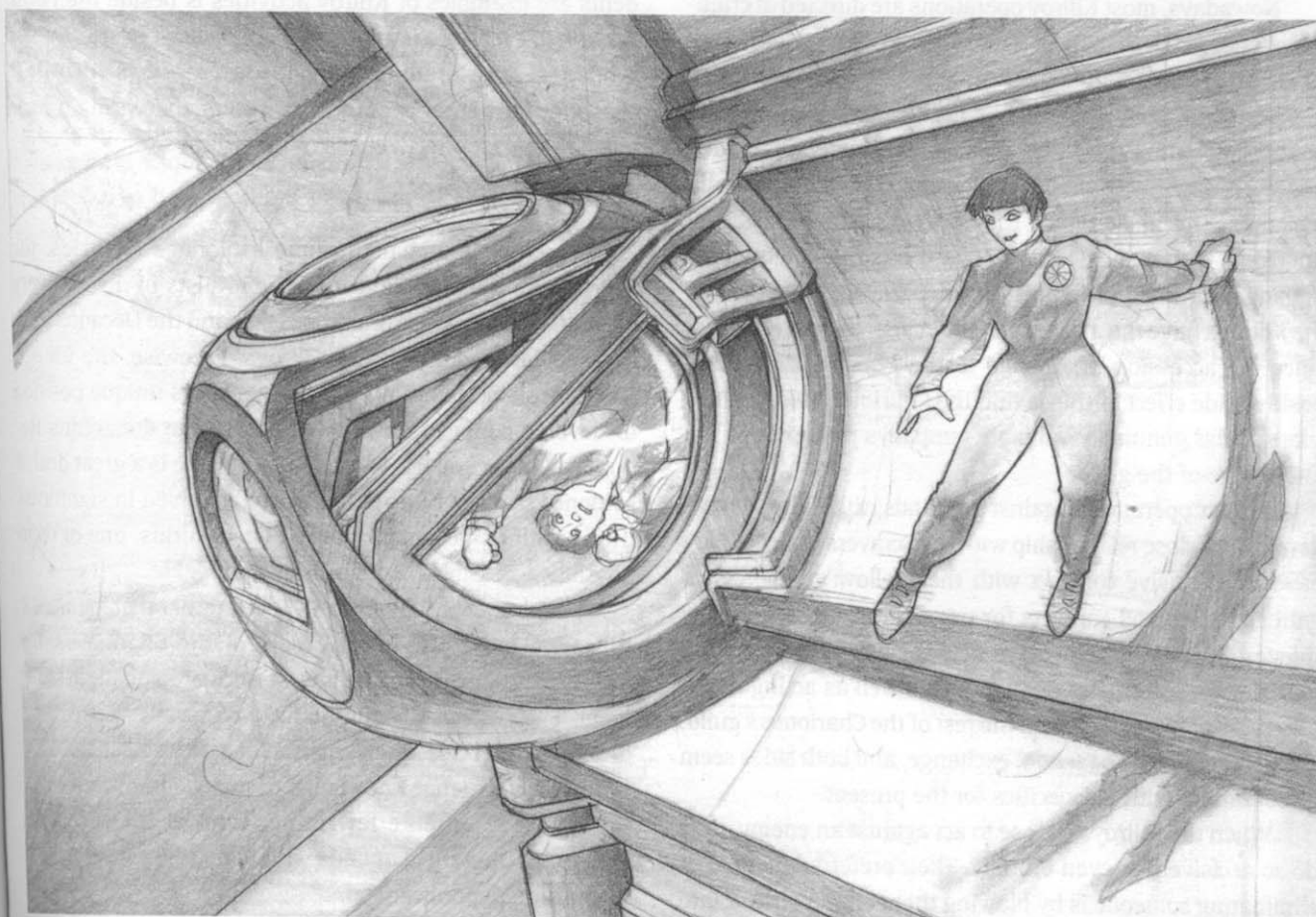
jumpkey technology was destroyed, leaving nothing from which the would-be imperial house could recover its losses. Left behind amid the wreckage was a strange iconic symbol — a large-nosed man peering over a wall — that would later mark all Killroy operations, a subtle threat to any who would follow in the Keddah's footsteps. Soon afterwards, House Keddah was reduced to vassalage under the Decados, a low state in which they still exist today.

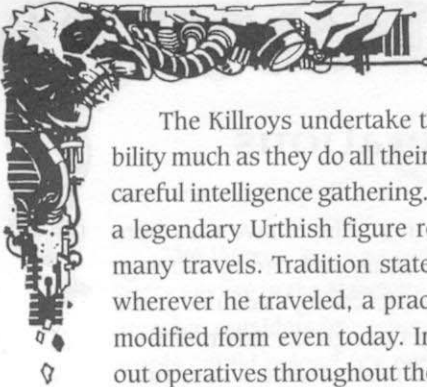
Since that time, the Killroys — or the threat of their actions — have been the Charioteers' most valuable tool in maintaining their monopoly. They have developed a reputation for cold efficiency and a lack of subtlety that even the Jakovian Agency can respect. Unsurprisingly, the Killroys haven't been associated with any notable activities in many decades. Even during the Emperor Wars, the various rivals for the throne respected the guild's place in the great scheme of things. There's little doubt that this was because even the Royal Houses feared the possibility of falling prey to the Killroys. After all, Keddah was once a Royal House as well and look what challenges the guild brought on them. So long as memory of "Yacob's folly" and other similar incidents remains fresh in the minds of the powerful (and the Killroys make sure they do), the Charioteers stand the most secure of all the guilds in their patents and exclusives.

Known Operations

As noted in their history, the Killroys have not been publicly active in quite some time. There have thus been few instances of the dramatic raids and daring sabotage missions of the years immediately following Vladimir's death. Yet, to view the Killroys solely through the prism of their external operations would be to misunderstand their function. The agency does not exist solely for external enforcement, even though that is an important function. Instead, the Killroys have numerous other responsibilities, many of which the masses of the Known Worlds (never mind the nobles or the Church) have little reason to see in action.

One such responsibility is the enforcement of the Charioteers' Code of Conduct. The Code is the list of precepts by which the guild operates. The three most important of these are: Preserve the Guild's Secrecy, All Jumpkeys are Guild Property, and Uphold All Contracts. These precepts form a kind of tripod on which the entire edifice of the Charioteers is built. Were any of them to be regularly or wantonly flouted by individual members of the guild, the Charioteers might cease to exist as a viable entity. Consequently, the Killroys work to ensure both that these precepts are not violated and that, when they are, retribution is swift and incontrovertible.





The Killroys undertake this internal security responsibility much as they do all their other responsibilities: through careful intelligence gathering. The agency gets its name from a legendary Urthish figure renowned for his ubiquity and many travels. Tradition states that this figure left his sigil wherever he traveled, a practice the Killroys continue in a modified form even today. In any event, the agency sends out operatives throughout the Known Worlds. They are well trained in normal Charioteer operations, allowing them to function whenever and wherever they are needed. Thus, almost any Charioteer might actually be a Killroy on a mission for the agency.

This potential ubiquity serves two functions. Most simply, it's an excellent way for the Killroys to gather intelligence of Code violations or other attempts to undermine the guild. Secondly, it induces a low level of paranoia among the rank and file. Since Killroys could be anywhere, most Charioteers aren't willing to risk violating the Code, lest they be uncovered. Likewise, they spread tales of the Killroys to outsiders — such as how they brought House Keddah low — so as to induce the same paranoia among them as well. The Charioteers thrive on secrecy and the appearance of utmost dependability. The mere existence of the Killroys has proven an excellent way to promote both qualities while at the same time putting down all but the most dedicated threats.

Nowadays, most Killroy operations are directed at criminal elements both within and without the guild. Since Vladimir's assassination, neither the nobility nor the Church has been willing to risk crossing the Charioteers. However, pirates and mobsters of all sorts haven't been as farsighted. These groups live or die by taking the chances that could win them the illicit riches they crave. Dealing in illegal jumpkeys is just such a chance, as it has the potential for making a fortune in firebirds. It's also the activity at which the Killroys have the most experience suppressing — at least since the accession of Alexius to the Phoenix Throne. A positive side effect of this is that the Charioteers sometimes come across genuinely valuable jumpkeys that expand the knowledge of the guild.

In their operations against criminals, the Killroys have developed a close relationship with the Scravers. Indeed, they have an exclusive contract with their fellow guildsmen to gain enforcers and contacts for use against these jumpkey thieves. In return, the Killroys help the Scravers by adding to their own information networks, as well as acting as intercessors between them and the rest of the Charioteers guild. This isn't an inconsequential exchange, and both sides seem quite content with its specifics for the present.

When the Killroys choose to act against an enemy, they do so decisively — even brutally. Their preferred method of eliminating someone is by blowing them out an airlock into

open space. Of course, the agency has always had a flair for the dramatic, believing that such gestures serve to discourage others from crossing them. That the Charioteers hold as central a place in the society of the Known Worlds may well speak to the wisdom behind these methods.

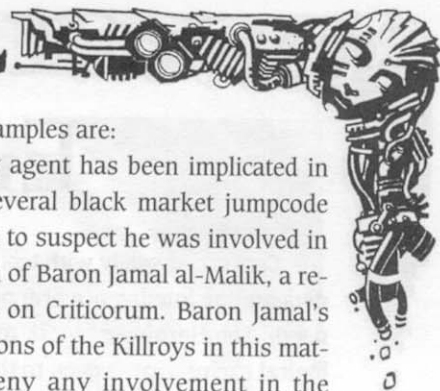
There is also good reason to believe that the Killroys are at the forefront of suppressing information about Lost Worlds. Outsiders would undoubtedly find this ironic, but it makes perfect sense. The Charioteers wish to ensure that star travel remains their exclusive province, without interference from any outside source. By collecting and suppressing all information about Lost Worlds, the guild can be certain that no one knows more about the jump routes than they. Moreover, these Lost Worlds sometimes hold technological secrets that might undermine their monopoly. By keeping this information hidden, they prevent others from gaining the means to supplant the guild.

All the foregoing responsibilities do not alter the fact that the Killroys probably still engage in external enforcement activities. However, none of these activities is as dramatic or large-scale as those they wrought prior to the Emperor Wars. For example, there have been several unexplained raids against the Hazat on Vera Cruz, which some observers suggest are organized by Charioteers attempting to restrict access to hitherto unknown Lost Worlds. Similar oddities occur in Decados space. Whether or not these incidents are examples of Killroy activities is beside the point. What truly matters is that no major faction in the Known Worlds — least of all the Royal Houses — has seen fit to challenge the authority of the Charioteers, thanks in no small part to the past effectiveness of the Killroys.

Observations

Of all the Merchant League espionage agencies, the Killroys are the one highest on the hit lists of nearly every one of its competitors. Both the Hazat and the Decados have a particular disdain for the Killroys. Likewise, the Church has long suspected this agency of using its unique position to develop contacts on Lost Worlds where dangerous Republican ideas still hold sway. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence that the Killroys have been involved in significant traffic with as-yet unannounced Lost Worlds, one of them possibly accessible through Grail's jumpgate.

The charge of Republicanism is another that haunts the Killroys. Unlike the lower orders of the Charioteers, the Killroys show only the shallowest form of Republican sentiment. Their role as the guardians of jumpcodes makes them ill-suited to serve as the vanguard of a Third Republic. Most Killroys believe that knowledge of jumpcodes is best left in the hands of an elite few rather than distributed freely, thereby putting them at odds with the strongest proponents of genuine Republicanism.



Given their many enemies, the Killroys have begun to expand their relationship with the Scravers guild, in particular with the Taketsu. The Taketsu provide the Killroys with enforcers and training in the finer arts of defense. Indeed, it's believed the Taketsu were the originators of the infamous airlock executions that have become a hallmark of the Killroys. Since the ascension of Alexius, the Killroys have shown a tendency toward greater brutality. Some observers suggest this is a result of their alliance with the Taketsu. Others suggest that the alliance itself is a symptom of a much greater concern, namely the declining confidence in which others hold the Killroys.

Indeed, the need for outside enforcers speaks volumes about how the Killroys are regarded by their fellow Charioteers. In fact, it's likely the Killroys are held in as high disdain by the rank and file of the guild as they are by outsiders. This probably stems from a combination of factors, including their lukewarm support for Republicanism. Furthermore, the Killroys frequently launch "cleansing operations" in which they seek out Charioteers that have violated one or more principles of the guild's Code of Conduct. Once found, these individuals are treated very harshly, so as to make an example of them. Cleansing operations are also a subtle threat to anyone who would challenge the authority of the Killroys in policing the Charioteers as they see fit.

As things stand now, the Killroys are both the most powerful and the most unstable of the guild intelligence agencies. There is growing discontent among the lower orders of the Charioteers regarding the activities of the Killroys. This grumbling is exemplified by a pilot named Jillian Aguanno, who has become a champion of reform within the agency. Aguanno is a squeaky clean guildmember who rose through the ranks to become the commander of her own ship. She regularly rails against the abuses and bullying of the Killroys. Needless to say, she's also a frequent target of cleansing operations, which — so far — have produced nothing her enemies can use against her. However, the Killroys are nothing if not persistent.

Agents

In the beginning, the Killroys' membership was very diverse, representing a broad cross section of the Charioteers. However, as criticism has increased, the agency has become more insular, retrenching within known and accepted practices. Consequently, its membership has become more limited, favoring certain hong, such as the De Vatha, that wish to tighten the guild's grip over the Known Worlds even further. Although this has met resistance from other hong, especially the Gailbreaths, that resistance hasn't changed the nature of the Killroys' recruitment policies.

The Killroys use codenames amongst themselves whose derivations are unknown, but may hearken back to early

days of star travel. Some examples are:

- **Mercury:** This Killroy agent has been implicated in the airlock executions of several black market jumpcode dealers. There is also reason to suspect he was involved in the equally unpleasant death of Baron Jamal al-Malik, a reputed dealer in these codes on Criticorum. Baron Jamal's family has protested the actions of the Killroys in this matter, but the Charioteers deny any involvement in the nobleman's untimely demise.

- **Soyuz:** This agent is a closely associated with the De Vatha hong, for whom he occasionally does work on the side. He works primarily on intelligence gathering for the Killroys, based in Li Halan space. He's also taken an unusual interest in Grail, lending credence to the involvement of the Charioteers in a plot relating to that world's jumpgate.

Revealed Agents

The Killroys are usually exceptionally adept at hiding their identities, lest vengeance be taken against them. However, the following pair have recently been unmasked:

- **Faryn Menezes:** This agent worked as a liaison with the Scravers before turning up dead on Cadavus. Jakovian agents were originally suspected of the deed, but further investigation suggests that Menezes may have been the victim of inter-hong warfare; she was closely associated with the Gailbreaths. Her death may have been a warning to anyone who'd dare to oppose the Killroys' current composition and methods.

- **Jack Ryukujo:** A former member of the Imperial Navy, Ryukujo went AWOL before joining the Killroys. He's wanted by Imperial authorities, but has thus far evaded capture. The Killroys find his skills and knowledge of great use to them in their own operations and are loath to surrender him to the emperor's justice.



Engineer Harbingers

Concerned solely with technical espionage, the Harbingers are the intelligence arm of the Supreme Order of Engineers. The Harbingers work to preserve the guild's technological exclusivity — even to the point of sabotaging others' research efforts. Thus, this agency takes a much more active role than other such agencies in the Merchant League, except for the Charioteer's Killroys.

History

The Harbingers actually predate the existence of the Engineers by many years. According to internal tradition, the original Harbingers were the security division of the Harbinger Technical Consortium (HTC), a Second Republic corporation specializing in the research and development of think machines. HTC was infamous for its ruthless competition against its rivals. This infamy derived not merely from its use of every legal maneuver allowable under Republican patent and other laws, but also from its willingness to engage in industrial espionage of a most brutal sort. HTC's agents would raid and sabotage the research facilities of their competitors, as well as harass anyone who threatened to affect the corporation's bottom line. In the end, no tactic was considered too underhanded or despicable.

HTC's methods worked for a time. However, even in its declining days, the Second Republic could occasionally rouse itself to action against the power of the corps. Hoping to shore up support for the rapidly flagging Republic, ambitious politicians launched many campaigns against "corporate greed." In this, they were often joined by the Church, which considered many corporations an occasion for sin for their employees. Thus it was that HTC was targeted and fell from grace, suffering from a combination of bad public relations and punitive fines. By the time of the Divestiture, HTC was bankrupt and its constituent parts were sold off to other corps to pay its debts. One such part was its security division, which became part of Retallack Industries on Criticorum.

The collapse of the Republic prevented Retallack Industries from making much use of the newly acquired HTC security personnel (who became known as "Harbinger Protection Services"). Retallack too went bankrupt and its resources were scattered among greedy nobles and priests. However, Harbinger Protection Services survived by offering its services to House al-Malik and others as security guards. Their experience as muscle for HTC gave them many unique skills, including familiarity with technological research methods. Although not scientists themselves, they knew enough to prove invaluable to many groups, including the Church, which had need of enforcers capable of rec-

ognizing and destroying proscribed technology.

Unfortunately, the leaders of Harbinger Protection Services were uncomfortable in their new role. Not only did it run counter to their deepest instincts, but it was also slowly placing them under the thumb of one illiterate despot after another. By the time the guilds began to assert their independence from the feudal order, Harbinger Protection Services was ready to do the same. Under the leadership of Diana Memari, the Harbingers (as they were now known) threw their lot in with the groups that would soon form the basis of the Supreme Order of Engineers. Memari did so because she believed the Harbingers had more in common with these technologists than with any other group. Moreover, the Harbingers could provide sorely needed protection to a group that otherwise had none.

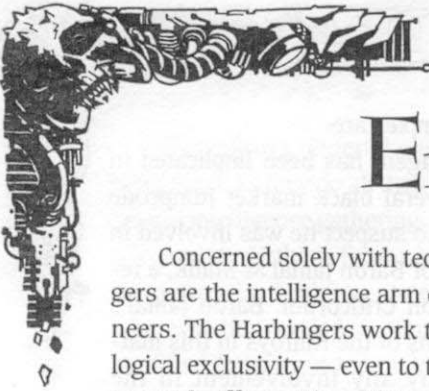
Once the Engineers became one of the founding guilds of the Merchant League, the Harbingers were fully incorporated into its hierarchy. As they did in the days of HTC, the Harbingers protected the Supreme Order from their foes, both within and without. Likewise, they enforced the guild's patents and exclusives — often with brutal efficiency. These methods, still remembered from Republican days, served the Engineers well. Without the vigorous enforcement of their monopolies, the Engineers might not have survived. Thanks to Memari and the Harbingers, they not only survived, but flourished, becoming one of the most important of the guilds.

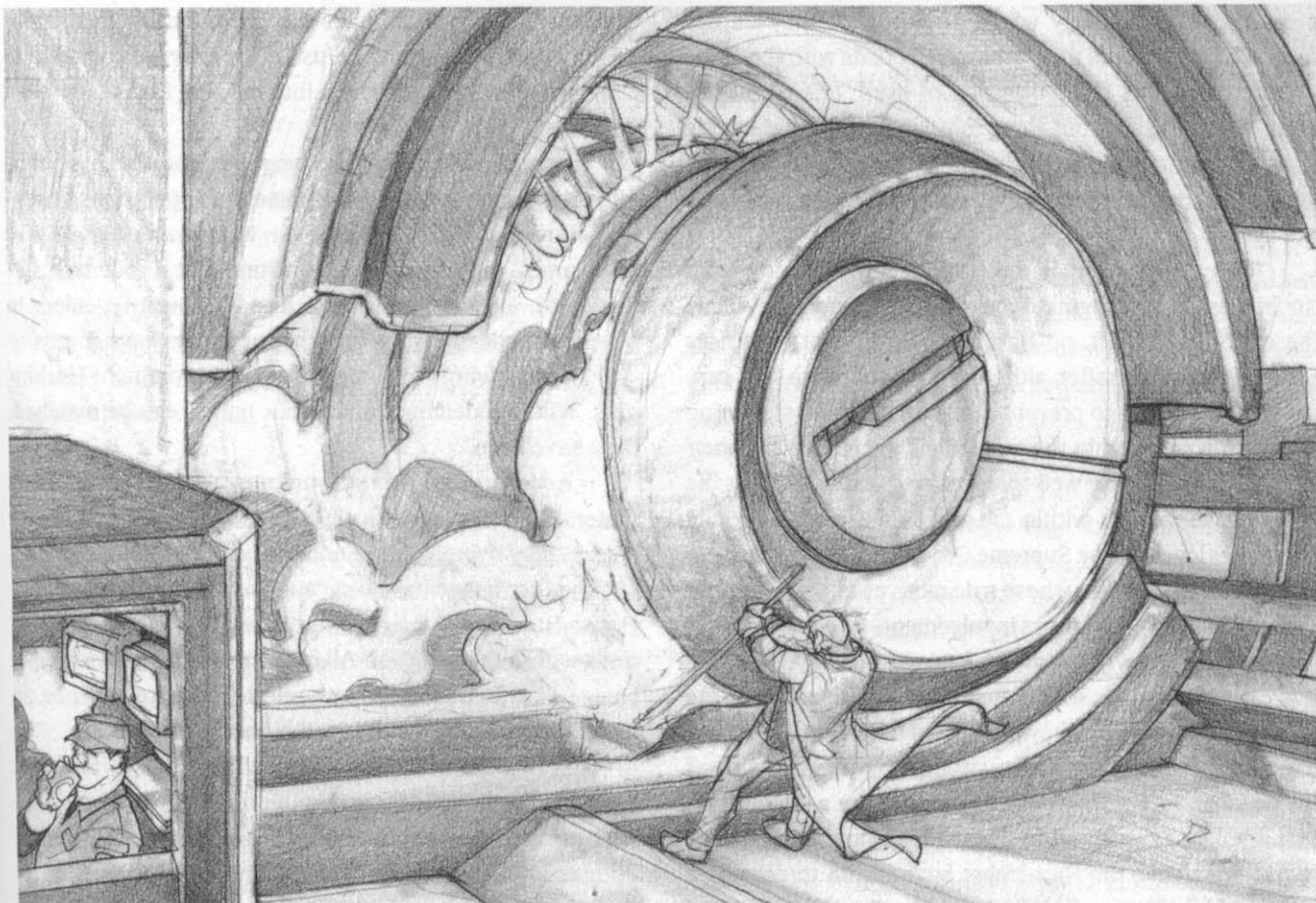
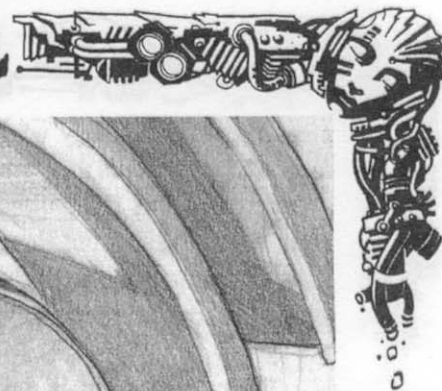
Over the centuries since the absorption of the Harbingers into the guild, the agency has been involved in numerous actions against Engineer competitors. The destruction of the Li Halan's Lypee-55 synthesis lab is perhaps the most famous, if only because this event sent a message to other noble houses attempting the same thing. Of course, it also enraged the Li Halan to the extent that their own intelligence agencies — the Jingcha and LSI — enjoy a fierce rivalry with the Harbingers to this very day.

Known Operations

The Harbingers operate both openly and covertly. That is, the existence of the agency is well known even to outsiders. Even its most obvious function — the maintenance of the Engineers' monopolies — is not fully hidden from the public. However, its more "colorful" methods of operation are not only hidden but strenuously denied. Since the Harbingers answer only to the Didact of the Order, even many lower-ranking Engineers have no idea the lengths to which the agency will go to defend the guild's interests.

Consequently, great emphasis is placed on public relations. The Harbingers regularly employ spokespeople to ex-





plain the agency's purpose and operations — a technique learned from its corporate days. This creates a false sense of transparency, leading many outsiders to believe the Harbingers are nothing more than a simple security force. Such spokespeople, such as the glib Jeremiah MacKay, stress the Harbingers' "battle against illegal research" as a "boon to the Empire" and a "blow against unreflective thought." While this approach doesn't fool everyone, it does create a sufficient doubt in the minds of many that the Engineers retain the confidence of those with whom they work. This is, of course, vitally important, since the Harbingers operate by insinuating themselves into the non-guild research facilities throughout the Known Worlds. This is made easier — but not without risks — if the true role of the Harbingers isn't public knowledge.

The primary role of the Harbingers is intelligence gathering about technical innovations by groups outside the Engineers. Their agents use their contacts within noble houses, the Church and other guilds to ferret out groups that are attempting to circumvent guild monopolies. Once found, the Harbingers find a way to join these groups as undercover agents. They then ascertain whether the research being undertaken is a genuine threat to the Engineers' patents and exclusives. If so, they steal the research for the guild — no point in wasting good research — and call in

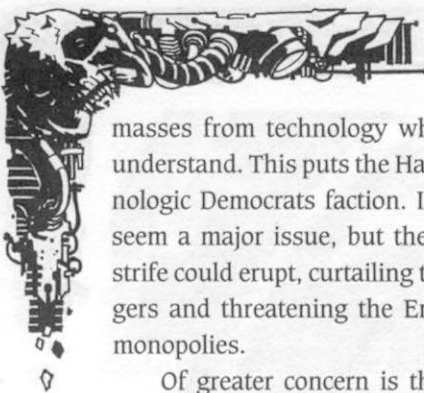
Harbinger saboteurs. These specialized agents find a way to destroy the research facility so that no trace of its work can be found. In addition, they plant evidence implicating another group to draw suspicion away from the Engineers.

Harbinger saboteurs operate in small groups divided according to their technical specialties. They draw upon their skills in a particular field of technological endeavor to find the "perfect" means to destroy illicit research. For example, think machine research might be destroyed by a tailored computer virus while energy production might suffer a catastrophic meltdown. Harbinger saboteurs believe in crafting the most suitable — even poetic — means of destroying anyone who dares compete against the Supreme Order.

Observations

The Harbingers are an extremely effective intelligence agency, second only to the Killroys among the guilds, but they suffer from a degree of internal strife that might one day hamper their operations. This strife has two sources. The first, and least dangerous, stems from the rift within the Engineers themselves about the nature of a future Third Republic. The Harbingers are very closely tied to the Pure Technocracy faction, believing that humanity would be best served through the rule of a scientific elite. The Harbingers see themselves as the vanguard of that elite, protecting the





masses from technology whose true powers they do not understand. This puts the Harbingers at odds with the Technologic Democrats faction. In and of itself, this might not seem a major issue, but there is a small danger that this strife could erupt, curtailing the effectiveness of the Harbingers and threatening the Engineers' enforcement of their monopolies.

Of greater concern is the Harbingers' exclusion from the highest levels of guild government. Though they have the ear of the Didact, no Harbinger field agent ever rises above the rank of Crafter, although administrative staff can. It's believed this is to prevent the Harbingers from gaining too much power within the guild. Field agents who do their job well are otherwise well compensated, making up for the lack of advancement within the guild. Of course, some say the higher levels of the Supreme Order form a secret society within the guild — one whose true motives and goals might be threatened by Harbinger involvement. Of course, this is pure supposition without a firm basis in fact. Nevertheless, it is clear the guild is deliberately limiting the power of the Harbingers even while they depend on them for the maintenance of the status quo. Even without an understanding of the whys and wherefores of this move, there's no question that it holds the potential for great danger to the Engineers.

Interestingly, the Harbingers have begun to develop a relationship with the al-Malik Mutasih. The guildsmen and the al-Malik have always maintained good relations, but this latest turn goes beyond even that. The two agencies have begun to exchange information. Many al-Malik nobles have gotten into the habit of working amicably with the guild through information exchange as a way of pre-approving any of their own research, since they've surely had a lot of mishaps in the past when they didn't get the guild's permission. Both sides get something out of this arrangement: the Harbingers expand their network without significant cost, while the al-Malik avoid both technological mishaps and the ire of the Engineers.

Agents

The membership of the Harbingers is both small and specialized. Individual agents are well trained in both infiltration and sabotage. In addition, they are Engineers in every sense of the word — skilled technologists with keen, analytical minds. This combination of traits serves them well in their endeavors. Harbingers are also remarkable for their social skills, many of which they learned from their allies,

the Scravers. The Harbingers recognize that all their abilities in other areas would be useless if they were unable to convince others to allow them into the very areas they must infiltrate.

As noted earlier, the Harbingers maintain both a public and private face. In public, the names and operations of several Harbingers are well known. In private, agents use codenames. In some cases, it's certain that a codename refers to an agent whose public face has been revealed. In others, the codenames are all that outsiders have to go on.

The following is a listing of several prominent Harbingers. Where codenames and public names can be matched, they have been.

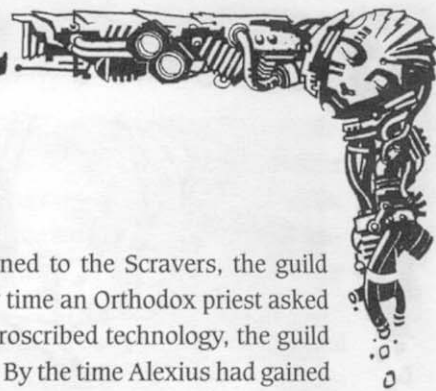
- **Adamantine:** This still-unknown agent specializes in materials science, specifically efforts by groups to synthesize or alloy Pygmalium, Keddite and other rare ores. Thus far, she (her image has been caught on security cameras by House Hawkwood) has been involved in no fewer than six raids within the last year. All of them were directed against House Hawkwood, leading some to suspect she has an agenda beyond that authorized by her superiors.

- **Jeremiah MacKay:** This Harbinger is one of the agency's most public faces. He frequently appears at Engineer functions, where he speaks out against the dangers of illicit technological research. MacKay is even on close terms with several clergy, including Archbishop Palamon of Byzantium Secundus, with whom he sometimes makes joint statements. Charming and urbane, MacKay is the perfect spokesperson for the agency. His private codename is unknown.

- **Keenan Dorelac:** Codenamed "Dogface," Dorelac is an important Harbinger in the field of genetics research. He's allegedly been involved in numerous raids against Decados facilities, including one reputedly held by Prince Hiram himself. Dorelac has a reputation for ruthless zeal; he clearly buys into the guild's propaganda as to why the Harbingers are needed by the Known Worlds.

- **Maharaja:** This agent is known only by his (or her) codename. Maharaja operates within al-Malik space, which may explain the secrecy surrounding his true identity. Normally, the al-Malik and the Engineers enjoy a strong and friendly relationship. However, Maharajah has made several successful attacks against al-Malik nanotech research facilities, suggesting that relationship may be less strong than outsiders surmise.





Scravers

Unique among the intelligence agencies of the Known Worlds are the Scravers, for they are both a guild and a vast information network. Though they lack the organization and unity of a true espionage agency, the Scravers more than make up for it with the extent of their knowledge about the hidden goings-on of the Empire and its inhabitants. When it comes to information gathering and distribution, the Scravers have no equal.

History

The history of the Scravers is well known. The progenitors of the modern-day guild were smugglers, gunrunners and tech reclamationists, all of whom worked against the established authorities of their day, whether they were zaibatsu or noble houses or the Second Republic itself. To succeed and prosper, the Scravers developed extensive webs of contacts and informants. These webs spread far and wide, giving the early Scraver families access to a great variety of information — some of it quite sensitive. While the original goal of this information acquisition was both survival and self-defense, the Scravers quickly realized an addendum to the old adage “knowledge is power,” namely “knowledge is wealth.” By the Fall, the Scravers had become the biggest and most successful information brokers in the Known Worlds.

Forging these families into a single guild was the life's work of Quentin Siegel. Siegel succeeded in presenting the Scravers as a united front to the other nascent guilds, but he never achieved genuine unity among its competing clans. In fact, there's plenty of reason to believe Siegel wouldn't have approved of this type of unity, believing it would have taken away the Scravers' greatest defense: their fractiousness. Had the Scravers become as united as the Engineers or the Muster, they'd be easy pickings for their enemies — and there were many. By retaining their fragmented character, the Scravers made it impossible to easily destroy them. Like hissing cockroaches, there was always another group of Scravers ready to take the place of their fallen comrades. Thus did the guild flourish throughout the new Dark Ages.

The divided nature of the Scravers meant their services as information brokers were available to — and used by — almost every faction within the Known Worlds. Even the Church found uses for the guild, distasteful though they may have been. Occasionally, this meant (and continues to mean) that one family worked against another, often without even realizing it. Yet, in the end, even this served the goals of the guild. With each new client, with each new assignment, the Scravers gained access to yet more information. Every time

a Li Halan noblewoman turned to the Scravers, the guild expanded its network. Every time an Orthodox priest asked for assistance in acquiring proscribed technology, the guild had fresh blackmail material. By the time Alexius had gained the imperial crown, one Scraver family or another probably possessed more information than many mainstream intelligence agencies, making them a potential aid and a threat to almost every faction in the Empire.

Known Operations

For the student of espionage and conspiracies, the Scravers are profoundly fascinating. Through its shady networks, this guild has access to more information than any in the Merchant League. Everything from where to purchase a flux sword to which noble is hoarding pygmalium — and everything in between — is within their purview. The only real impediment to their acquiring any particular piece of information is not whether they can find it — they almost always can — but whether they can efficiently pass it on, for the Scravers' great strength is also their great weakness. Lacking the central organization and discipline of groups like the Imperial Eye or the Auditors, the Scravers frequently don't realize the extent of their collected information. Consequently, the Harrisons may have one piece of data, the Siegels another and the Taketsu a third. Separately, these data points are worthless, but together they point the way to a rich cache of Second Republic weaponry. Unfortunately, there's no guarantee the information brokers of all three syndicates will work together long enough to discover the cache — and enrich their patrons.

In general, each syndicate handles its own information gathering operations differently than its rivals. Naturally, there are many common practices and protocols, but there is little to no coordination across syndicate lines. Indeed, there's little to no coordination even *within* a syndicate. Individual jonin or bosses oversee many operations, without any regard for what their colleagues or superiors may be undertaking. Unsurprisingly, it would be well nigh impossible for a consul or dean to process all the information gathered by agents of his syndicate, even if he wished to do so. Thus, the Scravers function as a vast library of information — without a cataloguing system.

Individual operations are usually nonviolent in nature. Most Scraver agents treat violence as a last resort used only to protect one's own life or the lives of accomplices. Instead, they prefer to treat information gathering as a sideline to the guild's other activities. For example, when a noble on Vera Cruz needs replacement parts for a think machine, the





Scravers provide that service for the usual fees, but they also take note of the fact that Don Hernando Gabriel Castaneda y Nunez is up to something unusual. After all, it's rare that a Hazat knight has need of a think machine. Thus, when an enemy of Don Hernando is looking for intelligence on his rival, the Scravers can provide these tidbits, all the while examining the enemy for information that may likewise be useful elsewhere.

In a sense, the Scravers have the most "casual" approach (detractors would say "amateurish") to intelligence gathering of any espionage agency in the Known Worlds. The guild treats information simply as a commodity rather than as a means to an end. This gives them a detachment from their work that has served them well. If they're unable to obtain a new piece of information, it's no more harm than if they failed to obtain a shipment of electro-spanners or freeze-dried monakots. Unlike the Jakovians or the Rooks, the Scravers do not treat information gathering as their *raison d'être*. It is a profitable sideline to be sure, but pales in comparison to gambling or smuggling — a fact that gives some solace to the guild's enemies.

Observations

If the latest round of rumors and hearsay is to be believed, the Scravers have started to take their information gathering "sideline" a bit more seriously of late. For many years, stories abounded of a secret Scraver base located on a lost world far from Leagueheim. These stories claimed that the Scravers used this base to train their espionage agents far from prying eyes. As interesting as this story is, there wasn't a lot of proof to back it up. Moreover, there was never any explanation why the Scravers would need a base on a lost world. After all, they're not the Imperial Eye or some other highly organized agency; the guild would have little use for a secret base.

Yet, the stories continued to circulate. Why would this be? There are two related explanations for these stories. The first is that these tales of a secret Scraver base stemmed from the genuine existence of a lost world contacted by the Scravers, namely Iver. For close to a decade, the Scravers and the Charioteers have been in contact with Iver, using its

status as a way to operate outside the control of both the Empire and the Church. So long as Iver remains under ecclesiastical interdiction, the Scravers need not worry about interference from anyone in the Known Worlds.

The second related explanation stems from the work of Jovanna Wilcock, a chunin with the Harrison syndicate. Since becoming a chunin in 4991, Wilcock has interceded between the Harrisons and most of the major syndicates of the guild. During that time, she became increasingly concerned that the Scravers' lack of coordination was seriously hampering its efforts, as well as cutting into its potential profits. Thus, Wilcock presented a plan to Gustav Harrison that involved closer cooperation between the information gathering operations of the major families and clans.

So far, mutual distrust and respect for Scraver "tradition," has prevented Wilcock's plan from being implemented — so far as anyone knows. However, reports continue to circulate of joint operations between Scraver families, as well as better than usual coordination in the realm of data processing. These reports can't be verified because no one within the guild has any idea where a data processing center would be located. It's definitely not on Leagueheim or Madoc, and the idea of its being on a world held by a noble house or the Church is implausible in the extreme. Could it be on Iver? It's possible and, if so, represents the potential for the Scravers guild to become even more of a threat to its enemies.

Agents

As might be expected, Scraver information gatherers are a diverse group, coming from every part of the guild. Complicating this picture is the fact that most Scravers have worked in this field at some point in their careers. Nevertheless, there are individuals who specialize as information brokers and it is these who hold the most interest for those in the espionage community.

In general, Scravers engaged in this trade possess either excellent interpersonal skills or technical know-how, especially the former. As already noted, the Scravers view this endeavor as a sideline, an added bonus in the course of their other activities. Most of the information they acquire

is done "accidentally," which is to say through keen observation and idle conversation while undertaking another matter. Of course, these Scravers are very adept at such skills, so much so that it's difficult to recognize that their accidental character is yet another level of artifice used by these master criminals.

Scravers rarely use codenames as such, but aliases and nicknames are common among them. The following individuals are guild members known or suspected to be involved in the information trade:

- **Donovan Stone:** An enforcer for the Taketsu syndicate, Stone spent most of his guild career on Pandemonium. Over the course of a decade, he helped the Taketsu and allied mobs muscle out all competition. His influence eventually grew to the point where he had the ear of many influential people, including the Decados governor, Enis Sharn. It's this fact that has given Stone access to the information he provides the guild today. To date, he's become so successful that his days as a thug are long gone — to the relief of the Taketsu's enemies.

- **Dubloon:** This individual, known only by his nickname (derived from his fascination with antique coinage), operates on Rampart and other Li Halan worlds. A member of the DeCaprio syndicate, he's an accomplished smuggler, specializing in weapons and other instruments of destruction. Dubloon possesses an extensive network of informants and snitches throughout Li Halan space. In addition, he's a keen observer of human nature, using his psychological skills to ferret out useful information from those who deal with him — which he then passes on to his superiors.

- **Nikolai "Nicky" Drevko:** Born on Severus, this Scraver earned the enmity of House Decados for his ability to pry into family secrets best left unknown. He fled to Grail, where he became a member of Harken Keddah's entourage. He serves Harken as a tech redeemer, as well as an advisor regarding the Decados, liege lords whom the young Keddah nobleman hopes his house will one day cast off. For his part, Nicky serves the Keddah more for protection than out of any loyalty to the clan. Indeed, there are many who wonder how long it will be before this Scraver sells Keddah family secrets just as he did to the Decados.



Muster Vigil

The Vigil is the inner law enforcement arm of the Muster. Its roving agents (called vigilantes by detractors) act as investigator, judge and jury when a guild operation goes awry. Their thoroughness and integrity are without equal — as are the numbers of their enemies.

History

Members of the Vigil have seemingly little interest in their organization's past. This fact is reflected in their general lack of knowledge about its origins. Of course, this isn't to say the history of the Vigil is a complete blank, especially if one is willing to look in the right places or ask the right people. What details could be uncovered shed significant light on the development of this group, as well as their operations at present.

The Vigil's earliest antecedent came into existence shortly after the death of General Roland Van Owen. At that time, the victorious nobles turned on their Muster allies, rightly fearing the existence of military power independent of their control. Because they lacked the firepower of the Muster, the nobles attempted to use bribery and other promises to turn the mercenaries against themselves. Such attempts largely failed, because a cabal of Van Owen's closest advisors, including Major Jarod Amad, appealed to the mercs' sense of duty and loyalty. When moral suasion failed, they made sure recalcitrant commanders met with unfortunate "accidents" and were replaced by subordinates devoted to the memory of Van Owen.

Once the noble houses formally recognized the Muster, this cabal entrenched themselves as a star chamber or secret court that ensured the loyalty of the guild's members. They also acted as advisors to the Janizary, providing him with recommendations based on information culled from their informers. This arrangement initially worked very well and achieved two ends. First, it gave the cabal access to great power. Second, it established devotion to Van Owen's legacy as a test of loyalty to the guild.

Unsurprisingly, this cabal (which had come to be called "the Vigil" by around 4400) acquired many enemies, including members of the High Command. They resented the Vigil's closeness to the Janizary and scoffed at its unswerving dedication to Van Owen's memory. In fact, many early members of the Vigil revered the Muster's founder as the "hero of the Second Republic" and harbored broader Republican sympathies, including the abolition of slavery.

The Vigil's enemies, led by Raphaella Mejia, acquired knowledge of these secret beliefs through their own agents. Thus, when the Vigil attempted to warn Janizary Jakub Cleef

against entering into the "sweat business," Mejia came forward and threatened to turn the Vigil over to the Church for adhering to the heresy of Republicanism. Initially, the Vigil doubted Mejia's claims, but the appearance of Avestites on Bannockburn soon changed their minds. The cabal had no choice but to acquiesce and encourage Cleef to accept slaving as a natural outgrowth of the Muster's mandate.

Mejia's interference seriously undermined the Vigil's power base. Yet, the cabal didn't simply roll over and die. Instead, it regrouped and decided to take a new approach to its self-appointed mission. Led by Yannick Hagelaar, the Vigil approached Janizary Cleef and asked permission to remove themselves from his immediate counsel. Hagelaar argued forcefully that the Muster had many enemies, within and without. To survive and prosper in these turbulent times, the guild needed devoted — and impartial — judges of the activities of its members. Hagelaar offered to turn the Vigil into such an organization.

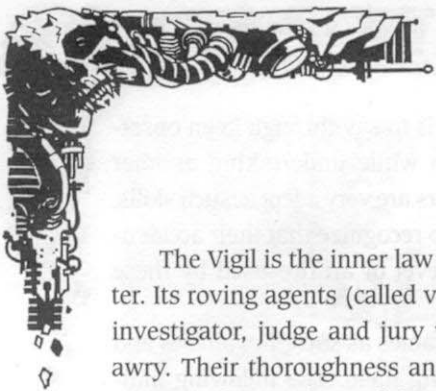
Although Mejia again threatened the Vigil with exposure, it no longer mattered. The announcement of the Vigil was widely seen by rank and file Chainers as a safeguard against their superiors' abuse of power. Any attempt to discredit the Vigil in this way would have implicated Mejia in these same abuses; she could do little but accept the Vigil's new public role in the guild.

From such internal strife was the modern Vigil born. The irony, of course, is that the organization owes its existence to the abuses of power and nepotism that it now combats so strenuously.

Known Operations

The Vigil's responsibilities are exceedingly broad — as are its powers. Judges and their teams investigate a wide range of wrongdoing within the Muster, from outright abuse of power to contract violations. In addition, they have the authority to levy fines, dock wages and even expel Chainers from the guild, should their actions warrant it. Unsurprisingly, the appearance of a Vigil judge is greatly feared by even the most stalwart guildmember.

In addition to a small entourage of loyal agents, Vigil judges usually have at least one partner, often two. The theory is that their incredible authority demands a check against abuse. The presence of another judge or two ensures that a Vigil investigation team remains as incorrupt as is possible within the Muster. Likewise, judges are well paid in order to eliminate bribery as a possible means of interfering with their investigations. For the most part, these methods have worked admirably, giving most judges a solid repu-



tation for honesty and trustworthiness.

The decisions of a Vigil judge can only be overturned by another judge or by the High Command. Thus, a further safeguard exists in the form of undercover judges who monitor the activities of their colleagues. These hidden judges ensure that the sentences passed on cases are neither unduly harsh nor too lenient. In addition, they look for signs that political bias may have influenced a decision illicitly. If a judge is found to have overstepped his authority or otherwise failed in his duties, he is relieved of duty until an investigation either confirms or refutes the charges made against him. All in all, it's a remarkable system that has actually kept the Vigil free from much of the corruption found elsewhere in the Muster.

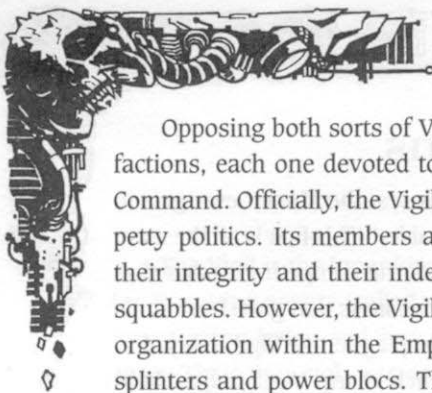
The Vigil also works to ensure that other factions aren't breaking the Muster's monopoly on trained labor. Thus, they have agents who are not internal judges but external undercover observers. These agents rely on rumors and reports of violations from other Chainers, specializing not so much in information gathering as the reconnaissance needed to prove allegations of threatened monopolies. These Vigil agents are adept at getting into their target faction's territory without raising suspicions while they observe conditions there. If violations are uncovered, they are reported to the High Command, which determines how best to deal with the problem.

Observations

The Vigil is certainly the closest the Muster ever gets to earning the appellation "honorable." This feat is all the more impressive when one considers the competing camps that exist within its ranks. The old tensions that gave birth to its current incarnation continue to plague the Vigil today. For example, the reverence in which many Vigil judges hold General Van Owen borders on the cult-like. These men and women truly believe the Muster's founder to be just short of the Prophet in terms of personal sanctity — and only by a little. They claim to uphold his traditions of "fidelity, honor and integrity" so as to serve as examples to their brethren.

Of course, many do so simply because they believe the Muster is more profitable if it's perceived as an honest broker. The "legacy of Van Owen" is simply a business tactic designed to earn the trust of its clients. However, not all members of the Vigil share this cynical view. Some still harbor the Republican sympathies for which Raphaella Mejia blackmailed their predecessors so long ago. This minority sees Van Owen as an exemplar of all that was best in the Second Republic. It is doubtful this minority works toward a Third Republic, but they do seek to ameliorate the worst excesses of the present age by putting an end to corruption and self-aggrandizement within their own guild. They hope to inspire others through their actions.





Opposing both sorts of Van Owenites are several small factions, each one devoted to a different dean in the High Command. Officially, the Vigil is supposed to be above such petty politics. Its members are carefully selected both for their integrity and their independence from internal guild squabbles. However, the Vigil is no different than any other organization within the Empire and possesses numerous splinters and power blocs. The largest of these serves the Solace family, whose ambitions are well known even outside the Muster.

By and large, though, Vigil judges confine themselves to internal policing and investigation. Even those beholden to a political faction exert most of their efforts in rooting out the enemies *within* the guild — however they choose to define this. Naturally, this means the Vigil possesses extraordinary resources and information about the Muster, making it an obvious means of infiltrating the Chainers should anyone wish to do so. Unfortunately for would-be double agents, the Vigil has a remarkable *esprit de corps* that transcends even the splits within its own ranks. Any attempts to penetrate the inner workings of this group will require precise planning and execution — not impossible, but certainly difficult.

Agents

Judges of the Vigil are selected by the High Command from every part of the Muster. They are vetted on the basis of their skills, service to the guild and personal integrity. Consequently, its membership is exceptionally diverse and secretive. Most Vigil judges use code names in their correspondence with their superiors, so to ensure their ability to continue functioning as hidden observers of the guild's activities. The following is a capsule summary of some of the most prominent judges, listed according to their code names:

- **Tarr and Fether:** Like many Vigil judges, these individuals work as a pair. Their identities are completely unknown even to many in the High Command, as they report directly to the Janizary. The depth of their knowledge and the breadth of their travels is legendary, suggesting they may in fact be the code names of more than just two judges. If they are indeed real, Tarr and Fether must be personally

powerful individuals with extensive contacts throughout the Known Worlds. The recent fall from grace of Consul Laetitia Klemburg is attributed to them, a testament both to their skills and daring.

- **Spartacus:** This judge clearly belongs to a Van Owenite faction, as his (or her) work to date shows a decided preference for busting Chainers whose actions threaten the reputation of the guild, particularly in running slave operations. A good example was the arrest of Manager Wen Shihao on charges of falsifying the origins of slaves offered for sale on Cadiz. Rumor has it Spartacus opposes slavery in any form and works to limit its profitability within the guild.

- **Debs:** Another Van Owenite, Debs specializes in violations and abuse of Muster contracts. He believes front-line grunts deserve equal protection under guild law — especially from rapacious managers and consuls. Of late, his greatest successes have been in bringing down crooked guild members conspiring with House Decados to cheat mercs out of their pay and rights to booty.

Revealed Agents

Of course, not all judges can keep their identities secret forever. When revealed as a member of the Vigil, a judge retires from active service and begins life anew as part of the organization's bureaucracy. In some cases, judges voluntarily retire so as to lend their accumulated wisdom to the administration of the Vigil. Among the most notable of these retired and unmasked judges are:

- **Adrian Pollion:** When a turncoat within the Muster revealed Pollion's identity in 4997, it surely came as a serious blow to the Vigil. Operating under the codename "Inquisitor," Pollion had earned a reputation as a no-nonsense opponent of the politicization of the Vigil. He tangled as often with crooked judges as he did with corrupt Chainers. Rumor has it he was busted by agents of Dean Solace, who had had enough of Pollion's "interference" in her schemes.

- **Parvinder Sholto:** Exposed late in 4999, Sholto (codenamed "Bad Karma") was a specialist in reconnaissance, seeking out proof of monopoly violations. His cover was blown by Li Halan agents on Kish.



Reeves Auditors

The Reeves are widely feared and reviled for their banking, money lending and collections activities. The latter is a particular source of worry, as 50th century debtors are no more willing to part with their firebirds than their counterparts in past eras. That's why the Reeves created the Auditors, an agency dedicated to making sure the guild gets what's coming to it — by any means necessary.

History

Like the guild as a whole, the precise origin of the Auditors is a subject of fierce debate and controversy. As the agency has no single architect or founding date, this is understandable. The Auditors themselves claim descent from the collections divisions of the corporations whose merger created the guild's immediate ancestor, Reeve Holdings. According to this theory, the Auditors took on additional responsibilities as Reeve Holdings expanded its interests, including intelligence gathering and security. The need for these additional responsibilities become more acute after the collapse of the Second Republic, when Reeve Holdings faced bankruptcy and dissolution due to nonpayment of noble debts. Had the forebears of the Auditors not acted quickly and forcefully, there might not even be a Reeves guild today — an alternate history many in the Known Worlds devoutly wish the Pancreator had ordained instead!

While true, the official version of the Auditors' founding doesn't tell the entire story. It fails to mention a very significant fact, namely that the guild's ancestors also included numerous pirates and corsairs, many of them renowned for their insatiable rapacity. Admittedly, some of these reavers were merely disenfranchised Diasporan gentry, who often acted for the benefit of similarly dispossessed common people. However, the bulk of these pirates were not such romantic figures as Conn Madichian nor Harausz Brutout, but something closer to the infamous Tracina Isterot or Beliah Black. Thus, the Auditors are also the inheritors of an ancient tradition of murder and theft in the service of greed. The skills acquired in such dubious endeavors have served the agency well over the centuries, as anyone who's suffered at the hands of a special collections team can attest.

Despite the mystery surrounding its origins, this hasn't stopped the Auditors from being intimately involved in the history of the Known Worlds. Since the onset of the New Dark Ages, they have played a vital role in several key events. Most notably, the Auditors provided intelligence about both leading nobles and clergy to the nascent Merchant League. This intelligence enabled the League to fend off its enemies long enough to establish itself firmly as a fixture of the

Known Worlds. Some conspiracy theorists argue that the early Auditors provided Quentin Siegel with the secrets he used to cement his alliance with the other guilds, as well as the League's eventual acceptance by the Church and nobility. If true, it's one of the better-kept secrets in the Known Worlds — which isn't to say it's a lie.

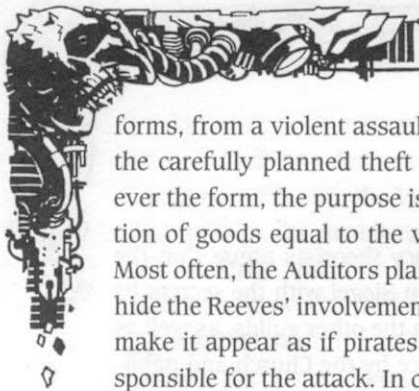
Since the founding of the League, the Auditors have worked quietly behind the scenes, enabling the Reeves to acquire properties and possessions on many worlds. Indeed, the guild's reputation for aggressive collections is in no small part due to the actions of the Auditors. These tactics frightened the guild's enemies and won the Reeves a prominent place in the society of the Known Worlds. Many nobles and priests turned to the Reeves as advisors and advocates. The most notable exception to this pattern was Vladimir Alecto, who publicly rejected the use of the Reeves in his bid for the Imperial throne (although some claim he made several backroom deals with the guild to fund his fleet). Precisely why he did this is unknown, leading conspiracy theorists again to suspect the Auditors involvement in his assassination. That Alexius chose not to follow Vladimir's lead in this matter (and has not met with assassination) only adds further support to this popular theory.

Known Operations

First and foremost, the Auditors exist to facilitate the collection of debts from recalcitrant borrowers. The Reeves only call upon the Auditors' services once all normal methods of collection have failed. As noted above, this agency draws upon its unusual store of skills and abilities in order to achieve its goals. The simplest method the Auditors employ is blackmail. The agency maintains an extensive network of spies and informants, making it one of the Empire's largest sources of illicit information. Most often this information is not so much sensitive as it is of an embarrassing nature. Thus, the Auditors seek out information about illegal business dealings, forbidden love affairs, unfortunate political leanings — even heresy. They then threaten to reveal this information unless the debt to the Reeves is repaid. In most cases, this approach works admirably, meaning that the agency never needs to become physically involved in collection.

However, there are always obdurate borrowers who cannot be swayed even by the revelation of hidden sexual perversions to the local bishop. In such cases, the Auditors take a more direct approach: they send in one or more specially trained collections teams. These teams, which consist of highly skilled Reeve agents, raid the holdings of anyone who refuses to pay their debts to the guild. Raiding can take many





forms, from a violent assault on a noble's country estate to the carefully planned theft of a valuable heirloom. Whatever the form, the purpose is identical, namely the reclamation of goods equal to the value of the debt, plus interest. Most often, the Auditors plan their raids in such a way as to hide the Reeves' involvement in the operation. Instead, they make it appear as if pirates or other enemies had been responsible for the attack. In other cases, they make no effort to hide the guild's instigation of the attack — as a warning that crossing the Reeves will no longer be tolerated.

There's also the infamous Debt Collection Fleet, made up of remnants of the original reavers who founded the guild and augmented by vessels they've acquired over the centuries. The fleet exists primarily as a threatening gesture. Few noblemen or clerics show much courage when the fleet enters their system unannounced and parks in geosynchronous orbit over their lands. Its use is purely a last resort, but it has been called out in the past. The most recent use was in 4995, when a recalcitrant nobleman on Icon, Ambrosius Li Halan, failed to repay debts incurred during the Emperor Wars. The mere report of the fleet's arrival caused Ambrosius to sell off large portions of his personal belongings, including several religious relics, to repay the loan. The Reeves prefer to act in more subtle ways, but the fleet exists to remind would-be defaulters of the penalties of their actions.

Of course, the Auditors also function in less dramatic ways. When a debtor appeals for forbearance on his loans, the Reeves send in Auditors to investigate the merits of his claim. These Auditors are knowledgeable in both financial law and appraisal. Their sole purpose is to examine a borrower's finances and possessions from top to bottom to determine whether or not he is sufficiently impoverished to warrant a delay in his repayment to the guild. The thoroughness of these Auditors is without rival, and they are uniquely adept at finding ways for debtors to repay their loans to the Reeves. Needless to say, these Auditors are only marginally less hated than their more violent counterparts.

Observations

The Auditors are without a doubt one of the more useful — and dangerous — intelligence agencies in the Merchant League. First, they possess skills matched only by the Imperial Eye when it comes to the hostile extraction of goods and other property. For the most part, the Reeves are scrupulous in their own use of the Auditors; they never employ their services until all other avenues have been exhausted. However, the guild sometimes rents out its Auditor collection teams to nobles and businesses in exchange for huge fees. In these cases, the Reeves are especially fastidious in ensuring that the missions they undertake are legitimate. The last thing the guild needs are lawsuits stemming from the misuse of its collection teams — no matter what the

potential benefit. Rumor has it that Count Gaius Decados has taken to using Auditors agents in this fashion in his disputes with House Keddah of Grail.

More importantly, the Auditors possess excellent gossip and bribery networks. Through the judicious use of guild funds, their agents have obtained data crystals full of sordid information with which to extort money from noncompliant debtors. Again, the Auditors are notably scrupulous in their acquisition and use of this information. Indeed, the Reeves have strong prohibitions for using Auditor information for personal gain. Unfortunately, not all Auditors are as scrupulous in the handling of this data as their agency demands. Consequently, there exists the definite possibility that unprincipled individuals or groups — such as the Decados, the al-Malik, even the Avestites — might find a way to gain access to this veritable storehouse of embarrassing information. After all, it isn't always necessary to kill a man in order to eliminate him as a threat.

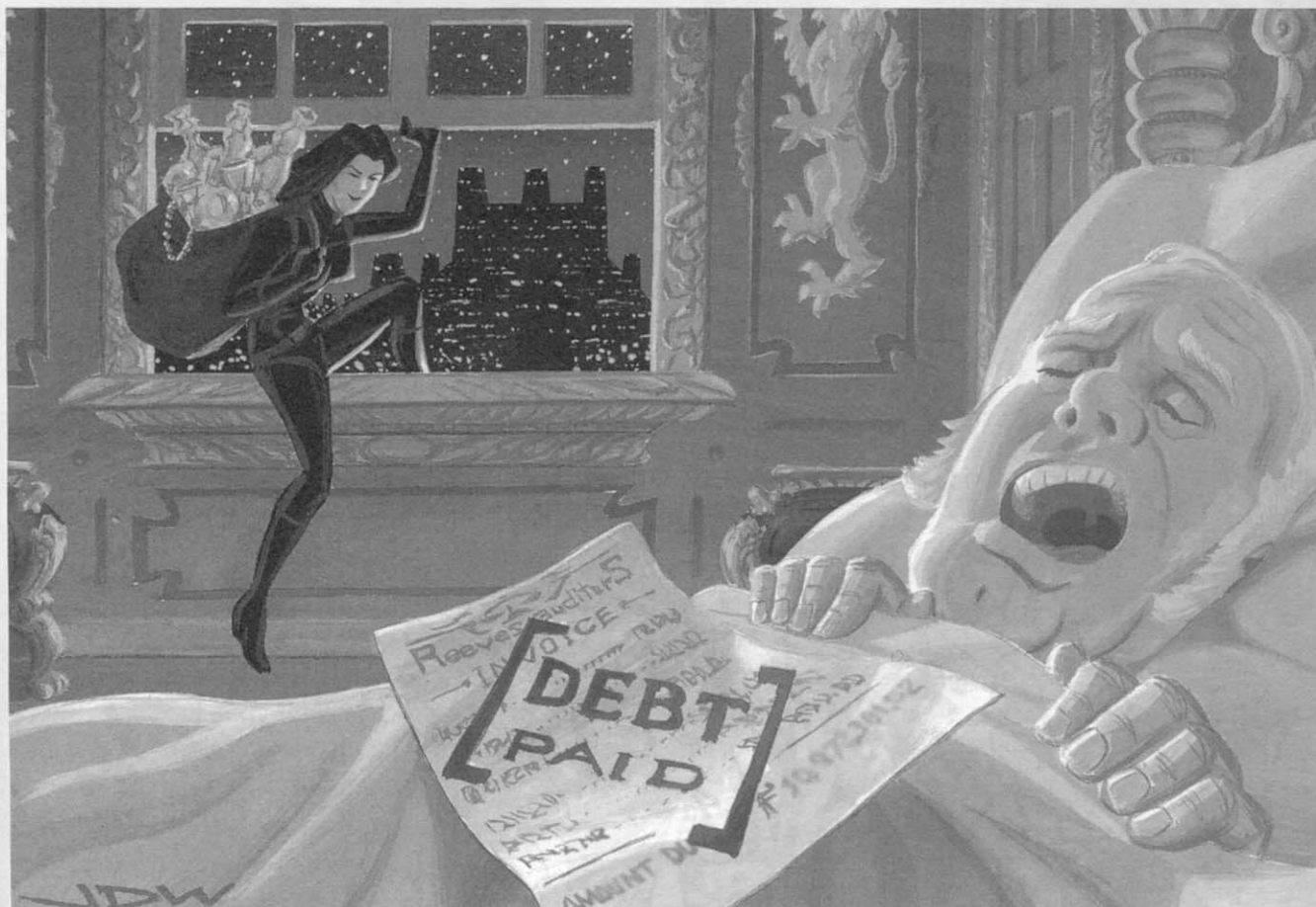
Finally, rumors abound that the Auditors possess hidden caches of Second Republic era technology from their piratical predecessors. The agency has long denied such rumors and with good reason: if they indeed possessed them, why don't they use them in their operations? Such logic hasn't won over everyone, but it has silenced all except the most ardent believers in ancient Merchant League conspiracies.

Agents

Auditors are recruited from every part of the Reeves guild, with special attention paid to those with experience in money lending, collections and advocacy. In addition, skill in the use of think machines is highly prized, as many Auditor activities require sifting through large amounts of raw data for small bits of valuable information. Of course, many Reeve clients don't keep records on such machines. This means that agents must also rely on gossip from within a household. What differentiates an Auditor from a Scriver in this regard is that the Auditors don't use bully tactics or blackmail with their informants — just firebirds. Agents working with special collections teams are talented infiltrators with a smattering of combat skills. Thus, the Auditors tend to be a focused agency, whose members show great proficiency within a narrow range of abilities.

Because of the fear in which they are held, Auditors use an elaborate system of codenames by which they designate their agents. This codename consists of three parts: a division designator (such as collections, data gathering, etc.), a location designator (Hawkwood space, Rampart, etc.) and an internal serial number unique to each Auditor. Because the Reeves frequently shuffle the first two designators, it's often difficult to divine their meanings with exactitude. However, the serial number seems permanent and moves with





an agent, even if she should transfer from one division or location to another.

Here are a few sample codenames based on the latest intelligence about the Auditors:

- **Alpha Shin 102969:** This agent appears to work on Byzantium Secundus and is suspected of overseeing collections from deadbeat nobles associated with the Imperial Court. To date, Alpha Shin 102969 has proven very successful, having obtained payment from the dissolute Haakon Cameton as well as Giovanni Ejiwunmi of House al-Malik.

- **Gamma Zed 030172:** This agent has one of the most difficult jobs of any Auditor: collecting Church debts. Since Alexius' ascension to the Phoenix Throne, the Reeves have loaned money to fund improvements and restorations throughout the Empire. The Church is one of the guild's biggest borrowers — and is frequently reluctant to repay its loans. Gamma Zed 030172 has shown himself particularly adept at recouping the guild's investment through the shrewd use of secrets many priests and bishops would rather keep out of public view. Unsurprisingly, this agent is a regular target for ecclesiastical harassment and may soon be transferred to another division.

Revealed Agents

What little is known of the meaning of the Auditors' codenames comes from several agents whose identities were

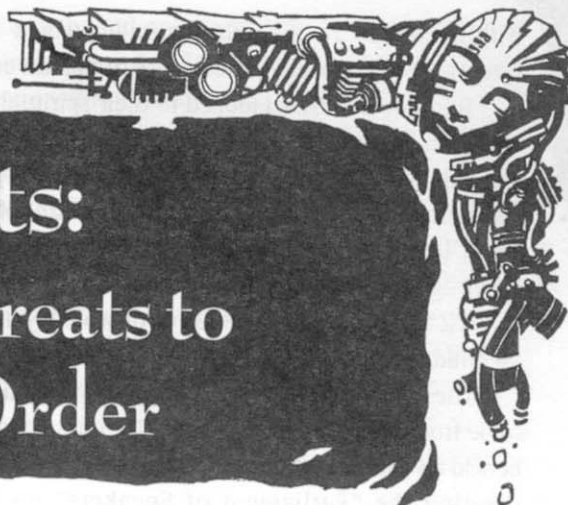
uncovered through various means. By comparing their designators with their work and location, useful details came to light. Unfortunately, their usefulness did not last long, as the Auditors are quick to change the meanings of their codenames in order to prevent outsiders from gaining too clear a picture of their operations. A few examples of Auditors uncovered in such a fashion follow:

- **Shailesh Savundragayam:** This agent once bore the codename Beth Zebra 011600 and operated within Decados space as a commander of special collections teams, as other such commanders who bore the "Beth" designator during a six-month span in late 4998. Likewise, the "Zebra" designator came from a particular alphabetic sequence used only for Auditors operating in Decados territory. Exactly how this sequence mapped on to Decados territory was never uncovered before the Auditors again changed their naming practices.

- **Andrea Steward:** Designated agent Hna Zeh 053071, Steward operated a gossip and bribery network on Istakhr before her mysterious death in 4995, possibly at the hands of the Mutasih. Her death briefly caused problems for the Auditors in al-Malik space, as it disrupted their collection of information about Umar al-Malik, a profligate sycophant at the court of Duke Hakim.







Terrorists: Anarchistic Threats to Established Order

We turn from the consideration of professional spies to the underground doings of fanatics bent on the destruction of all we love.

The number of such deadly organizations throughout the Known Worlds is uncountable. I list only the most pervasive and persistent of them, those run by criminal-minded

Ur-Ukar and the anarchic — even heretical, perhaps — guildsmembers, particularly those who consider themselves to be members in standing of Guild Mercurian, which, despite official desires to the contrary, do indeed exist and are not a joke.

Bava! & the United Freedom Movement

Like humans, the Ur-Ukar have employed spies since the beginning of their recorded history. The *Noddavittya*, which covers their mythological history on Velisimil, mentions Usporr, an Ukar who passed himself off as an Obun prince, relaying secrets to his people. The Ukari seemed to rely on sympathizers during their mytho-historical war, for it states in Book Three: "The lowland people/ fishers and farmers/ passed secrets to the Ukari/ against the proud Obun princes."

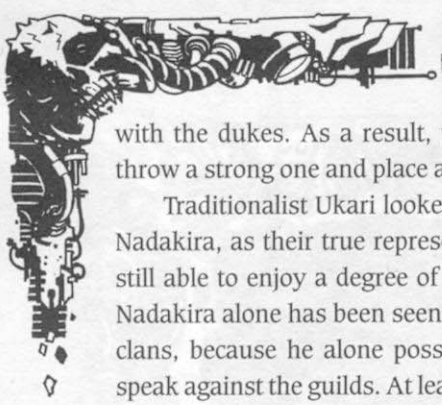
Once removed to Kordeth by the Sons of Rillos, Ukari unity broke down into clan units, some of which later joined to create nations. For a time, Ukari nobles flourished. When nobles became corrupt, however, and tried to seize planetwide power, spies from various religious orders worked against them, aiding the populace to eventually overthrow the lords. The end of the nobles saw the resurrection of the ancient clan powers.

With industrialization and early space flight, the Usturak clan nation rose to prominence. Usturak employed spies and maintained a network of agents to keep the other clans aligned or subservient to her. When Kordeth was attacked by

Patriarch Palamedes' armada during the Ukar-Human War (c. 2800), the lesser clans rebelled. Many of the Usturak agents were later relocated to Aylon. A few managed to stir up a rebellion, but it was put down. For the next 500 years, the human military watched over Kordeth. Human intelligence agencies, in the manner of most conquerors throughout history, often pitted clan against clan. When the Second Republic allowed Kordeth to elect its own governor and parliament, the Ur-Ukar assumed responsibility for their own security. Ukari military units were allowed to form during the late Second Republic and some Ukari military intelligence officers rose in the Republican military command late in the Republican era (3850-4000).

Clans unsympathetic to humans returned to their ancestral, subterranean dwellings after Kordeth fell under the management of the Merchant League. The reigning, human-placed dukes were stuck in a difficult position. They had to keep their rebellious kinsmen down to preserve a remnant of Ukari freedom from human control, while trying to halt the worst of the guild excesses to prove their loyalty to the people. This resulted in neither side being completely happy





with the dukes. As a result, the guilds would often overthrow a strong one and place a more compliant one in place.

Traditionalist Ukari looked to their spiritual leader, the Nadakira, as their true representative, and the Nadakira is still able to enjoy a degree of autonomy in his palace. The Nadakira alone has been seen as the protector of the poorer clans, because he alone possesses the moral authority to speak against the guilds. At least two in the position (Ryngal in 4772 and Nomgupa in 4823) were probably assassinated on guild/loyalist orders.

The greatest challenge to the guild and human loyalists came from the Aylon Ukar warrior Dyn'dran oed Nata, who beheld a vision in 4883 and forsook the path of the warrior. Creating the "Parliament of Speakers" on Critcorum, Dyn'dran's dream of uniting Vorox, Shantor, Gannock, human, Etyri, Oro'ym, Ukari and Obun representatives to create a new society based on complete equality came to fruition. He was slain in 4911 by regency agents. The death of the holy peacemaker outraged the Ukari.

Dyn'dran's assassination united the traditionalist clans of Kordeth and Aylon with Bava!, a terrorist organization composed of Ukar dwelling on human worlds, and some Kraxi monks who resisted Allied Clan/human rule to form the United Freedom Movement in 4912. These factions had not worked together in the past, but now an exchange of goals and ideas took place. The traditionalists often thought that Bava! was too far removed from the realities of clan life, and that their revolutionary philosophies were grafted from human sources. Bava! viewed the traditionalists as ignorant kinsmen who lacked revolutionary principles and guidance. The Kraxi monasteries were intent on preserving the purity of Ukari culture and the traditional martial philosophy of blade fighting. Kraxi, as taught by Gisdrom of the Jeweled Eye, follower of Ronga "The Overcome." They distrusted Bava! and often held a more puritanical view of their religion, at odds with non-Kraxi priests among the outlawed clans.

Bava!

A number of small Ukari terrorist cells existed before Bava!, mostly operating on human worlds, including the anarchist-leaning Rivga and the utopian Black Millenniallist groups, the later of which assassinated the archbishop of Leagueheim in 4811.

Bava! was formed in 4867 by the revolutionary theorist Darth'un Dwelthmid on Byzantium Secundus. Composed of a number of revolutionary Ukari groups, including the remnants of Rivga and the Black Millenniallists, their stated goal was independence for their people and uplifting the Ukari to a collectivist civilization which would destroy the human oppressors. Their ideas, ironically, were derived from the human social thinker, Pablo Luxx, a professor of social and

economic philosophy at the University of Rampart.

Luxx's ideas owed something to the Rampart philosopher Lorenzeto's (4776-4848) triad theories of history, which called for action, counter-reaction and synthesis. Bava! felt that revolutionary cells could organize the masses in a war of liberation on Aylon and Kordeth. However, their lack of respect for the clan unit led to limited successes on these worlds. Bava! felt that the clan's power was a remnant of the exploitative technocracy of the Ukari Usturak Empire, useful in uniting the people but "unprogressive" and "reactionary" in carrying out hopes for final liberation.

Bava! achieved success among Ukari populations living in human cities, often in ghetto situations, where the need for a protective, revolutionary vanguard force was felt due to the excessive exploitation suffered at human hands (prejudice, low-paying jobs, mass police arrests and necessary payoffs for law officials).

Bava's first success came with the bombing of Count Hendrik Hawkwood's Byzantium Secundus estate at his birthday party, which resulted in a number of deaths among the nobles. Despite mass arrests and an army sweep through the Ukari marginal neighborhoods of the Imperial City, the Bava! leadership survived, spreading cells to other worlds. Human authorities feared them. Counterespionage units were largely unproductive until regency intelligence agents, using Obun psychics, stepped in. Ukari with criminal backgrounds would often bargain with intelligence agencies and agree to infiltrate the revolutionaries in exchange for clemency. The arrest of four Bava! leaders on Istakhr on 4902 was deemed a success, and with the death of First Leader Darth'un Dwelthmid on Rampart in 4906, it looked as the revolutionary movement would die out.

The martyrdom of Dyn'dran Oed Nata changed that. More committed Ukari flocked to join Bava!, and the group experienced a rebirth. Crucial in this was the meeting with the traditionalists and Kraxi priests, where an alliance was hammered out calling for the uniting of all anti-Allied Clan Ukari into one unit.

Still, Bava! retained its separate identity, although it sent explosives experts to train the Kordeth traditionalists. Its revolutionary thinking now emphasized the alliance: A people's revolt had to preclude society's transfer to a utopian state. Yet, traditionalist and Kraxi values began to soften its own views, and after 4955 the call for a revolutionary socialization of society was gradually dropped, as off-world Ukari began paying a renewed interest to the spiritual values of the Kordeth and Aylon traditionalists.

Bava! produced its greatest victory during the Emperor Wars, when agents planted a bomb aboard Baron Fasil al-Malik's private space-cruiser (4989), killing him, his advisors and his Hawkwood guests after the ship left Aylon. Baron Fasil was thought to influence Duke Hakim on alien



matters, and his liberal dealings with the Ukari were thought to endanger Bava!, who preferred their enemies to be hard-liners.

The organization recently suffered minor setbacks on two counts. The first was an internal war, which saw the second in command, Bardwont, assassinated by a rival terrorist group, the Children of Shurstrat. The second — and potentially more deadly — was the pressure applied on the Decados by Imperial, Hawkwood and al-Malik ambassadors to close down the funding of Bava! through their various Mantis League corporations and banking institutions. The Decados have promised to close down the banking services, but whether they will merely open another secret account for Bava! or force the group to find another source of income is difficult to say. The Jakovian Agency has provided Bava! with funding and training, seeing it as an enemy against its enemy. Hence, in the murky world of espionage and terrorism, they make for convenient allies.

UFM (United Freedom Movement)

The United Freedom Movement, which theoretically joins the traditionalist clans of Aylon and Kordeth with Bava! and the Kraxi priests, has enjoyed some success. The traditional clans have been at war with the surface human loyalist Ukari on Kordeth since the end of the Ukari-Human War. Indeed, Allied Clan rule on Kordeth does not enter far into the world's interior, most of which is held by outlawed clans. On Aylon, the situation is somewhat different, since most of the clans live in the open air, and the division is between al-Malik-friendly clans and traditionalists.

The UFM enjoyed its greatest success during the Emperor Wars, when the traditionalist clans on Aylon rebelled and briefly seized a third of the planet. Working with Decados intelligence (and the charismatic Jakovian agent, Count Rurik Decados, who helped lead them), they were only defeated at Aylon's capitol by the swift arrival of elements of the Fifth Dark Legion. With Count Rurik's death in the aftermath of the battle, the unity of traditionalist clans shattered, and the Aylon-allied clans and al-Malik reasserted control over the world. Nonetheless, UFM was marked as a force to be reckoned with.

The group's second greatest success was on Kordeth, when they successfully sabotaged Duke Torquil of Borduk's mines, destroying huge investments and politically weakening Borduk's rule. Immediately after the explosion — which caused over a thousand deaths and the loss of millions in League investments — various League representatives met to decide whether to continue backing Duke Borduk or replace him with a more sympathetic figure. The Kordeth traditionalists are moving closer to the surface in their efforts

to retake Kordeth, and only the upper mines are now kept tenuously safe. The duke's loyalists have shrunk to include only elements within his own clan, and the 1st, 4th and 6th units of the Allied Clan Defense Force, along with the elite Deepers (see Navok, below).

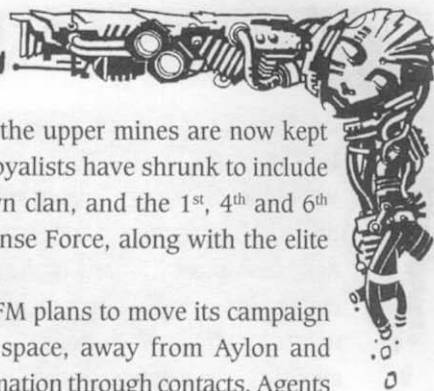
It is rumored that the UFM plans to move its campaign into al-Malik and Imperial space, away from Aylon and Kordeth. The UFM pass information through contacts. Agents are organized into cells, with only the leader of each cell reporting to his superiors. These cells live on human worlds in Ukari ghettos, among their own people, who are often in sympathy with their goals, aiding in fundraising, passing information, and even hiding and abetting Bava! /UFM suspects.

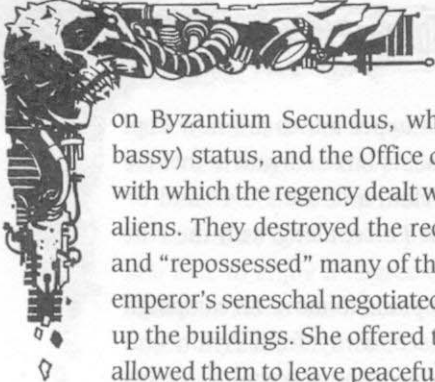
Agents are hard to root out, for they can be any Ukari. They are also the most dangerous and unpredictable terrorists, claiming responsibility for many palace and marketplace bombings. Some human sympathizers even aid their cause, compounding the problem for authorities. These human sympathizers are largely found among the radical, fringe members of the upper classes who possess education without responsibility. At times, a sort of working-class solidarity has been achieved with radical unions, especially on Criticorum.

The UFM also has contacts among other alien revolutionaries and rights groups, the Shantor being the most prominent among them, but also certain Obun and Vorox factions. It is hard to infiltrate the UFM. Clan loyalty is everything to most Ukari, and a clan will often hide a known UFM member from the authorities. Despite centuries of attempts by authorities to breakdown clan units, the family is stronger than the state. The ability of UFM members to melt into the relative security of a clan's protection is amazing. Even Allied Clans will hide UFM members, for some agents come from the Allied Clans. Even these families are loathe to turn members over to human authorities for questioning, and perhaps torture and death.

The UFM usually uses code signs in the Ukari language, but at times they use symbols of their human conquerors. Two branches on Istakhr in Sarmakand often met under the jumpgate sign of the Universal Church inscribed on an abandoned warehouse. They even use cartoon characters as signs. The popular "Vootie Vorox" was often spray-painted onto designated meeting places. Vootie's well-known defiance of authority figures was adopted by Bava!. On Aylon and Kordeth, the UFM don't hide their meetings wherever the traditionalist clans meet in strength, but in Sunval they often gather on Regency Street, which houses many pubs catering to the planet's resident Ukari. Mutasih spy cameras have recorded meetings in the basement of the Flaile King pub, helping agents to break up a local ring.

In 4992, the UFM occupied the Ukari Council Building





on Byzantium Secundus, which has consultant (not embassy) status, and the Office of Sentient Affairs, the agency with which the regency dealt with all non-human, "civilized" aliens. They destroyed the records during a police standoff and "repossessed" many of the objects in the buildings. The emperor's seneschal negotiated when they threatened to blow up the buildings. She offered to consider their demands and allowed them to leave peacefully. Naturally, the Imperial Eye captured images of the departing leaders, including Crazy Eye, their most charismatic spokesman (a traditionalist from Aylon), who was later jailed for three years on Byzantium Secundus before receiving a pardon. Crazy Eye Vwontha is currently involved with FAR (Frontier for Alien Rights), which proves to FAR's critics that FAR and the UFM are indistinguishable arms of the same organization.

Agents

Votha Vordwed is the current UFM leader. He was recently smuggled off Aylon into the relative safety of Decados space. However, his lieutenants enjoy a great degree of freedom; the command structure of the UFM usually includes an autonomous leader on every planet on which it has representatives. On Kordeth, the UFM cell is undoubtedly lead by Gont Tholowyn, the leader of an outlawed clan situated deep in Kordeth's interior. His is more an alliance of outlawed clans, and he has an excellent intelligence network, utilizing shamans and priests to foretell possible courses of action. He does not take orders from Vordwed.

On Aylon, the matriarch of clan Vordwed, Bash'ir Vordwed, is clearly the traditionalist leader. She now has a tenuous alliance with the planet's governor, Baroness Nudara al-Malik, who has allowed for more traditionalist representation on the ruling council, thus diffusing a volatile situation. However, traditionalists belonging to the small clan Tontha are openly fighting al-Malik and Allied Clan forces over traditionalist lands on Mwerid T'lakil, north of the small city of Alfheim. The UFM underground is run by an agent known as Rillos (a mythological war-god in the Ukari pantheon), who is believed to travel incognito between the reservations.

In the Istakhr Market, the UFM is represented by an Ukari codenamed Sister Storm. Counterintelligence efforts have been unable to identify her. The UFM operates out of Samarkand and has some contact with the small reservations on this world. It is believed that Sister Storm is highly placed in Vordwed's trust, and operates more frequently with him than the Aylon UFM.

On Criticorum, the UFM is lead by an agent known as Shadow or Kadan, who has been photographed but whose real identity remains unknown. Their meeting place is in Tada Town, although the bar, Anikrunta's Eye, in the slightly mixed alien neighborhood of Jaran, is a sort of Ukari politi-

cal base watched by the Mutasih (the Ukari know this as well, and it has become a sort of joke among them).

On Byzantium Secundus, the UFM is lead by Ostiri Dweltmid, whose cover has been exposed. She is in hiding, wanted by the authorities. She was identified by Imperial Eye agents after breaking up a counterfeit ring; the leader of the money-laundering unit identified her in exchange for safe conduct off world. The authorities moved in to get her, but she slipped out just in time, apparently warned by an Ukari psychic that her safety was compromised.

Their most compromised agent, however, is their leader, Votha Vordwed, who was identified by a deep-cover Ukari mole who gave her life while revealing this information. Vordwed now operates out of the safety of Decados space, under that house's protection, although attempts to extradite him by the al-Malik and Imperial authorities have levied considerable pressure. They claim, for now, that Vordwed is a "political refugee." Vordwed's greatest crime was the kidnapping and execution of Countess Umari al-Malik, along with Church bombings on Tethys, albeit carried out by his faithful agents.

Vordwed's most dangerous operative, codenamed Grackle Fox, is an utterly ruthless killer, responsible for the Istakhr Market bombings in 4994.

Kraxi Priesthood

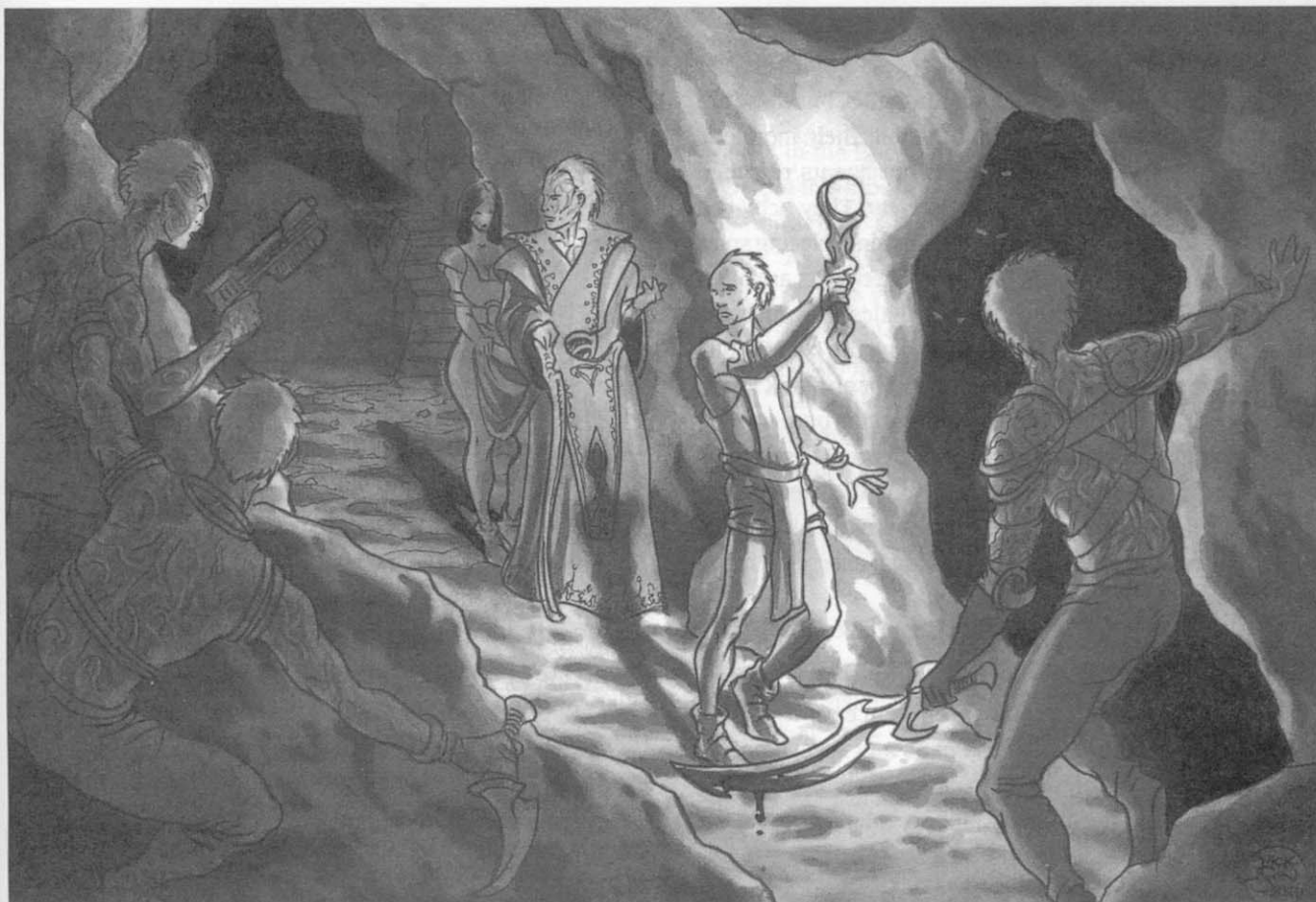
This priesthood trains for war, a philosophical method of realizing Ronga's truths. Ronga preached a vision of Fidwontha, or the "path beyond the gods," which leads to eventual release from the cycles of creation. Ronga's follower, Gisdrom of the Jewel Eye, a warrior, applied Ronga's Nine Noble Truths to the arena of combat, creating Kraxi, the path of the blade, and Jox Kai Von, a weaponless martial art.

Gisdrom's priests were allowed to practice with blades, and they later became the focal point of rebellion against the old Ukari aristocracy. Kraxi monasteries are still places of Ukari pride and defiance of human rule. Since the Ukari will not defile their own temples, they are also relatively safe places for harboring UFM agents.

On Kordeth, the Seven Sister monasteries lie below the earth. Utlan Tarr is the greatest, home to 2,000 warrior-monks. On Aylon, five such monasteries exist on the surface, the greatest being Rongatana, in Sajik.

Kraxi's greatest leader is Tolmek Koor, the High Priest on Kordeth. He is sympathetic to the UFM — indeed, Kraxi priests are that organization's best fighters, and have successfully defeated Allied Clan companies below the surface of Kordeth on three recent occasions. On Aylon, Kraxi priests come under greater scrutiny. The dedication and concentration powers of these priest-agents makes them the most dangerous element within the UFM. They sometimes seek





suicide missions for honor. Concessions have been given by al-Malik leaders to the Kraxi priesthood, which has paid off by lowering the local level of violence. However, the Aylon monasteries often provide Kordeth with leaders for UFM attacks, as well as places of refuge for fleeing cell members. The Allied Clans have attempted to negotiate with them, and seem to have bought a truce for a time. However, recent developments on Kordeth will surely end this truce.

Opposition Groups

Not all Ukari seek the same goals as Bava!, the UFM or Kraxi monks. There are certain groups opposed to their terrorist activities:

Navok — Allied Clan Spies

The Allied Clans are a misnomer, for even in their ranks clans Morwec speaks for the people, and among clans Borduk, Suderi, and va T'laka, there is constant political strife and jockeying for position. Nonetheless, the Allied Clans possess an intelligence agency called Navok (from the Ukari "death rattle," the sound of one's last air escaping the lungs at death). Navok spies on its enemies and provides information to the Allied Clans on its rebellious and sullen kinsmen.

Navok agents are ruthless. They destroyed the small subterranean village of Nordwillya in 4998 for suspicion of

harboring traditionalist outlaws. Their intelligence gathering efforts, however, are compromised by their sources; their ranks are often composed of outlaws and petty criminals or clanless wanderers who owe allegiance to no one. They essentially act as armed thugs, blackmailing and bribing people. Some traditionalists and Kraxi priests have infiltrated the organization, but have been unable to sever Navok ties to the human guilds or halt the capture of the hard-core traditionalist, Farath Gotek, in 5000.

Their roster of agents is not long, but their network of informers is vast. Many semi-legal operations on Kordeth have ties to Navok.

Navok sponsors a specially trained military unit, the Deepers, that engages in long-term spying and reconnaissance missions beneath the surface, deep inside enemy territory, where its agents work to disrupt enemy communications and spread terror. Deepers are all recruited from Duke Bordoc's small Allied Clan army and their morale is excellent. They had the honor of capturing Farath Gotek, head of Clan Gotek and longtime foe of the Allied Clans. The unit was created during the Emperor Wars to combat traditionalist sabotage of vital industries on Kordeth. They are presently the only loyal, reliable units able to hold back — for a time — a traditionalist revolt.



Aylon Allied Clans

On Aylon, the al-Malik loyalists possess a much greater intelligence gathering network than Kordeth's, but these are often spies loyal to various clans. Overall, their morale is higher and they are not armed thugs but agents recruited from the noblest elements in Ukari society. They achieved great success during the Traditionalist Uprising, placing spies deep in the enemies' councils. These spy networks are often drawn from secret brotherhoods or societies, of which the Ngol Brotherhood (agents for al-Malik loyalist clan Siddir) or the Dark Rivga Council (a spy network for al-Malik loyalist clan Dwon), are the most noted. Some agents once worked for the Mutasih or al-Malik military intelligence. These agents are often recruited at times to aid their Kordeth sister agency, Navok, but the Aylon loyalist's estimation of this brutal organization is rather low, with an occasional exception being made for the elite military Deepers.

Anikrunta's Eye

The Fifth Dark Legion, the all-Ukari al-Malik military regiment, possesses its own intelligence unit, called Anikrunta's Eye, composed of shamans and special operatives with military training. Anikrunta's Eye falls under the distant command of the al-Malik military intelligence. In the past, its agents successfully infiltrated Bava! and certain traditionalist clans. However, after these agents mustered out at the end of the Emperor Wars, many joined these revolutionary organizations, searching for meaning in the Known Worlds that no longer honored them.

The Nadakira

The Nadakira's priests, guards and small armed force possesses a small intelligence gathering service, dubbed "Dzwornga's Ear" by the Allied Clans. The Nadakira is traditionally the voice of all the Ur-Ukar and is the ultimate authority on religious questions. Despite many concessions given to him by the Allied Clans (such as the autonomy of Darugin, his capital), the Nadakira sides more with the traditionalists. The Allied Clans fear that intelligence is often passed between the Nadakira's agents and the traditionalist

rebels. They are correct.

The Nadakira is considered the Ukari's representative to their gods, responsible for the conduct of their race. Hence, his position is untouchable. This priest/emperor, while stripped of much of his temporal power, is the only true royalty the Ukari possess. The title has passed from eldest child to eldest child since Tlinkali the Moon Goddess, a descendant of Anikrunta, gave birth to Thollo, the First Nadakira, in legendary times on Velisimil. The Nadakira's goal is to again unite the Ukari into one nation.

Sanctuary is available in Darugin, and a number of rebels have escaped there, to the anger of the Allied Clans. They dare not touch the Nadakira openly, but hope to sway his advisors with bribes and concessions. A few actually give ear to them.

Children of Shurstrat

Reports of this group are sketchy, and there has been scant verification of its existence by UFM, the Mutasih and Imperial Eye reports. The Children of Shustrat is a joint Obun/Ukar revolutionary group that wishes to overthrow human rule and return the two races to their primordial unity from before the elder races divided them. In mythology, Shurstrat was the daughter of the Obun Paa Han Venel and Shinistraku, the Ukari daughter of Invincible Shinris, the greatest hero of their race. Legend has it that Shurstrat survived the slaying of her parents — recorded both in Obun and Ukar mythological writings — and was mother to many.

The Children of Shurstrat are rumored to have a base on an unknown world. They have been involved in terrorist bombings in the Istakhr Market, on Vesimil and on Kordeth, primarily targeting human businesses and government buildings. The first report of their existence came from the Obun Virta Virta Han Loaj and the Ukar visionary Dyn'dran Oed Nata in 4891, when the two notable representatives spoke on Criticorum. The movement seemed to start on Velisimil with a desire among some Obun — tired of their secondary status — to unite with the Ukari and usher in an age of glory for the reunited races.

Guild Mercurian

History

Any dossier on Guild Mercurian must, of necessity, be less than comprehensive, due to their low socioeconomic profile and the wide variety of their activities. The guild's association with the Merchant League is confusing; it seems at times to be a recognized faction that pays minimal dues and exercises voting privileges (although rarely, and usually in an extravagantly wasteful manner). However, at other times, League deans repudiate Guild Mercurian's very existence, insisting that the guild is merely a joke. Careful study of these periods of quiet acceptance and vehement denial seems to show that Guild Mercurian is allowed an official existence only when its pranks do not cause League leaders undue embarrassment or monetary trouble — or when the deans are blackmailed by Mercurian dirty tricks into recognizing its charter.

Obscure records on Leagueheim show that Guild Mercurian's charter does exist, and that the guild is classified by the League as "regional independent executors," like the Purgers or Wranglers. However, their cells of intensely localized activity seem to have little legitimate contact with Leagueheim. (The charter is coy as to just what "business" Guild Mercurian is independently executing....)

In person, Mercurians tend to be idiosyncratic in the extreme, with a general contempt for social conventions — except when it serves their purposes to blend in with the world. Standing in the community varies widely, so that any given local Mercurian may act openly as an eccentric philanthropist, work in secret as a crime lord, or simply waste away as a worthless layabout. Their lifestyles and outlooks are correspondingly diverse, but some common traits may be gleaned. All members of the guild are conversant in an apocryphal mythos which dates back to the Second Republic, if not earlier. The chief proselytizer of this pseudo-mystical hodgepodge was the Republic's own self-styled "Antipoet Illaureate" Ymli d'Amheurst, whose pirate broadcast overrode the 3984 inaugural ceremony for the QUEUEX4000 — the think machine responsible for the collapse of the Republican welfare state:

"Us am the culture-bringer, the fool whose fall warns the tribe of the pit!

"In the Age of Chaos, we thronged the mount where the Prophet Zarathud proclaimed the Five Commandments,

"In the Era of Discord, we listened in silence as Sri Syadasti spoke of the futility of speech,

"In the Aeon of Confusion, we laughed as Saint Gulik was stoned before the crowds,

"In the Epoch of Bureaucracy, we pile our bodies before this bloody great grayfaced steamroller you see behind me,

"As if our flesh could jam its gears, bind up its axle, clog its valves... Come on, people!

"Is this really what you signed on for? One law for the lion and the lamb is bullshit!

"Let's give our children an Aftermath they can grow in dronf!

"Seize the day, the millennium, the nanosecond! Take control of your own density!

"Pull the string! PULL THE FURSHLUGGINER STRING!"

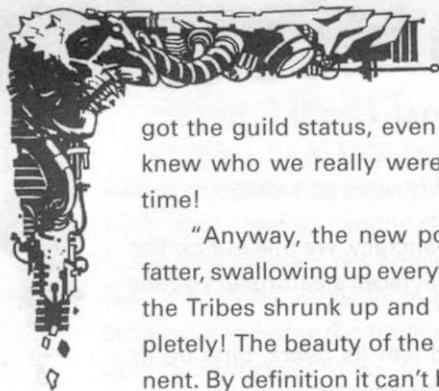
The following statement was secretly recorded by one of our own agents in the course of an operation resulting in the apprehension of the speaker, a Lord Eustaccio Buckley-McHorchak. The "Tribe" spoken of, described later in this dossier, is a loose coalition of willful non-participants from society, the sort of so-called "dropout culture" that plagued the later days of both Republics.

"You wanna know who we are, you gotta know the Tribe, how it comes about. Now, yer academy pedagogues, yer priests and such, they'll tell you the Tribe is a mad howling stampeding looting Gehenne on Urth, everyone cutting each others' throats, bathing in blood, rains of toads, Obun and Ukar screwing in the streets, whatever, spontaneously erupting from the work of demons or something. And I suppose it can be that, betimes.

"But the Tribe is so much more. You know how it started? After the Fall, when the whole Republic control apparatus was breaking up and all the families and companies got to scrambling to hold any ground they had, borders were thick, wide spaces where you could travel for days without smelling any law at all. As things settled down, spheres of influence spread to fill up the cracks, but that's the problem with centralized power, you see? They can't watch everyone all the time, they can't station guards on every street corner, a law is only in effect as long as most of the folk present agree to abide by it.

"So you got all these people excluded by the new regimes: the refugees, outcasts, beggars, lunatics, criminals, escaped serfs, pirates and freethinkers who just wanted out of civilization altogether. These Tribes were the only culture at that time who could communicate and trade with all these isolated kingdoms and holdings — we were the economy that made the Merchant League possible, for Zeb's sake! That's why we





got the guild status, even though the last dean who knew who we really were lived just after Vladimir's time!

"Anyway, the new powermongering states got fatter, swallowing up every place they could reach, and the Tribes shrunk up and disappeared. But not completely! The beauty of the Tribe is that it's not permanent. By definition it can't be. So, here and there, now and again, the Tribe keeps popping up, in all those empty places where the law doesn't bother patrolling, while the priest thinks you're home praying and the baron's back is turned, little chunks of freedom got carved out, enjoyed, and then abandoned before the noise wakes up the dogs. Because remember what I said about the law? It works both ways. If enough folk in control of their own space decide some laws or commandments or customs need to be repealed, then that's it, laddybuck — anything goes!

"And it only takes one fool to break the chain of restriction, one fool to burn the banknote, to spit on the gospel, to break the taboo and show everybody they won't instantly go up in flames if they try something new. And that's our job here. So if you want to help, go over to that handsome man in uniform over there and if you can keep him looking at you for the next 10 minutes or so, then I'll show you what I promise to be the funniest thing you ever saw in your life!"

Observations

Solid information regarding Guild Mercurian is difficult to come by, since those who have contact with the guild seldom come away with an objective opinion. Serfs and the lower classes sometimes seem to feel that their own causes are championed by the Mercurians, and may give false witness to protect them. Those of the upper class who have anything to do with the guild generally do so in pursuit of exotic, illegal and forbidden goods and services, and therefore cannot be counted upon. This compiler is indebted to one Trinxee leBousch, a valuable informant from Guild Courtesan, who offered the following testimony with a minimum of inducement:

"Okay, so you know all about the hull rats, and the brutes with the stinky-glands... Oh, and that chap what dropped the rubber Manitar? Well, I think he wanted to get nicked. So he could take credit for that one public-like. Because it was funny! You're laughing right now! So anyway, the only way to contact them if you don't know one personal is to go to one of them, whadyacall, free zones or whatever, right?

"The zones are all over if you know where to look. The ones I know best are private noble havens and concerts by certain minstrels at those Charioteer medi-

cine shows. Minstrels like Drej Wimball, Eathrow Dhol, Steele Icepan, that sort, draw a big enough audience that if you can get to the center of the crowd, in thick where the guards and the pilgrims can't get to quick, well, anything goes there. Folks pull their tunics off and rut on the dance floor, you can find grog, shriekers, Kurgan hashish, whatever you want, meet whoever you want, say anything at all 'cause who the lehan can hear a damn thing at those shows?

"Anyways, you could just ask around, but that just means they'll tail you for a while and decide whether they want to talk or not. To get right in, you gotta know how to ask, who to ask for. It all depends on what you wanna talk about. You wanna forge documents, you ask around for Al Smitty. You wanna kill someone's rep, ask for a facial smear. You wanna break in somewheres, ask for — Huh? Well, of course they hire out! Who doesn't? Oh, they don't take money. They have their own. What! What'd I say?"

Madame leBousch's last comment may be elucidated somewhat by the following extract from an internal report currently circulating among the Reeves' Guild concerning "Illegal Shadow Economies:"

Increasing number of apprehended criminals in possession of distinct counterfeit firebirds ("freebirds") and other coin. Privately minted with care to imitate finish and heft of real coin, but with design changes obvious upon close inspection: caricatured portraits, rewritten mottos, etc. Regarded as collector's items in some quarters, legal to possess if not passed as genuine by spending, donating, etc. Guild Mercurian offers exchange rate for real firebirds in "money fetish" casinos, racetracks, adult taverns and billiard halls, etc.; secretly growing networks of private businesses accept freebirds; counterfeit coinage circulating among freemen and underclasses. Reports of isolated communities, sympathetic to radical causes, using freebird currency almost exclusively. Possible source of Thieves' Guild legends warning against stealing from Mercurians?

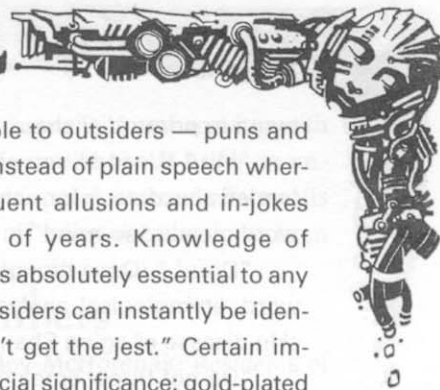
Known Schemes

The following notes were obtained from the Imperial Eye that appear to comprise a summary of previous investigations. The text is hastily scrawled using a simple shorthand cipher upon parchment bearing an Imperial letterhead.

Internal Structure

Cells, called clenches, are individualistic, noted for their unique character and style, both in person and in the focus of their pranks. Clenches tend to arise spontaneously, as if in response to any potential opportu-





nity for subversion, and then break up once sufficient damage has been done. Clenches rarely meet or join forces unless they are pursuing common goals or when members are incarcerated together. Poorer clenches often prove receptive to monetary inducement and may hire out as freelancers, but will never betray or compromise Guild Mercurian through such transactions.

Individual and group status is gained through an appreciation of the elegance, scale or innate humor of past pranks, as transmitted by normal channels of gossip. Natural leaders emerge from among the most clever and dynamic agents, but positions of hierarchic authority are never used, except as jest. (Nonsense honorifics are favored, such as "Head Honcho," "Big Kabloona," "Grand Poobah," "High Muckity-Muck" or "The Akond of Swat.") Some clenches may follow a "divine fool," usually some kind of philosophical revolutionary or merely a convincing madman, who may remain unaware of the clench's true nature and activities while filling their heads with demented rhetoric.

Codewords and Phrases

All internal correspondence of Guild Mercurian is written using letter-substitution ciphers; the key word for a text originating in any given star system is the name of that system's innermost planet. Mercurian

cant is nearly impenetrable to outsiders — puns and wordplay are employed instead of plain speech wherever possible, with frequent allusions and in-jokes going back thousands of years. Knowledge of Mercurian oral traditions is absolutely essential to any attempt at infiltration; outsiders can instantly be identified as those who "don't get the jest." Certain images and objects carry special significance: gold-plated fruit, pentagrams and other five-sided figures, antique smoking paraphernalia, oversized shoes, figures from children's entertainment and low culture. (Charioteers sympathetic to Guild Mercurian will obscure or deface one spoke in their wheel insignia by damaging, staining, etc. Possible significance as to which particular spoke is broken?) Certain useful catchphrases follow:

"Meddle not in the affairs of Eskatonics; it makes them soggy and hard to light."

"Eat the rich!"

"Convictions cause convicts."

"'Tis an ill wind that blows no minds."

"Hey, Rube!" (General warning cry; also used when greeting Engineers.)

"Be seeing you." (Common parting phrase, distinguished by salute in which speaker winks through circled thumb and forefinger.)

"Hail Eris! All Hail Discordia!" (Ancient pagan



hymn to primordial chaos.)

"Mu." (Used as non-sequitur punchline to an extended anecdote; informant from House Li Halan says word means "no-mind" in ancient Urthish dialect.)

"Dronf." (Once thought to be a coined nonsense word, etymological analysis has revealed it to be a skin disease of aging Shantor.)

"Do not throw smoking-butts in the midden, for they are subtle and quick to anger."

Monadic Tribalism

This lifestyle (for lack of a better term) is widely espoused by the Vagabonds' Guild and is currently spreading among the Children of Zuran. Characterized by their strong ethical preoccupations with individual and group autonomy, interdependence and responsibility, "monads" treat all as equals — escaped slaves or serfs, ruined nobles, aliens and even non-sentients (their motto: "One organism, one vote!"). They strive to live free from social constraint, some by retreating into hermitages, others by constant migration, or by living as beggars, street crazies or village idiots.

Note that monadic tribes do not consider themselves to be any sort of permanent institution, instead viewing their gatherings as a temporary but recurrent social phenomenon in which spiritual pressures resulting from authoritarian control may be released. This phenomenon was known to previous ages: in the earliest days of the First Republic it was called the "Temporary Autonomous Zone" or "Interzone"; the Diasporan mystic Hakim Elkhizr-Bey referred to his debauches as the "Momentary Mosque." Irresponsibly permissive Second Republicans even tried to cultivate this anarchy with their "Elemental Emancipation Environments."

Monads always help travelers in distress, share all food and resources equally with everyone present in their company and will invariably take the side of the underclasses against state, Church or business. Through Guild Mercurian, monadic tribes may work for passage or board with the Charioteer and Muster guilds, and they often serve as couriers for Scravers and others.

Speculative Extortion

Multiple blackmail threats are delivered, via different untraceable routes, to a single individual, household or organization. Then, the victim's responses are evaluated to determine which threats actually contained some truth, and to what degree. Extortive charges may range from the highly probable ("What noble doth not conspire? What priest doth not covet? What guildsman doth not skim a bit off the top now and then?" — Dame Kunoichi Li Halan) and the

strongly suspected to the absurd and physically impossible.

Responses can be gauged by such variables as the victim's monetary compliance (revenue which immediately disappears into some black market economy), emotional intensity, the number and type of other parties called in, or denial or even outright confession. While money is of course preferred, speculative extortionists receive special acclaim if they can provoke their target into making a public confession for some as-yet-undiscovered wrongdoing.

Character Assassins

Also called a "facial smear," character assassination is nothing more than the cold-blooded destruction of a target's reputation, achieved through the dissemination of rumor, manufactured evidence, arranged circumstance and carefully orchestrated public humiliation. Targets may be lured into compromising situations; libelous gossip spread among colleagues and acquaintances; poison poured into the ears of friends and family. Promoters and Wordwright Guild authors are frequently employed as pawns. Character assassination can also facilitate actual assassination, as targets are attacked by misguided enemies for false injuries, or take their own lives out of confusion and shame. ("What man wishes to outlive his own name?" — *Omega Gospels*, Maya's Song, verse 17)

Clay Faces

Clay Faces are professional impersonators skilled in quick-change disguise techniques, whether actors in godless Republican morph suits or Changed metonyms. They are deployed for character assassinations, deep infiltrations, seductions and entrapments, grand fraud, setting alibis, and much more. Members traditionally carry at least one priest costume at all times. Most Clay Face clenches are simply composed of Masque guild specialists whose appearances are altered by allied Apothecary cosmetic surgeons. Other clenches may harbor Changed refugees, replace healthy flesh with unnecessary cybernetics or even give themselves over to some manner of Symbiot infestation.

Limit-Testing Department

Deep inside the labyrinthine bureaucratic hierarchy of the Supreme Order of Engineers lurks a tiny division called the Department of Limit-Testing, which seems to receive little or no funding and so relies upon the Mercurian/Tribal network for intelligence, communication and transport. The Supreme Order grants this department license to inspect, analyze and evaluate every product the guild produces — even long after the product has been sold (a right specified in the

ultrafine print of all Supreme Order sales contracts.) Obsessively devoted to an ancient Republican regulatory code intended for policing manufacturing corporations, the department subjects its chosen products to extremes of wear and tear, overuse, misuse, weathering, shock and deliberate sabotage, carefully marking when breakage and functional failure occur. As long as the department does not cause death or injury to innocents in the course of its operations, it receives support from the Temple Avesti and other conservative anti-technologist factions in the Church.

Veracity Warning!

No sooner was the preceding data transcribed by this office than it was discovered that the entire file may be a deliberate forgery. (Is this surprising? Who the hell writes field reports with quotations from the Omega Gospels and obscure Li Halan drawing-room opera?) Close examination of the parchment's microscopic watermark, which should normally depict the profile of Vladimir Alecto under a scrolled banner bearing the Latin motto of the Empire, instead shows the grinning face of a square-jawed human male with a distinctly pre-Diasporan hairstyle and an antique tobacco-pipe clenched in his teeth; the banner reads "Frig 'em if they can't take a jest!" The channels whereby these documents were procured must be thoroughly scrutinized; meanwhile all intelligence contained therein should be disregarded as deliberate misinformation.

Known Agents

The following profiles were assembled from the bulletins and memoranda of various law enforcement agencies and intelligence organizations:

- **Consul Coyland Scharpe:** After serving as a diplomatic mediator during the Emperor Wars, this son of a distinguished line of Reeves became that guild's most successful advocate-at-large ever, specializing in radical egalitarian pro bono work for peasant causes, alien rights, and curbing the excesses of the Inquisition. Scharpe's travels before and after the wars correlate closely with the formation of known Monadic Tribes in the regions he visited, and most advocates and advisors of Guild Mercurian seem to have been trained by Scharpe or his associates.

- **"Tiny Doctor Tym":** Impeccable credentials from the Oubliette and Apothecaries' Guild furnish this eccentric physick with a rich clientele who demand discretion. Doctor Tym, whose real name is unknown at present, is believed to have access to a hidden Second Republic psychopharmacology laboratory. An expert on psychic powers, he was once linked to the Favyana but recent reports suggest that he has since been declared anathema by them. In person, he appears to be a naturally shriveled and bent nonagenarian who walks slowly with a cane, but surveillance holos from the

wreck of the Sky Queen IV show the doctor moving with astounding agility and speed; possibly he is using an unknown longevity treatment with purely internal effects. His movements over the course of many decades have been linked to sites of covert shrieker dosings.

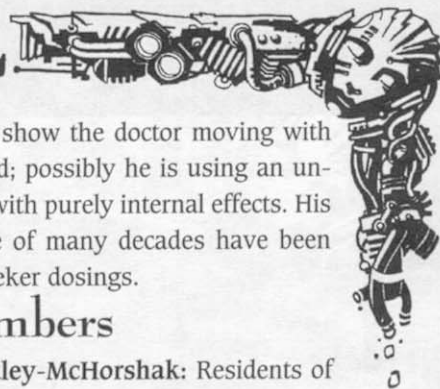
Revealed Members

- **Lord Eustaccio Buckley-McHorshak:** Residents of the Imperial throne world will certainly recall the incident which occasioned this public dispatch from Guild Herald:

6 April 4997, Byzantium Secundus — A stray comet replete with gaseous tail and rainbow corona entered the system over a week ago, alerting the outer planets as it accelerated toward the capitol world of the empire. Paced closely by fearless space patrols, it orbited Byzantium Secundus in a gently decreasing spiral for three days, causing mounting panic before finally entering the outermost atmosphere directly above the Imperial City last night. Whereupon, this "comet" burst apart into a swarm of guided mini-jets trailing smoke to spell "Lord Buckley's Flying Circus" (along with an elaborate array of crudely rendered images and names of top acts) across the skies of our northern hemisphere. The Flying Circus has been allowed to proceed with its opening due to public demand, but Lord Buckley has been arrested and forced to surrender the artificial comet (a device of the godless Second Republic) to the custody of the empire.

"Lord Buckley" turned out to be an escaped slave named Eustaccio McHorshak who had joined with the Carnivalers and eventually inherited the Buckley "title" by earning the trust of the Flying Circus's previous master, apparently an aging retired pirate. When told the penalties that both Church and secular law demanded for causing an entire planet to panic, McHorshak suddenly exhibited a demonstrative enthusiasm at the prospect of becoming one of our double agents. Moreover, he swore to put the considerable talents and resources of the Flying Circus at our disposal, supplying us in the process with the following very promising new pool of operatives...

- **Robin, Barry, J'nette, Otto, Naomi, LaSheequa, Nibnib, Brucilla, Mo, Moe, Shamsuddin, Jaurelle, Stig and Nancy-Alice, a.k.a. The Doppel Gang:** Apprehended last year, the mimic troupe calling itself the Doppel Gang is a cell of professional impostors ("Clay Faces") formerly in the pay of Guild Mercurian. Composed of over a dozen men and women of varying ages and body types, the group can produce a perfect impersonation of anyone — given proper preparation. Since their arrest, the Doppel Gang has shown a healthy interest in working for purely monetary incentive after being subjected to severe ideological re-education. It is believed that the majority of Guild Mercurian is currently unaware of the Doppel Gang's change of allegiance, although this information may have been leaked recently.







Revolutionaries: Politics Threats to the Throne and Its Interests

Herein we present the most difficult organizations to effectively deal with, for they are peopled by either fanatics or ideologues beyond the pale of reason. Even those whose goals may seem similar to the Phoenix Throne's must be distrusted, for they operate with no master but themselves. All those presented here deal, in some manner, with threats to the throne or its interests. They either wish to overthrow the current rule or modify it in their own image, regardless of the desires of the Emperor. Whether it be a conspiracy to spoil the careful distribution of wealth or to poison others' minds with dissent, each organization here should be watched and, where possible, dissuaded from its task. Barring this, they should be rooted out and their members executed for sedition and treason.

Some are not irredeemable. They may even play into the hands of the throne now and then, as long as they can be made to comply to the Emperor's agendas rather than their own. Indeed, your father has a certain fondness for the agenda put forth by FAR, but he abhors their methods. We must trust to his wisdom in how best to push this ideal, and rely not on the forceful urgings of FAR's leadership. The very existence of an independent revolutionary group with

organized leadership paints it as a potential wild card.

Certain of these revolutionary organizations border on heresy, especially one as strange as the Oneirokritikos. I debated even including its dossier here, but recent intelligence supports its veracity. This group presents more of a risk to the Emperor's governance than to the Church's orthodox rule; hence, its members are best dealt with by Imperial means rather than Inquisitorial, although we should not fear to use the synod as a tool against them. However, once unleashed, the Inquisition is most difficult to restrain. Use it as a last resort.

There are, of course, numerous other revolutionary groups not included here. They did not merit attention at this time, or are considered too local and diffuse to be of Imperial interest. These groups are also the hardest to monitor, for their memberships constantly change. Following the mercurial ups and downs of leadership, a group may go into hibernation for a time or even cease to exist — or may become a greater danger than before imagined. Do not underestimate the power of a charismatic leader to gather others under his wing with even the most far-fetched of ideologies.



FAR (Frontier for Alien Rights)

The Frontier for Alien Rights (FAR) is the popular name for a political movement dedicated to granting non-human sentient races equality under Known Worlds law. FAR's very existence threatens the status quo, for the non-human races of the Known Worlds live under secondary status as conquered peoples or "barely civilized" savages, led to the light of progress and the Pancreator only by humanity's kindness.

History

During the Second Republic many of the alien races theoretically had equal rights under the law. The Universal Party, a political coalition that brought many progressive reforms throughout the 3700's, advanced these laws. The Ukari received voting status in the Republican senate, as did the Obun, Shantor and certain other races. Even the Vorox, watched from Li Halan space, were allowed representation. The Mahayanist faction of the Universalist Church accepted alien rights, as did even some in the Hinayanists, although the latter tended towards the conservative view that a form of gradual "reflectionism" would best civilize the non-human races.

In the latter years of the Second Republic, human conservatives and royalists criticized the equality under the law of so many races and stressed the differences and traditional biases against the non-human races, recommending that they were better served on a local level. This was a tool to put alien populations directly under the jurisdiction of local planetary rulers. Yet, the loyalty of many aliens to the Second Republic was fierce. The Ukari units of the Republican military were some of the Republic's greatest defenders. Given a stake in the system, the Ur-Ukar, along with many other races, fought to defend it. Even after the defeat of the Second Republic, cells of alien rights groups continued — the Ur-Ukar still actively participated in the myth of the Second Republic until their last elected governor was removed in the 4400's by the Merchant League.

The Ur-Obun faced their own problems in the post-Republican era. The Voavenlohjun priest Eokesmen ma Dohlenni stirred up his people on Criticorum with *The Way of Liberation*, a book calling on Obun pride as the eldest children of the gods to resurrect their ancient heritage and throw off human shackles. The Church did not take kindly to his preaching, and violence flared when it sent troops into the Acheon Obun ghetto to find the hidden priest. Across the planet, a murderous pogrom waged. At its end, a half million Obun lay dead. The Criticorum records downplay the number of the slain; the Velisimil records show otherwise. Most planetary historians ignore this sad chapter of history.

By 4500, there were few alien rights defenders among humans — the cultural level of most worlds had greatly diminished. Only around the universities and alien slums of the Imperial City and Acheon did any movement advocate treating alien races as anything better than second-class citizens. On Criticorum, the movement was part of the Neo-Republican philosophy which attempted to revive the ancient Republican codes on the al-Malik worlds, and actually met with some success by pursuing appeals to the "authority of the ancestors" and the "traditional rights of all." On Byzantium Secundus, the movement was part of a broader attempt to revive the Republican senate, fueled by the study of the Second Republic legal philosopher Nakamura's works, most notably *The Ethical Evolution*, treated as the work of one of humanity's twelve noble sages. These movements met with local success; the Republican Codes were revived on Criticorum and the Nakamura revival influenced the neo-ethicist movement in the Church and the universities.

The modern alien rights movement began as a result of Known Worlds alien activity on two occasions. The first was the Symbiot invasion. Humanity learned that cooperation with its resident aliens was better than the resentment — or eventual Symbiot collaboration — of a hostile underclass waiting for the day of liberation. At first, however, the Symbiot Wars created a bout of xenophobia (the slaying of Dyn'dran Oed Nata by the regency) before cooler and wiser heads prevailed. The second instance illustrating a reawakening of alien rights was the founding of the Parliament of Speakers by Dyn'dran Oed Nata, the Ukar holy peacemaker. Representatives of the Ukari, Oro'ym, Vorox, Shantor, Gannok, Hironem, Etyri and humanity met in a revolutionary parliament on Criticorum. Supported by some of the local al-Malik, the Parliament was forced to close after two years of combined Church and regency pressure. But the seeds had been planted: The races could work together as equals. The utopian message of the Parliament's dream beckoned to many idealists across the Known Worlds.

The Ethical Alien Society formed in 4917 as a response to the Parliament. Started by Duchess Penelope Hawkwood, its aim was to improve the lot of Known World alien rights through legislation and education. The Ethical Alien Society rather resembled the Known Worlds power structure: Enlightened nobles ran the organization, with upper-class freeman or guildsmen composing the local leadership. The EAS had an impact in Hawkwood, League, Church and al-Malik space (the Hawkwoods were known for their superior treatment of aliens), but made little headway on Decados, Li Halan or Hazat worlds. The EAS paved the way for gains in the Alien Rights Movements of the 4940-50s, when the organi-

zation led a boycott of certain League goods until Ukari-Shantor mining conditions were improved. Their successes, however, were largely due to social affiliations. The noble leadership of the EAS had connections, usually familial, to the reigning princes, and could use their influence for ethical ends. While aliens were admitted into the EAS, none assumed leadership roles beyond the post of General Secretary, with an Obun traditionally filling that role.

During a serious Shantor slave revolt on Aylon during the 4960s, the leadership of the EAS split. A radical faction, desiring to help the aliens on the ground level, followed Sorhab "Star Speaker" Moshad. This group lent tactical, supply and legal support to the Shantor on a level the EAS couldn't or wouldn't approve. Hence, FAR — the Frontier for Alien Rights — was born. This radical splinter group grew during the turmoil of the Emperor Wars, when much of the EAS leadership split or were separated by the wars. Some joined FAR, others remained loyal to then-EAS leader Countess Fatima al-Malik.

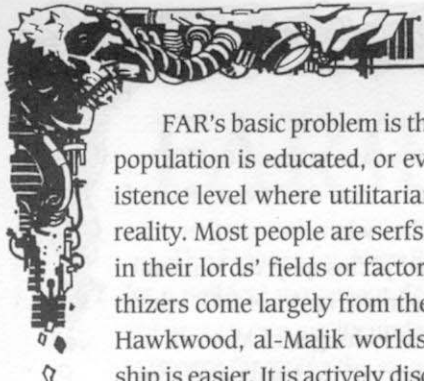
FAR's gains impressed even the revolutionary Ukari Freedom Movement. The Shantor were able to negotiate with the al-Malik, the Oro'ym's underwater lands and spawning grounds were declared off-limit to the guilds on Madoc, and the Merchant League officially declared the holy Ukari Nadakira, and his palace, off-limits to their authority (although, by tradition, it had honored him anyway, to stave

off an uprising).

Presently, FAR is led by Domina "Many Scars" Corduvan, the daughter of early FAR leader Tara Corduvan. Raised mainly by a Criticorum Ukari clan when her mother was imprisoned, Domina later studied philosophy on Velisimil. Returning to Criticorum, she rose in the ranks of FAR when the leadership council resigned over charges of Mutasih infiltration. Corduvan has proven herself in debate and combat (she is trained in Ukari Kraxi techniques). Departing from earlier FAR leaders, she has vowed to take FAR to the Patriarch, realizing that the Church holds the key to alien rights. Because of this, she has softened some of FAR's earlier, harsh anti-Church rhetoric.

Domina's "12 Points" are becoming universally known across the Known Worlds; every alien has heard of them, and even many human serfs have caught wind of some of their implications. Corduvan is a propagandist of the first rank, and her charisma has even swayed Criticorum's highly independent Archbishop Gampopa. FAR is represented in the Acheon Congress, and has official observer status (below ambassador level) on Byzantium Secundus. On many worlds, the group is still illegal, but members secretly meet under "friendship societies" and other club names. There have been rumors about the emperor's interest in promoting parts of FAR's agenda; the stumbling block, and the key to people's minds, remains the Universal Church.





FAR's basic problem is that so little of the Known Worlds population is educated, or even literate, and lives on an existence level where utilitarian idealism does not mesh with reality. Most people are serfs or low-class freemen, laboring in their lords' fields or factories. FAR's recruits and sympathizers come largely from the cities and universities. On the Hawkwood, al-Malik worlds and League worlds, membership is easier. It is actively discouraged on the Li Halan worlds (who, nonetheless, allow some EAS representation), and is rarely present on the Hazat or Decados worlds. Ironically, the Church worlds are somewhat open to recruits. Many Mahayanist, Amalthean and Eskatonic priests on Urth, Artemis and Pentateuch are members or sympathizers — a fact that worries the Church's Hinayanist leadership.

Gaining the ear of the Patriarch has been a major goal of FAR. Indeed, the Hinayanists themselves hold to the Doctrine of the Ethical Alien, and the educated Church leadership is not without some sympathy for alien rights. Overall, however, they hold the noble-led and more moderate EAS views as to how such rights might be accomplished: gradually, so as not to disrupt the fabric of Known World society by civil unrest. The Hinayanist leadership is aware, and partially beholden to, the peasant-serf prejudices and social codes which infuse the current state of Zebulon's Church.

Archbishop Mezenzikis of Midian wrote, in his recent *Codex Alienesque*: "The Mother Church must, as far as alien rights are concerned, steer a slow but certain course, avoiding rattling the social convictions and prejudices of the great multitudes of believers without slow education and steps, while maintaining the philosophical and ethical high-ground. Zebulon desired all sentients to speak on equal terms as children of one Pancreator."

Yet, some agree more with Bishop Pantaglorus of Aragon, who wrote: "Zebulon the Prophet came as a human, and indeed, while one of his disciples was an Obun, it is greatly to be marveled at that the Pancreator chose a human, and humanity, for the Word. We are to be an example to the other races. They are less reflective, and need our rule and guidance." The Church has a hierarchy for the reflectiveness of the races, with humans on the top, followed by the Obun, then, in declining order, Vorox, Ukari, Etyri, Gannock, Shantor, Hironem, Oro'ym, Ascorbites, and finally the Changed. The Church is undecided on the Vau, but it is sure that the Symbiots are completely non-reflective.

The Patriarch has twice met with FAR representatives. Hezekiah seems to recognize that the current times are a "crisis of faith," with many new seditious sects and movements sprouting up. Alien populations, if properly utilized, would possibly increase the Church's authority, powerbase and wealth in a time of declining membership. This has been discussed in the Church's highest levels. Hezekiah the Elder is old, but he has late in his Patriarchy attempted, with the

College of Ethicals, to meet the Church's challenges and steer a course for the future. Alien rights, while anathema to many, are increasingly seen as a possible source of renewed support for the Church — long advocated by the Mahayanist faction, they have made some serious inroads into the more conservative Hinayanist faction.

FAR's association with the UFM has not helped the organization. Indeed, many Hinayanists see it as nothing more than the political wing of a multitude of alien terrorist groups.

Known Operations

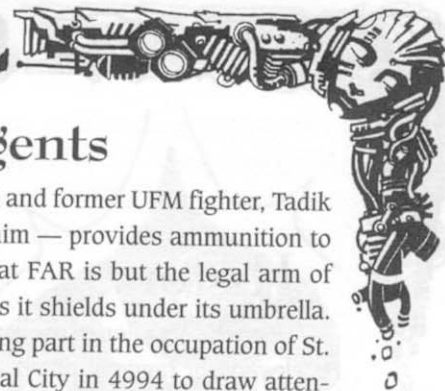
The Shantor, Whian Frees-the-Sun, working with the Obun philosopher Rame Voj Noorn, leads the most secretive part of FAR — setting up meetings with exploited aliens in off-limits areas (i.e. Shantor slave labor mines or inside human-run prisons) and gathering information about conditions. Their operatives are highly motivated, skilled individuals, and many humans work with them, gaining access to areas off-limits to non-humans, including the forbidden genesplicing "monster factories" on Rampart that the Li Halan shut down. These two run what is perhaps FAR's most extensive intelligence-gathering operation, and allied with FAR's legal arm, challenge or enforce ancient Second Republic codes to shut down the violations and abuses endured by Known World aliens.

The intelligence gathering branch of FAR, whose agents are often nicknamed "Meddlers," is comprised of dedicated agents willing to infiltrate hostile corporations, royal bases and guild territory to aid oppressed aliens and record conditions in these areas. These agents often work on pure idealism alone, with little or no pay. The Mutasih captured a human-Shantor Meddler team infiltrating a Shantor slave labor mine on southern Aylon. The two agents were shot. The Mutasih claimed the saboteurs were smuggling weapons to the Shantor labor force. Their associates, also captured, were put on trial in a highly publicized case. No less a personage than Duchess Crescentia Meih, Prince Flavius Li Halan's daughter, has asked for the release of these prisoners.

The Meddlers are Whian Frees-the-Sun's commandos. They possess high morale and often display a joking, devil-may-care manner. In all probability, the Meddlers do arm enslaved aliens at times, in addition to their intelligence gathering. The Mutasih have been somewhat adept at infiltrating their ranks. Some Meddlers seem to possess military backgrounds; at least 12 of the captured group served with the Hawkwood forces, and not a few were proud Ukari veterans of the Fifth Dark Legion.

FAR's legal arm is run by Yawthird Castiligo, a charismatic Reeve with a knack for swaying noble juries. Castiligo's team of Reeve-trained advocates is often quick to arrive on the scene, and comprises the complimentary intelligence branch to the Meddlers. They have been able to prolong the





trial of the captured Meddlers on Aylon by appealing to ancient Republican codes, all the while building up public support for the group's amnesty. "Castiligo's Raiders" are flexible in their approach to the law: "Do what works" is their motto. On Icon, they called upon one of Grand Duke Maxamino's reforms to save a suspect; their appeal touched Maxamino's vanity (especially upon hearing his own laws quoted eloquently back at him).

This legal team is often drawn from well-educated, idealistic nobles, guildsmembers and upper-class freemen students. Their use of the law has amazed their critics. Working on low salaries — but with a feverish belief in the righteousness of their cause — they have shut down numerous illegal sweat shops, drawing on their ability to generate attention and create media events, often pitting rival news agencies against each other for a scoop. Even with the heavily censored noble media organizations, they play upon vanity and contacts to achieved public relations victories. They have not always been successful. A Hazat judge on Urth once tossed them out of court for their rudeness in the case of an illegal alien sweatshop found in the northwest Eurasian landmass.

Known Agents

- **Sortat Talik:** An Ukari and former UFM fighter, Tadik — and other members like him — provides ammunition to critics in their contention that FAR is but the legal arm of the alien terrorist movements it shields under its umbrella. Talik admitted openly to taking part in the occupation of St. Maya's Church in the Imperial City in 4994 to draw attention to the plight of the traditionalists on Kordeth. He has fought with the loyalist clans and League mercenaries before — it is rumored he was even a political assassin. Eventually, Talik saw that FAR was a better path towards improving his people's rights, and is now quite active on Byzantium Secundus, spreading information, gathering funds and speaking out.

- **Father Rollo:** An Eskatonic priest, Father Rollo has emerged as a leader of FAR on the largely unsympathetic worlds of the Hazat, Decados and Li Halan, using his priestly duties to spread the word to royalists unreceptive to alien rights. Father Rollo often meets planetary representatives under the sign of the nine-sided enneagram, often inscribed on some meeting house in a poor section of a city where political strategy meetings are held.



Oneirokritikos

History

Upon the occasion of the coronation of Emperor Alexius Hawkwood, a raggedy derelict figure attempted to break through the line of the Phoenix Guard, crying that he had intelligence of a threat to the throne. When detained and interrogated, he babbled at length, and with varying degrees of coherence, regarding "a secret society that invites its members to ply the hidden corridors of history and, by subtle means revealed only to adepts, invent the world they choose to inhabit. Once ensnared, recruits soon find the spiritual foundations of their world ripped away, all certainty obliterated and all belief tainted by doubt. Most succumb to the madness, degenerating into suggestible golems commanded by those who emerge from the ordeal possessed by a dementia they mistake for enlightenment."

As proof, he presented the following documents, promising more to come. The first consists of extracts from an Inquisitorial transcript, with certain words and phrases underlined or circled and translated into various archaic dialects. The subject appears to be one Montag, accused of heresy; the date and location of the interrogation have been effaced.

History? How far back do you wish to go? Say then, that we have been with you since the first intelligible words were uttered, the first true symbol conceived and held in the mind's eye. In that vast yet invisible gap betwixt representation and reality, that is where you will find our genesis. Man is a creature capable of weaving the frayed ends of chaos surrounding him into a meaningful world, but cannot do so without binding his own soul into the tapestry. It falls therefore upon us, the unbound, we who have refused to entangle ourselves in the snares of Truth, who will not identify with the Real, to slash away the bonds with which humanity ties itself down.

When, you ask? Who and where... Any statement I could offer would be in essence a lie, though its facts may accord with the realm of the senses. Would you know that we were the first to whisper into the campfire of spirits and gods and wars in the heavens? That we have instigated every revolution and counterrevolution, that we teach the bitter subterfuges of peace and war, that our murmurs are the roar of the mob? That we are the callous indifference of your overlords, the cold disaffection of your children? Would you listen in the dead of night as we whisper of what can be, rather than what is? Would you let us heckle and play

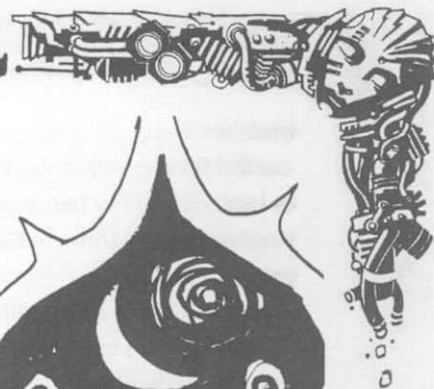
critic at the darkened theater of your dreams?

Names, dates, places — what would all this avail you? If your data is insufficient, make up whatever you need to prove our existence to your superiors and then watch as we vanish like mist! Pick a target at random, level your accusations, denounce him publicly, seize his property, interrogate his family, peers and retainers — you will find ample proof of any conspiracy you desire! Consider yourself: your own actions, your own history. Were your earliest memories gained by your own thirst for discovery, or manufactured by the culture that bore you? Are you your family, your university, your life-task? Are you who you say you are, or who you are told to be by others? Can you trust even your own body, your own senses, your tenuous thread of swiftly dimming recollection tracing the path that brings you upon this stage tonight? Are you even certain that you are listening to me right now, this very moment? Do you know, in your heart of hearts, beyond hint of doubt, that this room, this cold floor, these hard walls, the dank air, is anything other than shadowplay, a mere illusion...

The second document is an excerpt (here translated from the original Latin) from private correspondence by Nostracenus IV, Chartophylax of the Library of Horace from 4903 to 4997.

A paucity of data precludes the formulation of any definite history of the Oneirokritikos. It is known that they adhere to the writings of one Hakim Elkhizr-Bey, a rabble-raising mystic of the late Diaspora, believed to be cognate with al-Khidr of Kurgan lore. Many also hold to the canon of the early Diasporan Hwai Lo, and profess that their society was founded on the planet Nineveh, mentioned in the Omega Gospels but long since dismissed as a literary invention. The name Oneirokritikos, from the Homeric dialect of Old High Urthish meaning, literally, "Dream Critics," appears in different contexts throughout late Second Republic records, as a business consulting firm, a musical ensemble, a charitable organization, a band of outlawed activists, a guerilla theatre troupe and as applicant to the status of official religion under the Unity Congregation Act of 3967. A questionable news source of the period gives it as the one word repeated by Senator Craven during his institutionalization.

After the Fall, the refugees and renegades who came together to form the so-called "Monadic Tribes" spoke of the Dream Critics in awed whispers, even



while priests cited them amid long lists of proscribed heresies and nobles blamed them for subversion of law and order. In 4398 Dame Kunoichi Li Halan produced her epic *Nineveh* trilogy, an opera phantasiae rich in veiled allusions to dark family secrets and then-current interplanetary intrigues, wherein the Oneirokritikos are indirectly credited with being not only the true shadow government of the Known Worlds but the very architects of physical reality itself, playing at some cosmic game left unfinished by the jumpgate builders eons ago.

In subsequent centuries, many criminals and dissidents, when captured and interrogated, have confessed to being servants of the Dream Critics, or a group fitting their admittedly vague description. The sheer volume of such confessions, however, suggests that the criminal underclass had collectively come to use, as scapegoat, the name of a group whose exact nature — whose very existence, even — had never been clearly determined. Occasionally resurrected by covert groups of radical academics, the name had, by the time of the Emperor Wars, become somewhat of a literary joke, the Dream Critic a kind of second-rate Antinomist fit only to act as the impotent one-dimensional villain of children's entertainment. In the current postwar period, however, one hears the Oneirokritikos spoken of in tones much more grave, as the feuds of past generations are disinterred and flung across the negotiator's table, and voice is given to ancient fears.

Observations and Rumors

The Imperial Coronation interloper was collected by kinsmen, wealthy al-Malik who explained that he was chronically prone to such delusional outbursts and had recently fled the care of his Oubliette mind-physick. "The Marquis of Khazaristan was once a good man," they said, "until the horrors he witnessed in the Emperor Wars shattered his soul." Apologies were offered and accepted, and the matter was forgotten.

Independent research eventually unearthed a rare folio edition of "Heir Ascendant," prelude to *The Nineveh Cycle* by Dame Kunoichi Li Halan, printed in 4397 on Icon. Act I, scene ii, reads:

DuMoiselle velMonte: ...and how fare the affairs in the deep dark dungeon?

Sigismundella: Oh, gone are the torture chambers, milady, for the new young master of Carcosa is an idealist this week! With fat cronies to entertain, so it's out with the bands and brands, out with the racks and



wretches —

DuMoiselle velMonte: The garden did seem so still as I entered... Pray tell, voluble gnome, what fat cronies have of late come to Carcosa to have themselves entertained?

Sigismundella: Oh, milady. I could never say...

DuMoiselle velMonte: For fear of having your wagging tongue plucked from that lump of head, no doubt?

Sigismundella: My stars, not so, your ladyship! I never could say on the account that I know not! For they arrive under cover of darkness, all wrapped about in plaincloak, and meet only in tall veiled hoods of white silk; silent always, and moving not save as their ceremonies require, blindly, like those that walk about when asleep. All hidden and ever unknown are they, even unto each another! For none may know the face of another save for that which brought him in, or that which he himself brought in. And only the young heir who brought them all might know them all. A nation, he has proclaimed them, a nation without borders, ruled by a dynasty without date, settled upon a land without substance, says he.

DuMoiselle velMonte: Does he? With a blank parchment for constitution, gravel for coinage, and a span of silence for anthem, I'll daresay! This is the empty talk of the vapid dreamer! Less than that, it is the tilting frame, the wobbling pedestal, upon which the ephemeral dream is displayed... What wayward night-fancy inspires this nation of his?

Sigismundella: He says... he says that he dreams of us, milady.

DuMoiselle velMonte: Of...us? Of you and I?

Sigismundella: Aye, milady.

DuMoiselle velMonte: You and I. As we stand here speaking at this very moment.

Sigismundella: Oh, aye, your ladyship. He was very specific, he was, telling me how we should don these very roles, meet upon this very stage, forasmuch as to reveal, to this very audience here tonight, the Innermost Secret of All Secrets, that their lives are determined by events in a land that might never be discovered though they explore unto the veriest antipodes of Creation, and such like that there.

DuMoiselle velMonte: How quaint...

Known Schemes and Operations

Independent confirmation positively identified the interloper as one Marquis Utranto Khazari al-Malik, who served his house as an intelligence courier during the Emperor Wars. Subsequent investigation yielded little of note beyond the

undistinguished career of a royal-born errand boy. Inquiries directed toward Mutasih contacts were soon followed by the purging of a number of erased disks, magnetized tape and mechanically shredded papers which, when expertly reconstructed and decrypted, disclose the following journal-notes in the handwriting of the marquis. Please note that the disjointed style is copied verbatim from Marquis Utranto's own hand and does not reflect any failing or inefficiency on the part of our cryptographers or documental reconstructors.

Overview

Extremely tight cellular structure. Members usually only personally know their own recruiter and any they themselves recruit — faces are always hidden at convocations. Command hierarchy unclear — believed to be based on seniority or system of graduated initiation. Intercellular communication minimal — heavily compounded encryption — individual communication restricted by anonymity to immediate senior member. Convocations take place in secure, secluded locations — usually enclosed spaces like cellars or caves — access gained by several different routes. Parties arrive separately, already veiled or masked, moving in silence. Meetings conducted in silence also, except for obscure ceremonial intonations. Could their actual business be conducted through use of Psi? Must deploy dervishes — or perhaps an Avestite Penitent....

Poetic Terrorism

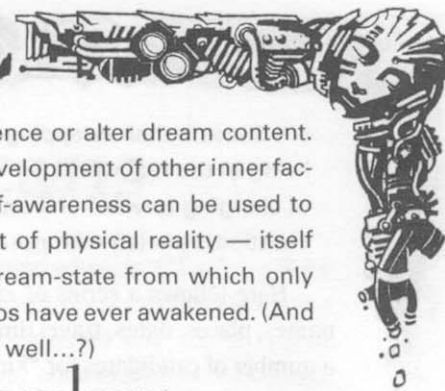
(Note: Also "poeterrorism" or "pterrorism.")

Majority of operations consist of anti-authoritarian "pranks" — much like Mercurian operations. (Could Mercurian agents be hired? Recruited?) Pterrorism is primarily directed against institutions deemed corrupt — seldom resulting in injury to civilians — damaging property only in minimal acts of critically precise sabotage. Manipulation of information media is most prevalent modus operandi — especially targeting of town criers and heralds guilds. Couriers waylaid, forged dispatches delivered to town criers. Internal communications of guilds such as Bureaucrats, Shills, Wordwrights — even Reeves — have been disrupted, diverted, subverted. False documents generate spurious scandal — minor malfunctions cause major operations to grind to a halt — the wrong rumor whispered in the right ear — another hairline fracture along society's foundation. Confused populace falls to ridiculing its betters — may become volatile, unreceptive to governance....

Jihadihahr

Branch of pterrorist operations specifically directed against the Universal Church (although pagans and other unbelievers' sects have complained of at-





tacks as well). Base techniques of sacrilege, blasphemy, heresy, schism, etc. used to misdirect authorities from more subtle attacks: spreading humanist, Republicanist, even occultist and other proscribed philosophies among general populace — encouraging those of little faith to continually question accepted doctrine and Church policy, especially in public. Replacing saint's relics and notable editions of scripture with fakes and forgeries, sometimes revealing the hoax in such a manner as to cause those in charge greatest amount of trouble. Goal appears to be gradual erosion of the foundation of the Universal Church as a sociopolitical entity — as prelude to ultimate deconstruction of all religious thought and spiritual teaching. Just how long has this operation been in effect? As a child I remember when the Omega Gospels of Sanctuary Aeon on Grail were discovered to have been forged. Gossip related that Saint Amalthea's pronouncement, "We are all God's children" (Amalthea IV 3:17), had been changed to "We are all gods, children!" And for centuries the underclasses of Acheon have laughingly noted how the knucklebone of Saint Ignatius — enshrined in a lucite pillar at the cathedral since Diasporan times — has a distinctly phallic shape....

Antilogism

Difficult to determine exact nature of this operation — goal would seem to be abolition of language itself! Based on work of Second Republic "neurolinguist" Countess Constencia Korzyb — wrote "Sentience must ultimately abandon the crutch of symbolic thought." Whatever that means. Believed most people unable to distinguish between words and real things/events that words represent — called the "consensory hallucination" — so must be "deprogrammed." Initiates speak only in dialect they call the "Key of Korzyb" (the Countess herself called it "Urthish Prime") with increasing restrictions to speech at each higher level: no verb "to be" (called the "'is' of identity"), no use of first or second person, active voice used exclusively... Highest order of practitioners maintain absolute silence — communicate only through underlings.

Oneirophany

Can only guess at secret innermost teaching — reports scant, unclear. Intense self-examination and deep meditative techniques involved — adherents may disappear from society for long periods. (Seclusion? Or some other reason? And is this voluntary?) Sleeping behavior studied closely — dreams recorded in journal upon waking. Cultivation of that which the ancients called "lucid" or self-aware dreaming —

awareness used to influence or alter dream content. This in turn stimulates development of other inner faculties until amplified self-awareness can be used to alter or influence content of physical reality — itself regarded as collective dream-state from which only fully realized Oneirokritikos have ever awakened. (And perhaps the Anunnaki as well...?)

Known Members

Research gave no clue as to the location of "Khazaristan" but it was learned that the marquis held a small estate south of Mostabul on Istakhr. There, unkept grounds encroach upon the remains of a sprawling pre-regency style villa, gutted by fire in the early days of the wars. Concealed beneath false floorboards in the north wing cellar was a brutehide case containing a journal-slate of Republican manufacture. Apparently a sort of diary of dreams or visions written in a more florid and stately version of Marquis Utranto's script, the journal also contains an encrypted parallel text of informal commentary. Although the slate's memory bank was damaged by heat, our expert think-machinist was able to recover the following double entry.

The King in Yellow and the Queen in Red

...On the Night of the Burning Moon, when all of Nineveh lays dreaming the next day into being, then do the courtiers of Castle Carcosa convene to negotiate the shape of their world. In the moments before all come to perfect agreement and accord, one note is struck upon the standing tubular bell. All immediately fall quiet and drop to their knees facing the main entrance. Then one note is sounded upon the hanging hyperbolic gong. This is the entrance of our Monarchs, the Lord and Lady of Dreams, they whose merest whims are the very foundation of our being. Their understanding is enormous and terrible, such that it leaks through the sutures of their skulls, such that it shines from their eyes in rays as sharp and penetrating as meson beams, such that it would shrivel the soul simply to look upon the heavy veils which shroud their countenances; wherefore do we press our eyes shut and press our hands over our ears and press our faces to the floor and cloak our selves all about, that we should not be blasted by greater wisdom than that for which we might be prepared...

(One may surmise, given the prohibition against seeing or hearing this "king," that his place in the ceremony is purely symbolic, perhaps even nonexistent, i.e., no actual person has physically entered the chamber at the time. However, by deft use of a pocket mirror I was able to steal a glimpse of this fabled figure and his consort, who appeared quite solid and human-



oid beneath their wrappings. These are real persons, living in the real world, so who could they be? Short of charging forward and unmasking them at the convocation, I am left with purely deductive methods...

Here follows a series of exhaustive tables, correlating names, places, dates, travel times and other data to produce a number of candidates for "king" and "queen." Other fragmentary entries reinforce the impression that the marquis attempted to infiltrate the Oneirokritikos himself, seemingly unaided. It cannot be determined from this journal-slate if the marquis ever learned the cult leader's identity; of the names under consideration, supposed scions of extinct houses predominate, in the company of Church and guild leaders of questionable political bent, alien rights activists, anti-regency activists, and suspected psychics and Antinomists.

Revealed Members

At this point in the investigation one cannot but wonder if this modern manifestation of the ancient Dream Critics might be nothing more than the elaborate self-delusion of a shell-shocked veteran from the ruined branch of a royal family, perhaps aggravated by a literary hoax several centuries old. The valuable attention of the Imperial spymaster should not be wasted on the ravings of a lunatic, one thinks, until the following bulletin was intercepted from the Inquisitorial Synod. While hardly constituting proof of Marquis

Utranto's fears, it clearly indicates the presence of a threat to the stability of the empire. Two points require comment. First, reports seem to conflict as to whether or not these volunteers are collaborating with the performer. Second, regarding the subject's unusual reputed ability — while such a thing is doubtful without major demonic aid, it may be safe to assume that he is a powerful psychic skilled in the casting of illusions.

Montag the Merciless

Notable of hidden rank in the Guild of the Masque, performing mainly on Criticorum and Decados worlds. Private performances of his "Theatre of Cruelty" are patronized by degenerate nobles and guild brats, noted in the subversive and licentious Criticorum Subterranean Free Press and Grafix as "scaring the piss out of mobsters' girlfriends for over three decades." Events include escape artistry, bondage and related perversions, torture and contortionism, culminating in a gory spectacle wherein "volunteers" from the audience are dismembered or mangled by various elaborate means, only to reappear unharmed at final curtain. Montag is rumored to detach his own limbs and direct them to act from a distance. Recently escaped from Inquisitorial custody; latest reports place Montag on Byzantium Secundus in the company of Makron, a known Antinomist.



Third Era Republicans

History

From "Hopes for a Third Era," a tract written by Benjamin Locke, a name used by numerous Third Era operatives, and annotated by Tiberius, thought to be the pen name of a member of the Hidden Fellowship.

According to various Church leaders, Third Era cells have existed since the Fall of the Second Republic, established by twisted politicians determined to reestablish their vile rule. These officials, linked to every crime from Antimony to murder to public indecency, became the bogeymen of the post-Fall years. The mere accusation that someone favored democracy could lead to arrest... and worse.

Lest anyone confuse us for some quasi-mystical secret society, we don't believe that any Third Era cells actually date back that far. They come into creation, do what good they can, and then disappear due to persecution or discretion. What has lasted since the Fall, however, is the burning desire for freedom — a torch that burns in millions of breasts. While we of the Third Era would like nothing more than to see this freedom become reality right now, we know that it will be a long and thankless process. Each cell contributes what it can, and attempts to prevent past cell's accomplishments from being undone.

While many of our activities have a militant bent, our primary function is to educate. While the Second Republic had many weaknesses, we can learn from its mistakes — and learn we must. The stars are dying, and no superstitious Church or tyrannical nobles can prevent this. They had their chance and have done nothing except line their own pockets at humanity's expense. Only a new republic, one that encourages every citizen to contribute to humanity's survival, can make an impact. Indeed, the Second Republic was humanity's best hope, but the greed of nobles and the Church's lust for power combined to destroy it. (We give little credence to those who say that Church fanatics actually work to encourage the fading suns, hoping to speed the process by which we all go to meet the Pancreator.)

Now the Third Era acts as best it can, and we do what we can to encourage democratic impulses. Be it something as minor as establishing a farm cooperative, or something as major as ensuring truly democratic elections for new Muster leaders, every action has a place.

Please keep this in mind when establishing a Third Era cell. Even the most insignificant action can have a powerful effect when combined with many others. Even if you feel that your contribution is ineffectual, rest assured that it will make itself felt. This principal shines through in the four stages of forming a cell — an action much like starting a farm.

1. Choose your fruit and plant your seeds.
2. Watch the weather and guard your crop.
3. Harvest and share the fruit.
4. Store seeds for the future.

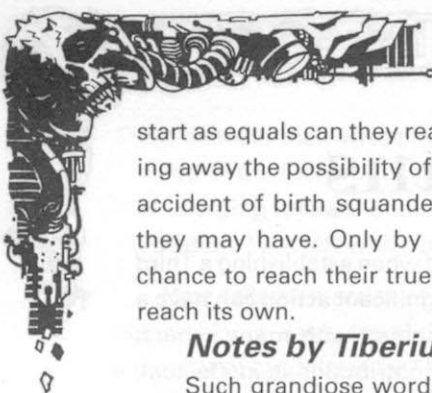
The first stage reminds us that no group can do everything. Focus on a specific action or goal, and do not spread yourself too thin. If your objective is to defend a free town from a Church-sponsored takeover, then do that and put less effort toward making the local Reeves guild conduct fair voting among its members. Establishing the Third Republic might prove to be too big a focus for one cell.

The second stage exhorts us to remember that anyone can be a traitor. Always have an escape route available. If you are caught promoting democracy, you will probably die. You will at least be tortured. If the worst happens, let them drag information out of you after a day of torture. Your enemies will torture you anyway, and you will eventually speak, so try to minimize the damage. Act *extremely* contrite for the rest of your days. You have done your part, and now it is up to the next generation.

The third stage reminds us to harvest and share our fruits. Trumpet your successes as loudly as possible. If your success can be undone, then hide the Third Era involvement, but still let everyone know about the good that has occurred. Success inspires more successes, and we must promote democracy in all ways.

The fourth stage reminds us that this promotion must continue long after you are gone. None of us will be around forever, and we probably will not see the Third Republic in our lifetimes. Nonetheless, we owe it to humanity to do whatever we can to ensure its survival, and no other endeavor can have a greater impact than the spread of democracy. No one knows for sure what it will take to reverse the fading of the suns, but whatever it takes will not occur in our rigid, stagnating feudal system. Only a society where everyone has the opportunity to make a mark will give humanity a chance. Remember that democracy means equality put into practice, and that only when people





start as equals can they reach their true potential. Taking away the possibility of bettering oneself due to an accident of birth squanders whatever natural ability they may have. Only by giving each individual the chance to reach their true potential can all humanity reach its own.

Notes by Tiberius

Such grandiose words are good for the philosopher, but we operate in a time of pressing needs. The Third Era may be correct that a new republic is the only way to one day save humanity, but people act in the here-and-now. Show them that they can make an extra firebird a year, and they won't care about the fading suns. As much as the idealists among us might despise these base desires, they drive many of our allies. While our leaders might call for equality, our foot soldiers could often care less, as long as they get their needs fulfilled. Those who call for political and civil democracy often find their greatest adherents among those who fervently reject economic democracy, and the pro-democracy groups have drawn a disproportionate share of their members from the merchant class. Reach out to whomever you can, and give them whatever promises they need. Remember, democracy is flexible, and we can argue about what kind of democracy to form when our chances begin to look better.

Observations

The pro-democracy groups foster perhaps the most disparate and diffused conspiracies I have seen. Even the Mercurians evidence more cohesiveness than do these insurgent groups. Third Era cells have the most tenuous of links to begin with, and each seems to have its own goals, motivations, and views on what democracy means. These cells range from Merchant Green, a coalition of Charioteers and Muster officers who want less noble and Church interference in their businesses, to the Liberty Collective, a coalition of farms on Aylon that preaches economic equality over all else.

In fact, the entire pro-democracy movement is split into three primary groups, with lesser organizations scattered around the Known Worlds. The three main groups have little contact with each other, yet they have many similarities. The best known is the Third Era, which has survived for hundreds of years despite epic persecution. This group has no formal initiation procedure, though some cells have their own. Instead, all one has to do to become a member is to consider oneself such. We have had no luck destroying this group — destroy a cell on Tethys one day, and the next a completely unrelated cell pops up on Pandemonium. Indeed, the Emperor has asked us to keep an especially close eye

out for Third Era agents. When we confirm that someone is a member of this organization, we turn his name over to the Emperor and continue surveillance. We do not act against them until so ordered.

Members of the Third Era tend to be careful, methodical and cagey. They do their best to conceal their activities, trying to hide them behind a façade of legitimacy. For instance, we believe that Baron Ezra Michel Hawkwood's downfall was the result of Third Era manipulations. You may remember that shortly after the Emperor Wars, the baron tried to revoke the city charter he had granted to Windling town on Delphi. He had promised the city greater autonomy in exchange for 100,000 firebirds during the war, but after the war he lobbied to have Church and noble courts declare the charter invalid and coerced. Windling mounted a vigorous defense, and the baron began finding his efforts blocked at every turn.

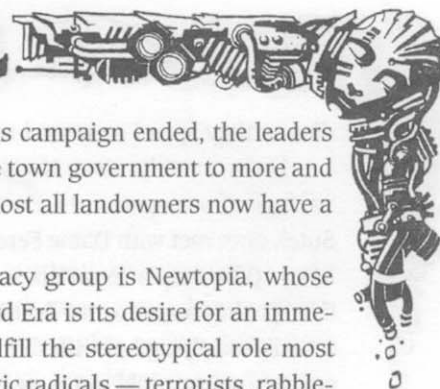
Guilds led the initial opposition, and as Ezra expected, the Charioteers ceased selling goods to him, and the Reeves led Windling's legal defense. However, he had not expected local Church officials to withdraw their support of his efforts. Bishop Carlo Albin, who had first encouraged Ezra in his actions, refused to even meet with the baron any more, and we believe someone presented the bishop with compromising holovids of himself... and a warning.

Then the baron met with several disasters in a row. His massive grain silos in his home fief of Anrich caught on fire one night, and local firefighting teams found that something had damaged the pipes leading to their water sources. Thousands of firebirds of grain disappeared in a single night, and the Reeves refused to pay insurance, claiming that the lack of water voided the insurance. Suspicious fires also struck two of the baron's secondary residences, gutting them both. Even more damaging was the whispering campaign that began in Hawkwood courts, raising doubts about his loyalty to the Emperor and implying that his treatment of Windling was just a first strike in an effort to bring all neighboring fiefs under his control.

Baron Ezra decided to use these incidents as an excuse to mobilize his troops against Windling, only to discover that this created more problems. His troop mobilization made his neighboring nobles even more nervous, and drew a fierce rebuke from nearby Veet. Bandits waylaid couriers sent to raise troops from various towns, and technical difficulties jammed his radio appeals for troops. Frustrated, Baron Ezra decided to attack Windling with only his core troops, only to discover that even these once-reliable troops had their doubts. Several units suddenly remembered promises that the baron had made during the Emperor Wars that he had never fulfilled.

Unit commanders met with the baron to discuss these past rewards, and rumors spread through the troops that





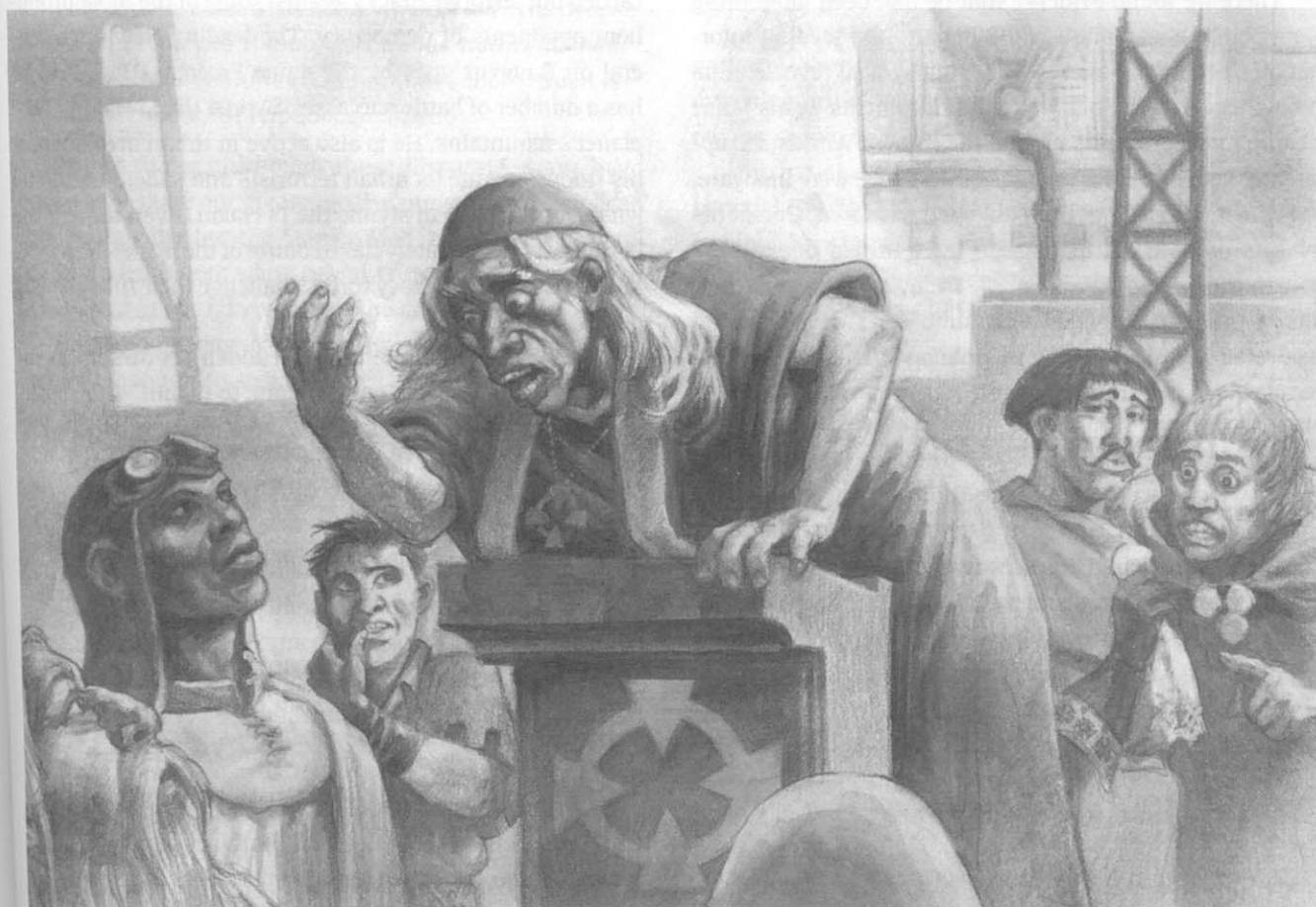
the baron planned to get as many killed in battle as possible so that he would not have to pay them. By the time the baron came to agreement with the commanders, the troops were ready to revolt. The baron returned to his castle, where he discovered that Bishop Albin had called for his excommunication on charges that his troops had destroyed a church on their way to Windling. Baroness Felia Hawkwood and Baronet Dover Hawkwood took advantage of this to seize a number of Ezra's outlying fiefs that they claimed his ancestors had stolen from their's. In the end, the baron had to sue for peace with all parties involved, and the various settlement fees forced him to sell off most of his lands and still left him near destitute. He has not attempted to move against Windling again, and I gather he is still trying to recruit allies to help him rebuild his lands.

While much of this would seem to be the work of Windling or the baron's political enemies, our operatives have found evidence of Third Era involvement. We have traced several suspected republican sympathizers to Windling at that time, and it would appear that these few experienced operatives made all the difference in this campaign. The baron had no reason to expect anyone outside of Windling to move against him, and their actions caught him unprepared. We believe they took an active role with the fires (especially one who went by the code name Liberty Torch), and began the various whispering campaigns against the baron.

Whatever the case, since this campaign ended, the leaders of Windling have opened the town government to more and more of its citizens, and almost all landowners now have a say in the town council.

The second pro-democracy group is Newtopia, whose primary difference from Third Era is its desire for an immediate republic. Its agents fulfill the stereotypical role most people assign to all democratic radicals — terrorists, rabble-rousers and misguided zealots. Rampart is the only planet where Newtopia followers outnumber Third Era agents, for that is the planet where the battle is most heated. If someone is crazy enough to walk into the middle of the Fu Street agora on Midian and begin preaching revolution, he is probably a member of Newtopia. We have had more success penetrating Newtopia than any other republican organization, for it attracts the most hotheaded and careless revolutionaries.

Our agents have a standing order to contact any suspected republican sympathizers on behalf of Newtopia. If that contact succeeds, then we use these pawns as we do any such figure. We try to neutralize their effectiveness, direct them against our own opponents, or turn them over to the authorities. Newtopia radicals prove especially easy to neutralize, and this rarely involves death. In most cases, all we have to do is get them debating with other similar radicals, and any interest in taking direct actions withers and



dies as they spend more and more time arguing.

Unfortunately, some Newtopia radicals have taken advantage of our operatives. For instance, one of our men on Sutek once met with Dame Ferona al-Malik, who claimed to have 10 Newtopia terrorists under her control. Our operative, posing as an arms dealer, gained her confidence by actually supplying her with some weapons and weapon trainers. Before we could move against her, she used the weapons and trainers in an attack on one of Countess Dereeda Anna Castenda de Bravo's police stations. She and the weapons then disappeared (we believe to Kordeth), where we have not been able to find her.

The Hidden Fellowship is the last of the major democratic organizations, but its existence is still subject to debate. Some people have theorized that the existence of this high-level organization is merely Third Era propaganda designed to make new recruits believe that they have friends in high places. While we have no hard evidence that the Hidden Fellowship exists, we have uncovered individuals who could have been members. We discovered amazing surveillance devices when we raided Engragio Laubser, an information specialist on Grail. We had traced an unauthorized landing on the planet to people who visited him. Believing them to be from a lost world, we raided his home. All his visitors managed to escape, and we had to kill him to keep him from destroying his secret office.

There we found evidence that he had been monitoring events on Pandemonium and Rampart, and feeding information to Newtopia agents. His autopsy also revealed him to be a lost worlder, but we found documents at his home relating to major events around the Known Worlds. He apparently had high-level contacts of which we were unaware, and which we have not been able to track down. One of his contacts that we did manage to trace turned out to be a woman thought to have died on Cadavus during the Emperor Wars. Decados agents captured her shortly after we uncovered her identity, but she managed to escape from a Decados high-security prison and has not been seen since.

Operations and Operatives

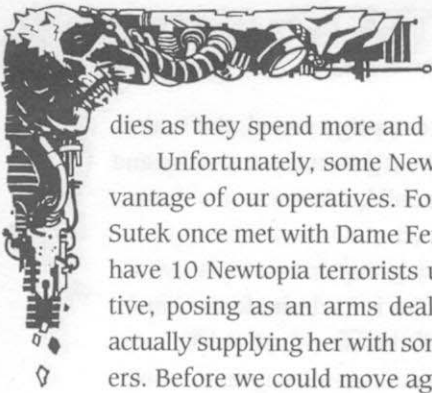
Most of the Third Era's activities are nonviolent and center around education and propaganda. We keep an especially close eye on Wordwrights and printers, for a proliferation of radical pamphlets often heralds Third Era activity in an area. Recent proposals in Imperial circles to extend lit-

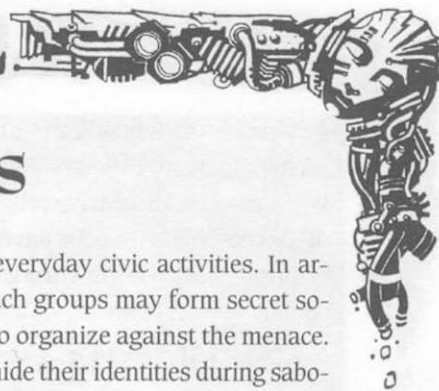
eracy opportunities to most freemen could worsen such activities, and we will need greater resources to continue our vigilance. Many Third Era activists have used the name Benjamin Locke, and his writings have appeared everywhere, obviously written by many different people.

The Third Era does not limit itself to the written word, however. The operatives we believe helped stop Delphi's Baron Ezra have been active in a number of other places. Abraham Elijah, a lieutenant in the Muster, has fought on Rampart and other places, and he once managed to keep Vorox commandos from capturing several members of Rampart's old ruling council. Lady Aretha Torenson has proven instrumental in bringing disparate groups together to further democracy, and we believe she has contacts with information specialists and blackmailers around the Known Worlds. Finally, both often work with "Gray Chakah," a secretive figure whose identity remains elusive. Rumors about this figure often crop up at Third Era meetings, for he often serves as a courier and spy. He (or she) has been alleged to be Ur-Obun, Ur-Ukar, a psychic, a rogue theurgist, a member of the Hidden Fellowship, and even a relative of Alexius.

We have a long list of current and former Newtopia members, but its effective ones remain elusive. The woman who told us she was Dame Ferona al-Malik, may or may not have been that noble woman, but she has been active on several worlds. She has become a weapon master, and has carried out terrorist attacks against some of the most prominent opponents of democracy. The leading Newtopia general on Rampart goes by the name Freeman Han, and he has a number of battle successes against the Li Halan in the planet's mountains. He is also active in urban areas, where his troops operate as urban terrorists and saboteurs, doing whatever they can to stymie the Li Halan. Even though the Li Halan can legitimately claim control of the planet, Newtopia and other pro-democracy forces challenge their rule in many places.

We have no definite lists of Hidden Fellowship membership, but our suspicions continue to mount. This is perhaps the most dangerous of the three major groups, especially if rumors of its links to lost worlds are true. We have identified three possible members within the past several years, including Engragio Laubser, on Grail, Tiberius of Shaprut, and Harlena Ursene Maltrip, who masqueraded as an engineer on Byzantium Secundus for several years. While none of these people has taken any direct action against us, or been involved in any violence, they seem to be ringleaders for some republican organization.





Anti-Republicans

From the diary of Jacques Trantor, mayor of Glint, a small mining town in Rampart's Ceremanique Mountains, discovered after his death and brought to the attention of the Li Halan Jingcha (from which we intercepted it):

I can no longer bear the weight of this secret. And yet, I cannot reveal it in life, for it would be the end of my brethren. I hereby tell of it in this book, that it may be read upon my death and so release my soul from its bondage.

...[garbled handwriting]...

We came to the cave. [garbled] The poor man struggled, trying to once more recant his democratic ways, but my brethren would not hear it. They gagged him and thrust him into the ancient mine. Before he could rise and run from the chill darkness, Kalfo activated the charges.

The shaft exploded, scattered dust miles into the sky. [garbled] I know not whether Manager Delepai survived. We had placed the charges such that it should have simply caused the entrance to become blocked, so that he would eke out the rest of his days in that shaft.

Of course, none of us knew where it led in its deepest parts. The old Republican mines had remained untouched for centuries. Let him have them. Such is the punishment for Republican amor.

Be not fooled. Although these disparate, short-lived groups may share our greater goal of preventing Republican activity, they are but the Unruly Mob — reactionaries and small-minded bigots who seek to protect their own wealth and welfare in total disregard of the law.

For the most part, such mobs are purely local and last only long enough to strike against a perceived threat — a new printing press or independent media outlet, perhaps. Some of them are even aimed not so much at Republican activity as local business rivals; painting others with the stain of Republicanism allows groups to commit all manner of illegal crimes against rivals in the name of justice, whether it be burning down stores, spreading lies or threatening customers.

Convened by concerned local leaders — often guiding lights in civic community life — these mobs do most of their work at night, sabotaging technology or rousting suspected strangers from their beds and chasing them out of town. For more obvious or persistent threats, they may resort to midnight hangings or torch riots.

Once the suspected Republican danger is gone, the mobs

disperse, returning to their everyday civic activities. In areas with constant threats, such groups may form secret societies or gentlemen's clubs to organize against the menace. They may adopt uniforms to hide their identities during sabotage or revenge actions. Hooded cowls are popular, as are emblems sewn onto robes to designate a group identity to whomever they wish to scare.

Most of their perceived dangers, however, are hardly dangerous to anyone. A stranger talking about increased freedoms or a farmer complaining about the local lords are sometimes enough to roust these bigots. On the other hand, they do indeed uncover real plots at times.

One such group on Criticorum, calling itself the Hammer of Industry, revealed an actual cabal of Third Era plotters hidden among some visiting terraforming experts. Unfortunately, they hung them all without waiting for any response from their guilds. Weeks later, highly respected townsfolk began disappearing, their bodies found later wedged into crevasses near the region's terraforming nodes. It seemed to be the work of Scravers, holding up a favor they owed to a local Engineer, who had hoped to rehabilitate the recalcitrant, Republican terraformers. The Hammer of Industry has not been seen or heard from since.

This reveals the true danger behind such vigilante groups — they operate with their own codes of justice, contravening actual laws. In place of evidence and facts, they rely on suspicion to root out their foes.

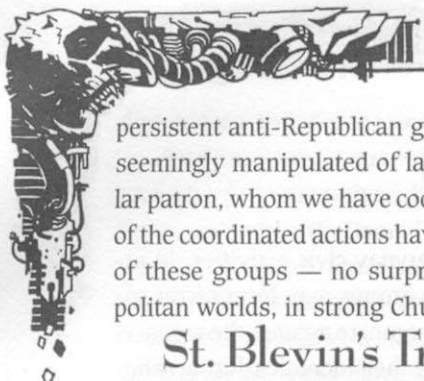
Such actions endanger undercover field agents. The Imperial Eye has suffered at least two occasions where their agents were harassed or even beaten by such anti-Republican mobs. That their agents were posing as pro-Republican sympathizers didn't help, of course. Nonetheless, these groups interfere with the proper workings of justice and place valuable agents' lives at risk.

We have reason to believe that they are no longer confined to backwards principalities, but may be coordinated on an interstellar level by some hidden patron. While each lodge or cabal is completely separate from the others and are surely unaware of their others' existence or titles, some common element seems to be goading them from afar, targeting their prejudice against political foes — some of them even friends of the Emperor.

Who this mysterious patron or group is is not yet known. His existence is simply a speculation at this stage, based more on theory than evidence. These coincidental actions against linked targets on various worlds are too odd not to comment upon.

Below we present some of the more noteworthy and





persistent anti-Republican groups, each of which has been seemingly manipulated of late by our mysterious interstellar patron, whom we have codenamed "Urthworm," for most of the coordinated actions have occurred on Holy Terra. Most of these groups — no surprise — operate on non-cosmopolitan worlds, in strong Church-going districts.

St. Blevin's Troop

Operating out of the city of Agni on Pentateuch, this secret lodge of black-cowled figures has been sighted as far away as Heliopolis, administering night justice in the form of mob beatings or assassinations — Novitiate Hamalas' tragic fall from a high tower is believed to be their work, for the young priest had just published his sympathetic history dissertation on Republican groups of Pentateuch.

The local Eskatonic authorities have finally begun an investigation of this group, but it is unlikely they will find anything of note. The Troop's membership seems quite adept at disappearing underground for years on end to evade the theurgical scryings of investigating priests.

Oddly enough, the best leads we have as to the leadership's identities points to a coalition of concerned industrialists fearful that the local priesthood is too lenient on Republican thought. They seek to bring the Eskatonics back into the fold of a Pancreator-fearing Church.

Nightmartin's Guard

This group takes its name from an ancient and much feared vigilante outfit from Sutek's Diasporan times. The old Nightmartin's Guard, named for their blackhearted leader, routinely hunted down any who favored the rise of a new Republic (the coming Second Republic) and made a bloody example of them. The Guard was finally caught one night by House Chauki forces and executed without a trial. The dying words of Garner Nightmartin — revealed to be one Sir Garner Giles Gesar — still haunt the bogeyman tales of Sutek's children: "Go ahead, kill me. I won't leave. I'll walk this damn rock until the last one of you is dead and gone."

It is believed that he did indeed haunt Sutek until the last Chauki was deposed and the Hazat took over.

Now he's back. Or at least, one or more individuals has taken his guise on the recently reconstituted Guard's moonlit rides. Their psuedo-military outfits and capes still strike fear into locals — especially guildsmembers, their primary target. This time, however, the guilds are fighting back. More vicious than any Diasporan merchant group, the Scravers have declared a vendetta against anyone suspected of doning the garb of the Guard. They have already caught one such victim — the straggler in a midnight raid on a Reeve's home — and beat him to a bloody pulp. His disfigured body still hangs in the town square, the local officials too afraid of the

guild to take it down.

No one knows who the poor bastard was. The Scravers beat him so badly no one can identify the prominently displayed body.

The Noose of Grellic

Although its name is somewhat chilling, the Noose is perhaps the gentlest of all such groups. Its members seek not to maim or kill suspected Republicans but to recondition them and teach them the error of their ways.

Towards this end, they operate an expert kidnapping ring on Grail. They can strike at any hour of the day or night, secreting their victims away before any alarm is raised. They take their charges to some distant or hidden cathedral and there begin the work of brainwashing them back to normalcy — defined as the acceptance of the lots the Pancreator has chosen for everyone in this life. Serfs are born to be serfs, and they should not be so hubristic to believe otherwise.

The group takes its name from an ancient relic, the Noose of Grellic, worn by a former criminal who, after being rescued from hanging by an angel (his story), forsook his old ways and traveled the country preaching indigence and acceptance of one's lot in life. He ever after wore the noose that he had been hung with to demonstrate to all that there is a new life waiting after the death of old ideas.

There are a number of people on Grail who have been witnessed wearing slender, hemp necklaces shaped like nooses. When asked about them, they each invariably look embarrassed and hide them under their clothing before changing the subject. Apparently, Grellic's Noose is to be worn in humility by those whose lives' have been changed by the intervention of this group.

The Noose is led by a Sanctuary Aeon priest or priestess (reports conflict) named Morning Brand. He or she maintains a network of confessors who are suspected of breaking the Confessional Seal to reveal Republicans. For this reason alone, the Amalthean's planetary leadership has elected to investigate, promising to punish anyone caught breaking this sacred vow, so important to maintaining the free operations of the Church among nobles and guildsmembers.

Whether Morning Brand has ties to Urthworm or is simply being used by him is unknown.

The Black Void Court

Certainly the oddest such group of all, the Black Void Court operates out of a reclaimed Inquisition style frigate. While its owners are well-known pirates, they do not confine their activities to robbing the wealthy: they also judge those they deem guilty of Republicanism.

The leader, Captain Izambard, is an ex-Avestite who is





comfortable with technology but not its use by the masses. His loyal crew is composed of religious fanatics who have bought into his creed of robbing the rich to give to themselves, all the while ensuring that the masses never become rich. Somehow, being poor is a blessed state, one that this crew is too stained to share in. However, they have the self-sacrificing courage to protect others from accidentally obtaining a state of wealth or — much worse — the belief that everyone should be prosperous, a foul leftover ideal from the Second Republic.

Needless to say, the Black Void Court is wanted in many systems for piracy against noble and guild interests (they have never yet attacked a Church ship). They have captured and killed (by space walk) at least three guild merchants, later notifying their guilds by message pod of their trials and verdicts.

It is unknown whether or not they are involved in Urthworm's conspiracy.

Radical Null

This is the group we most suspect is tied to Urthworm, for it operates out of a number of cities on Holy Terra, especially Atlantia. It has curtailed a number of public protests against the Church's overly strict laws concerning technology use, but has rarely engaged in the more violent actions of other such groups. Its members seem mainly intent on quelling public displays rather than actual thought.

However, it does seem to maintain a strong network of informants who know a disturbing amount of personal details concerning Holy Terra's Church, noble and League leaders. There may well be a hidden campaign of blackmail that even we have not yet uncovered, surely led by Urthworm himself.



Mammonists

History

Notes allegedly kept by Baron Alfred Oldman Hawkwood and captured shortly before the Emperor Wars began:

Since the earliest days of the Church, it has taught that money is the root of all evil. If that is so, then the root has sunk into its own heart. Now money draws as many hosannas as does the Prophet, and coin receives as much worship as the Pancreator. While some fanatics may decry this change, we recognize it for the holy truth that it represents. The accumulation of wealth is a divine imperative.

Wealth is far more than metal, land or even information. It is the tangible, physical manifestation of a person's worth. It measures more than what you own or can buy. It also measures the true value of a person's soul. It is a divine scale weighing our very essence. Those who have a true drive to accumulate and the ability to do so also demonstrate a true soul.

Certain enlightened humans have known this for most of our race's history, and they formed the Most Holy Manifestation of Mammon to further their spiritual growth. Such human luminaries as Sargon, Hammurabi and Ramses the Great followed our code, but Mammonism took its current form during the Persian Empire in the reign of Cyrus the Great. Persia's economy was the most developed that humanity had yet known. The empire minted money in many forms, dispersed it for many uses, and recollected it in many ways.

At the time, managing these riches required the greatest minds of the empire. Wizards and priests also served as custodians of this treasure, and they began to realize the power money embodied. While at its most basic level it only had whatever value people would trade for it, money came to mean far more. It came to represent people's hopes and dreams — their goals and aspirations. People thought of money constantly. They desired it and focused their lives around it. Their constant devotion and worship merged with these small objects of veneration, and the priests and wizards sensed this. The touch of such items caused a true feeling of power in the enlightened. Meditating upon a pile of money created an overwhelming clarity of mind and purpose. Finally, they found that money itself gave their rituals and spells the most wonderful effects. These revelations compelled Ahura and Cambyses to compose the Book of Mammon, detail-

ing these efforts, as well as their encounters with the guardians of their souls.

These two wise men began preparing their book in the very vault where the empire's wealth collected, and never have any people been so surrounded by such a great percentage of Holy Terra's worth. The Persian Empire created more value, and collected more of it in turn, than any other power of its age, allowing Ahura and Cambyses to personally witness the true power of money.

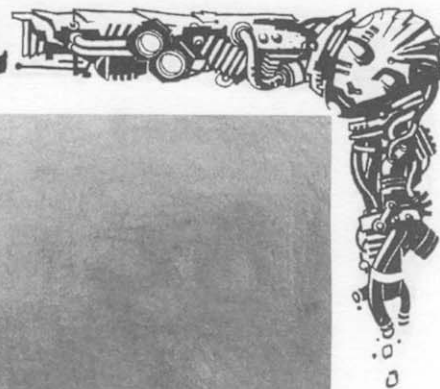
Their visions fill much of the Book of Mammon, and show the awesome influence that money (and those who possess it) would wield over the universe. They saw the temptation that people suffered, and their attempts to do away with money or just give away their own. These people squandered their own worth, becoming mere shells of what they could have been. The first part of the Book focuses on life as it is lived and how it should be lived.

Our souls begin their journey through life with the potential and the power to accomplish anything, yet we end up wasting this resource before we are even aware that we have it. We constantly give away parts of ourselves to other people, focusing on them when we should be focusing on ourselves. Love is one of the worst traps people fall into, constantly giving of themselves to one other person. They give their time, valuables, emotions and more. Wiser people know to collect these things in order to become more complete.

The second half of the book details the paths we must follow to make ourselves more complete. Accumulation is the goal, for the more we have, the more complete our souls become. Those who have the most fill their souls the most, becoming more powerful in life and greater beings in death. Weaker souls merely disappear, but ours continue on, seeking to encompass the universe.

The Book has wielded great influence on human history, though only the best people have ever been privy to its secrets. Ahura and Cambyses sought out only those who they felt positive could share their vision, and these five disciples in turn spread the word to other exemplary individuals throughout the empire and beyond.

Our fellow Mammonists grew in power through the succeeding generations, and we learned to exert power quietly, leaving the more obvious manifestations of power to our hirelings. Better to pay someone



to rule a kingdom than to actually do it oneself and become a target. By the time humanity reached space, we had become the quiet power behind most of Holy Terra's governments.

We tried to move too quickly during the First Republic, however, and some of our richest members became celebrities and leading officials. We realized this mistake too late, and many of us had overreached and begun squandering our own value. We needed the Diaspora to regain our anonymity, and regain it we did, though the Diaspora also split our group. This was perhaps our weakest era, though we began regaining our power after the founding of the Second Republic.

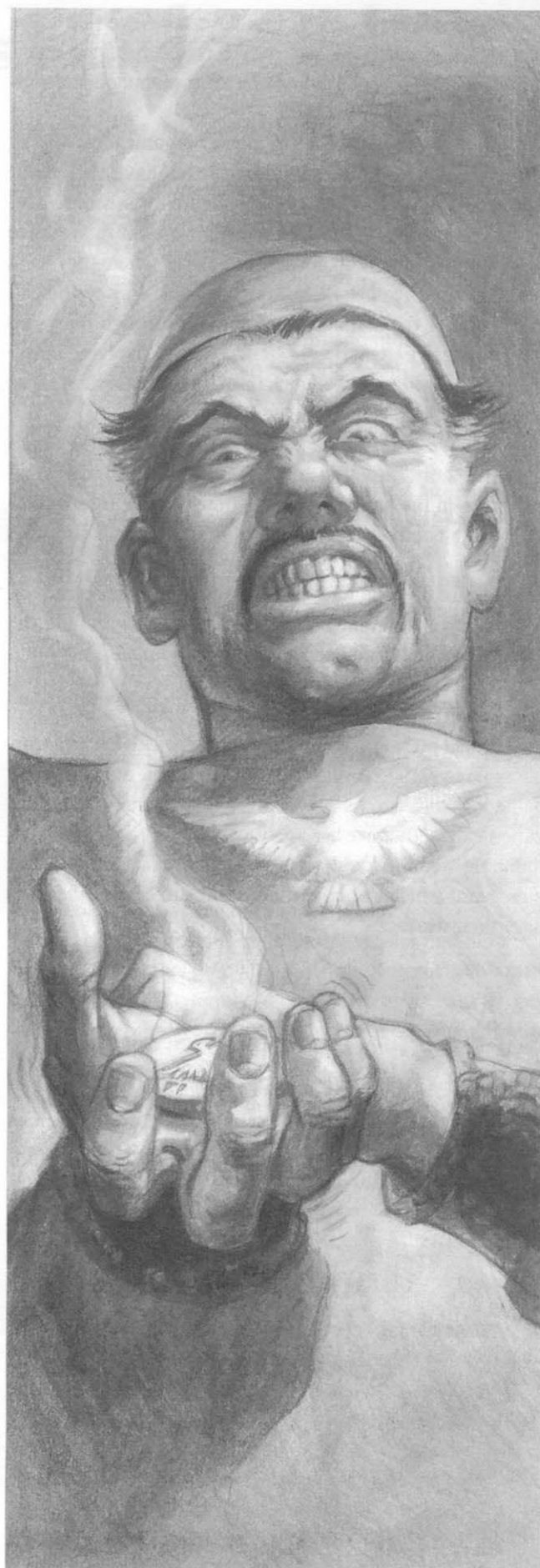
During the Second Republic, we did not fully regain the dominance we had achieved during the First, but that is a good thing. It taught us to be careful and to move slowly, for we have all eternity to attain our position at the head of the universe. By the time of the Fall, we were ready, and this time humanity's disconnection did not affect us as badly. We stayed in contact even as jump routes closed and codes were lost. With Vladimir's rise, our time was right.

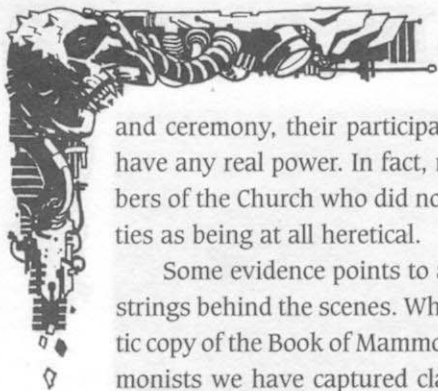
Reeve Dean Gilles Feeman, who had opposed Vladimir's initial rise, but later supported him and attended his coronation, unwittingly laid the groundworks for our revival. Determined that the wealthiest people had an obligation to the rest of humanity, he created a network of the wealthy so that they could use their riches to benefit everyone. This network included many Mammonists, and we began recruiting more. Now we may again consider taking the lead in human endeavors, finding strong puppets who will reunite humanity behind our concealed leadership.

Observations

A few leading theologians, including Mother Lothyut of Artemis, view Mammonism as the most dangerous of heresies. They consider it an especially insidious form of Antinomy. They believe that it came into existence after Vladimir's death, and that tales of ancient glory are red herrings. They fear that Mammonism has managed to sink its tendrils deep into human society, and we have had little luck rooting it out. When Mammonists come to light, they usually appear to be greedy little individuals, with more desire for wealth than real wealth. The Reeves have proven especially effective at stopping resurrections of this cult, for they know that they will be blamed if it crops up again.

Most of those who have confessed to Mammonism during the past few centuries believed it to be little more than a fraternal organization dedicated to making its members more money. While their meetings involve a great deal of ritual





and ceremony, their participants do not believe that these have any real power. In fact, most have been devout members of the Church who did not see their Mammonist activities as being at all heretical.

Some evidence points to a greater organization pulling strings behind the scenes. While we do not have an authentic copy of the Book of Mammon in our archives, some Mammonists we have captured claim to have seen it. We have never been able to find one in those places where they were supposed to have been kept. Such a book may well exist. Almost all of the Mammonists captured through the years have engaged in remarkably similar rituals involving initiation rites, blood letting, and chanting. Descriptions of these rituals vary little between planets or years.

We have acquired some Reeves data files on the Mammonists. Shortly after the Emperor Wars, Dean Melissa Winters ordered the guild to give the Imperial Eye information on a Mammonist cabal on Tethys in exchange for records about lost worlds. The Reeves have reason to fear, because members of its guild have been linked to this conspiracy on a number of different occasions. Stories have linked the aforementioned Dean Feeman to the founding of a new cult, but Reeve leaders vehemently deny this.

What we do believe is that details about Mammonism are handed out in bits and pieces, usually cloaked in metaphor and hyperbole. Initiates learn only a little at first, slowly being introduced to its deeper mysteries. If a greater organization exists, then we are unsure of its primary goal. Accumulating wealth would seem to be part of it, but we have also heard whispers about their desires to control the stars after their deaths.

Operations and Operatives

Sister Antoinette Meagary of Criticorum was the most recent person arrested for Mammonism. A synecular agent discovered that her tithe accounts did not balance, but before they could move in, imperial troops arrested her for treason. Unfortunately, she died in a mysterious explosion before she could be interrogated, causing no end of embarrassment. The Imperial Eye collaborated with the Church to investigate her death, but neither of them ever found a trace of the explosive that had done her in. It was hoped that she owned a copy of the Book of Mammon, but it was never found in her quarters.

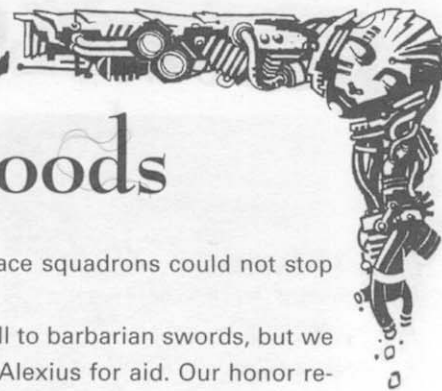
Evidence also points to a Mammonist in the failure of an Eye operation on Iver. Agents were investigating an ancient bank vault when they began to take ill. They retreated from the site to seek aid, and by the time they returned all its money was missing. Shortly thereafter, Reeve loan collectors showed up seeking the source of old money that had recently come into circulation on Pandemonium. They said they believed Mammonists had wanted the ancient coin and had infected our troops.

Loan collectors have taken an interest in the economic difficulties plaguing Kish over the past few years. Recessions have struck urban areas as guilds pull out their investments and nobles become more leery of using their own money. Peasants, who rarely use coin anyway, refuse to accept any money, claiming it all to be accursed. These economic difficulties have most afflicted areas that have reneged on other debts or have refused to allow Reeve investments.

While it was initially assumed that the loan collectors were primarily interested in collecting old debts, observation of their activities leads to other conclusions. They evidenced more interest in tracking financial data and following the trails of the money itself. Collectors have also broken into businesses with sacks of money, taking the money that was already there, and leaving theirs behind. Their coins showed no evidence of counterfeiting. We are still at a loss to determine what they were up to.

(Note: See the appendix for details on Mammonist theurgy.)





Anti-Alexius Hawkwoods

A House Betrayed

From an anonymous letter sent to Duke Redoran Hawkwood of Leminkainen

In the years before Prince Darius fathered Prince Alvarez and Prince Alexius, House Hawkwood faced trials that would have shaken other houses to their foundations. Ours persevered, and grew stronger in its unity. Hawkwood nobles have learned to support one another in the face of adversity. Where other houses might descend into internal feuding, ours created a shield wall no outside force could penetrate.

Our solidarity and familial loyalty reached its apex with the love and support we showered on Prince Darius. His own birth met with momentous portents: comets in the sky, mighty storms, and beautiful rainbows. The great prophet Hepatomas predicted that he and his children would bring humanity back together. He also warned that Darius and his children must beware serpents among them.

The Emperor Wars wreaked havoc throughout the Known Worlds, but no planets suffered as much as did those of House Hawkwood. At first, all sides jockeyed for position, and everyone fought everyone else. As the other houses began to recognize the strength of the Hawkwood bid, however, more and more of them began to focus their resources against us. Prince Darius' death left us in disarray, but Duke Alvarez moved quickly to marshal our forces. Then Alexius took control of the house.

Prince Alexius' rise to power only heightened the other houses' hostility, for his ambition required him to levy more and more troops from the nobles, leaving their fiefs poorly defended. All the noble houses took advantage of our weakness to prey on our people. Even Alexius' ostensible allies, the al-Malik, made furtive forays against us, stealing resources, destroying installations and enslaving our serfs. The most ignominious moments came when the minor houses made demands of us, as when Trusnikron nobles forced us to give them greater autonomy in exchange for their services.

We could have withstood these assaults and indignities as we have so many others, but then the barbarian menace began to take on a more threatening dimension. We had long faced and repelled raiders from lost worlds, but the threat had not been this serious since Vladimir's time. Vuldrok warlords like Reginald the Red, Ghorav the Unbearable and others swore that they would conquer what land of ours they could, and pillage what was left. Larger and larger Vuldrok fleets began pouring through

the jumpgates, and our space squadrons could not stop them all.

More and more fiefs fell to barbarian swords, but we knew we could not call on Alexius for aid. Our honor required that we fully support his war efforts and resolve our problems on our own. It required heroic exertions both unparalleled in history and unnoticed at the time. Battles at Jyvaskyla, Cortran, Londynium and other sites cost the lives of so many of us, but we fought for the glory of our house and the safety of our people. We managed to drive the barbarians back in enough time to lead Alexius to victory on Byzantium Secundus.

With the Emperor Wars finished, we prepared for the golden age that would be ours once Alexius began fulfilling his many promises. We were not prepared for the betrayal that was to come. Alexius turned his back on the many nobles who had done so much for his cause, giving them little land or wealth for their sacrifices. Instead of opening up the rich Imperial lands for his allies, he left them under their old controllers, whether those were bureaucrats, minor houses or even his enemies! And, in the final insult, when Vuldrok raiders threatened our space once again, he offered us only token help from the Imperial fleets, claiming that the Symbiot front required more of its strength.

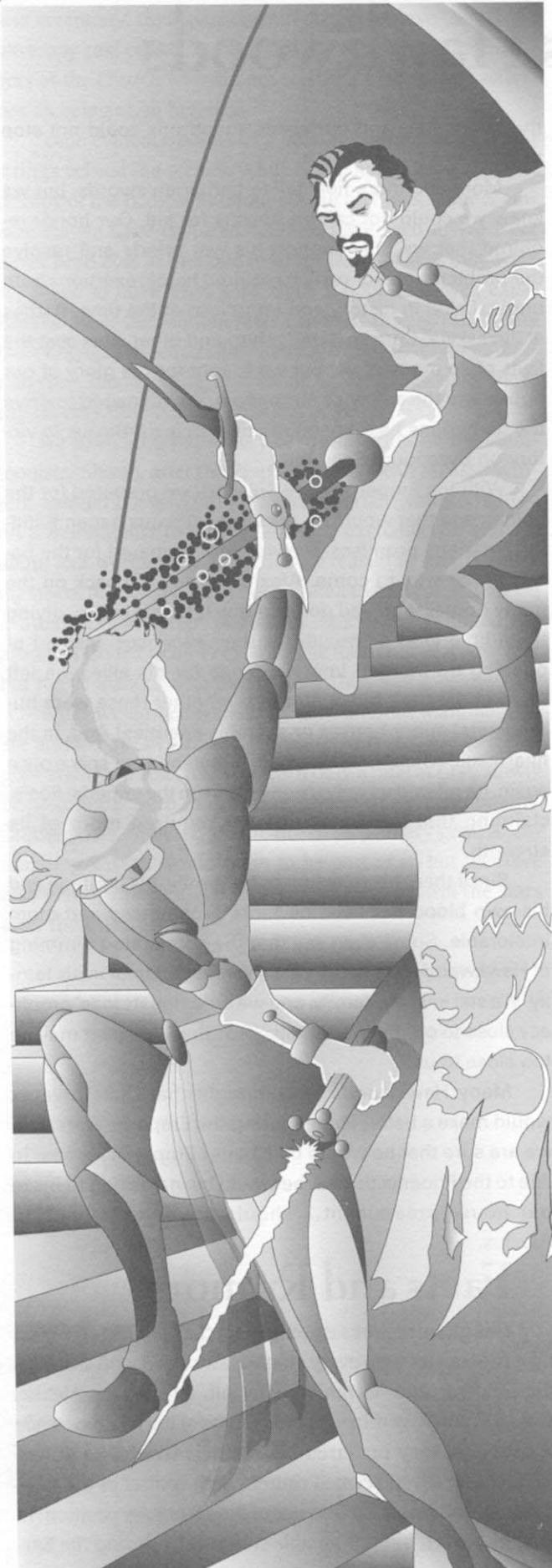
Since then, his rejection of his family, his heritage and his own blood has become more pronounced and more intolerable. Some even say that the accelerated dimming of Hawkwood stars parallels his waning interest in his family. We still love our family, and we hold Hepatomas' prophecy close to our hearts. We also fear that a serpent may be too close to us.

Many Hawkwoods long thought that Duke Alvarez would make a better leader during the Emperor Wars, and we are sure that he would be a better Emperor. As next in line to the Phoenix throne, he would be in position to make our house preeminent... should anything happen to Alexius.

Facts and Rumors

This group requires extremely special handling. We must take care not to lump every single Hawkwood who criticizes the Emperor into its ranks. After all, even when Alexius first took power within his house, some of his relatives made it clear that they preferred his brother Alvarez as prince. Alvarez, however, seemed content with control of the family lands and raised no fuss about his secondary position. In fact, he proved himself an able commander during the Em-





peror Wars, especially against House Decados.

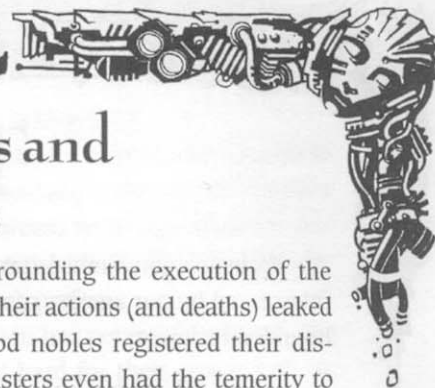
Initially, these criticisms came from those who liked both brothers but considered Alvarex more capable. After Alexius' victory, however, the whispering campaign began. Accusations that Alexius was betraying his house began to surface. Some of these came from Hawkwood nobles who had done little during the Emperor Wars, but expected to profit from the spoils. More worrisome, however, was when we learned that some of the complaints came from some of Emperor Alexius' more trusted relatives.

The Imperial Eye did little to investigate these critics, focusing much of its efforts on the Emperor's more predictable enemies (like House Decados). It was these efforts, however, that made us more aware of problems within House Hawkwood. It quickly became apparent that a great deal of Imperial information was finding its way into outside hands. We began with the most likely suspects — traitors within the Imperial Eye, surveillance devices in our offices, psychics loitering near the palace, and the like — but had no success plugging the leaks.

We only discovered the source of this problem through luck. A young Hawkwood noble, brought into the Eye shortly after the end of the Emperor Wars, was astounded to find his own observations being commented on by a Scriver crime boss. The only people privy to his observations had been family members at a gathering on Ravenna. Careful study reduced the number of people who could have revealed his comments, and then painstaking analysis revealed that Baron Edmund Stalwart Hawkwood had also been at gatherings from which other confidential data had escaped.

We then asked a young Hawkwood lady to leak specific false information to Baron Edmund so that we could prove whether he was indeed the problem. The "sensitive secrets" she told the baron quickly found their way into Decados reports, Scriver rumors, and Church sermons. We now knew that Baron Edmund was part of the problem, but we also knew he was not the source of all the leaks. We put him under observation, and soon realized that several other Hawkwood nobles were giving our secrets to the enemy. "Giving" is the operative term here, for we quickly deduced that they were not always selling the information.

We tested many hypotheses — that these nobles were being blackmailed, addicted to selchakah, trying to cast blame on enemies within their own house, or under psychic domination — but none of these proved correct. Then the horrible suspicion that these Hawkwoods were out to destroy the Emperor, one of their own, began to grow. Using various deceptions, we managed to bring them all to Byzantium Secundus' Cumulus space station. There our agents took them into custody, though the attempt cost both sides a number of lives. The ensuing interrogation revealed the true nature of this treacherous conspiracy.



Operations and Operatives

The five Hawkwoods who survived the capture all felt that the Emperor had turned his back on them and their house, taking advantage of their sacrifices during the Emperor Wars for his own profit. All of them had fought in the Emperor Wars, and all of them had served with distinction. They each had access to critical Imperial information, due either to their own positions or from the confidences other Hawkwoods placed in them. While none held especially critical posts, they all had managed to do serious damage to the Emperor's cause by their actions. After gathering what information we could from these five, we turned them over to Princess Victoria Hawkwood for justice. All five were executed for treason.

At the time, we believed that we had destroyed the conspiracy, but we soon found these hopes dashed. Their fellow conspirators became far more careful — and far more desperate. Before we caught the first group of traitors, they may not have realized the seriousness of their actions, but since then, their efforts have become even more extreme. Sabotage, vile whispering campaigns, and even assassination attempts have joined their arsenal. We believe that they have held numerous meetings to discuss overthrowing the Emperor, and have worked with House Decados, guild members, fanatical Church officials, anarchists, and even Vuldrok to further these aims.

We are sure that the anti-Alexites have cells on every Hawkwood planet, but determining who is an active member and who is just upset at the Emperor is difficult. We believe that the conspiracy has few (if any) adherents above the rank of baron, but fear that it may spread up the ranks. Secondly, almost all of these conspirators are veteran warriors. As members of House Hawkwood, they also have a special understanding of how Alexius thinks, as well as access to his staunchest allies. We have found conspirators on Byzantium Secundus and currently suspect one within the Questing Knights.

Our greatest fear is that the Emperor's own brother, Prince Alvarex, might become a member. Alvarex has not been afraid to voice his own anger with many of Alexius' decisions, and his own court holds a number of Alexius' leading critics. Many of these have left little doubt that they would like to see Alvarex take Alexius' place, an act that would almost certainly require the Emperor to die without an heir. Should this happen, we feel certain that the other powerful factions in the Known Worlds would renew the Emperor Wars, again insistent on putting one of their own on the throne. However, Alexius has forbidden us to act against his critics within House Hawkwood unless we have strong proof that they have acted against him. As a result, we can do little more than watch these traitors with growing alarm.

Despite the secrecy surrounding the execution of the five original traitors, word of their actions (and deaths) leaked out. A number of Hawkwood nobles registered their displeasure, and one of their sisters even had the temerity to challenge the Emperor to a duel. He refused, and the baroness found herself shipped out to Hargard, where she has served ever since. Several other nobles have tried to goad the Emperor into duels, but he would never submit to such an indignity. We have not been able to prove that any of these challengers were part of any organized conspiracy.

We have definite evidence that an assassination attempt against Alexius during the winter of 4998 involved anti-Alexite Hawkwoods. The actual assassin, Sir Charles Amay Hawkwood, managed to smuggle a shield damper and several wire grenades into a meeting at Zebulon's tower on Criticorum. He wore a chameleon suit and strapped several demolition packs to his body. He managed to make it as far as the Emperor's meeting room on the 303rd floor when Sister Theafana al-Malik noticed him. She managed to dispatch him before he could detonate the demolition rigs, but not before one of his wire grenades killed three people, including one of Mater Benita Ivankov's sons and two of the Scraver dean's advisors. Her enforcers managed to track down three Hawkwoods who had helped Sir Charles with his suicidal attack, and they gave us audiotapes of their interrogations. These tapes put us on the trail of "The Scar," a Hawkwood noble we believe arranged the assassination attempt. We have evidence placing him on Byzantium Secundus, Ravenna and Gwynneth, but have yet to uncover his true identity.

Imperial property has also come under attack. These violations have ranged from petty vandalism to more serious destruction and even the deaths of some of the Emperor's servants. The most recent one occurred at his summer villa on Gwynneth, where someone managed to sneak in and spray derogatory comments about his reproductive abilities on the mirrored ceiling in his bedroom.

The Royal Gambit

From an anonymous letter sent to Sir Maupin Torensen, intercepted by our agents, copied, and then delivered to its intended recipient:

Five Royal houses now dominate the Known Worlds, sure of their own place in the scheme of things and equally sure of everyone else's inferiority. They forget that other families have held power equal to and even exceeding their own. They forget that this can happen again. This blindness is their greatest weakness and our greatest strength.

It does not matter if you are Justinian, Torensen, Keddah, Van Gelder, Cameton, or a member of any other minor house. The Royal Houses believe us weak, but there are ways for other houses to join their august ranks. Some of our houses, like House Justinian, were once considered Royal Houses. They lost influence as jumpgates shut down or they lost battles. Others have risen in power, only to encounter various insurmountable obstacles. Sometimes those obstacles have been other minor houses.

A century after Vladimir's death, a number of us came to the conclusion that challenging the Royal Houses was not the fastest route to power. We had to make alliances, both with the Royal Houses and with each other. The first of these happened openly, but we soon learned the dangers in that.

Our alliance has been tattered and shorn but it still holds true. The Emperor Wars greatly tried our compacts with one another, but in the end, those who survived did so through the aid of their allies. We lost our initial bids in that conflict, but we still remain. The Gambit can still succeed.

We have one goal: Gain a vote scepter by hook or by crook, and share it with the group. Although only one of our houses can directly benefit from the scepter and its Elector status, it is honor bound to award its allies once in power. Even should it betray this pact, the fact of its risen status nonetheless opens the door for others.

Towards this end we must strengthen our ties further and work as one toward the goal of gaining a scepter. Our work must remain secret, however, for should the Royal Houses become aware of our increased intercourse, they would surely act to unravel it.

Share this missive with no one. Burn it. Then come to the Highmoor Crossroads [on Tamerlain, Byzantium Secundus] when the moon has set. Come alone or with

only your closest confidants. We shall there conspire to restore our greatness.

Observations

The Royal Gambit is a persistent conspiracy run by certain elements within most of the minor houses. They seek to gain (or regain) Royal status, sharing in the Elector status of the five major houses of the Known Worlds. For this, they require one or more vote scepters.

Vote scepters were issued by Vladimir mainly to quell dissent, to provide his allies and even rivals with some sense of a stake in the new system. Scepter holders — called Electors — are allowed to vote on the emperor's successor. While it is assumed that this does not allow them to nominate their own candidates, they can elect to ratify an heir — or not. A two-thirds majority of Electors is required to approve an emperor. Alexius' own ascension came with 23 out of 35 votes.

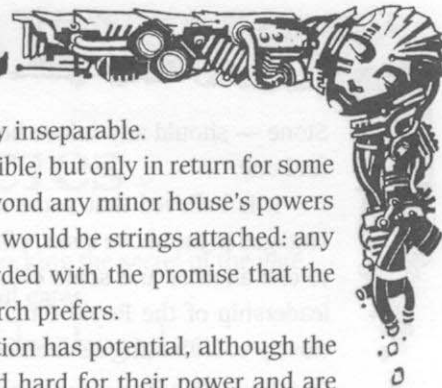
After Vladimir, in the absence of a duly ratified emperor, the Electors had the power to vote in a regent for 10-year terms until a true emperor could be declared. This lasted until the Emperor Wars, when Darius Hawkwood's bid for the throne ignited a firestorm of similar bids by every conceivable faction. Of course, Alexius Hawkwood was the eventual victor.

Following the tradition set by Vladimir, only an emperor can issue new vote scepters. A number of regents attempted this during the regency interregnum, but none were successful — too many opposing camps found ways to convince them to rescind their decisions. Hence, because of Vladimir's untimely death, the number of scepters has been fixed at 35 for so long that the number has become somewhat sacrosanct, one of the few bedrocks in an otherwise ever-shifting power base.

This means that only a limited number of parties hold pieces to the pie of governance, and each is extremely jealous of any attempts to infringe upon this right by widening the power base. Alexius theoretically has the right to issue new scepters, but to do so would court political disaster. It would rock the status quo, and risk turning even the Advocates (those Electors who voted for Alexius) against him and his potential heirs.

Political philosophers believe that only a significant expansion of the empire would warrant the rewarding of new scepters — growing the pie justifies increasing its pieces. Hence, it is possible that those who win new lands in a Kurgan crusade or by the reclamation of a lost world could be granted vote scepters.





Those noble houses that hold vote scepters are called Royal Houses. The current five major houses successfully collected the majority of vote scepters in the years after Vladimir's death, claiming those of the noble houses they subsumed or slew. The Church and the Merchant League hold the rest. None of the minor houses now owns a vote scepter.

There are 35 vote scepters that have been accounted for. It is known, however, that Vladimir issued 40. Five have been destroyed or become lost since his death. None of these five were available during the Emperor Wars, and hence their votes were lost. (Only those scepters present at the time of voting are counted, which explains the vast armadas that escorted each faction to Byzantium Secundus's treaty table.)

It should come as no surprise that the quest for these missing vote scepters has become quite a cause among the 10 minor houses of note.

Representatives of these houses have banded together to towards the goal of gaining scepters and raising one of their number to Royal status. This blessed house would then be beholden to the others, and so ensure the eventual rise of them all.

There are a number of means by which they can gain scepters:

- From a Royal House: An unlikely option. Noble houses holding vote scepters cling to them like a hull rat to a heat-

ing duct. They are practically inseparable.

- From the Church: Possible, but only in return for some great boon — one surely beyond any minor house's powers to grant. What's more, there would be strings attached: any scepter would only be awarded with the promise that the new Elector vote as the Church prefers.

- From a guild: This option has potential, although the guilds have fought long and hard for their power and are loath to give it up. The promise of control over new worlds might well be worth the trade for them, if these worlds promised new wealth.

- From a lost world: The most likely option, although still a long shot. Whoever can claim a lost world and return it to the fold of the empire would surely be awarded Elector status by Alexius. Finding one is not so much the problem, as the recent spate of jumpkeys into barbarian space has shown — it's returning them to the fold wherein the problem lies.

- In return for meritorious service: The final conceivable option is to martyr someone from one of the houses in the service of the Emperor, such that Alexius would feel beholden to make up for the tragic loss by awarding the martyr's family with a scepter. Whatever deed this is, it needs to convey the minor house's full and complete loyalty to Alexius and his progeny. Instead of a life sacrifice, another option is to award Alexius with a recovered Philosophers



Stone — should any minor house knight be so lucky as to find one.

It is believed that some members of most houses are engaged in the above tasks, often working at cross-purposes to one another and some even ignorant of the others. The leadership of the Royal Gambit seems either incapable of closely coordinating its members actions or is unwilling to do so.

Conspiracies

Some of the plots the Royal Gambit has hatched include:

The Imperial Heir

These conspirators are doing whatever they can to help Alexius produce an imperial heir, from personal attempts at seduction, tampering with his birth control technology, setting him up with irresistible suitors, or even hailing the causes of both Lady Theafana al-Malik and Salandra Decados, known paramours of the Emperor. The open existence of an heir would cause Alexius to more closely consider the necessity of building his core of Advocates, and this might in turn necessitate the awarding of new scepters to loyal nobles.

Of course, this one is a long shot. While Alexius is sure to produce an heir, he will do so on his own time and under his own control. There is no telling what such an heir may or may not cause the Emperor to do in the realm of statecraft.

Depose an Elector

One politically dangerous option that has been considered but does not appear to have been implemented yet is a plot to depose a current Elector and gain its scepter. This would require a substantiated charge of treason against that Elector. Everybody suspects that each faction holds discontents who surely plot treason, but to catch them in the act is something else entirely. To even attempt it is to risk the ire of that faction, with the possible punishments of war, excommunication or embargo, each of which alone is often enough to ruin an already teetering house.

Interstellar Incident

Great events call for unusual actions. Wars often see battlefield knightings, so why not battlefield Electorhood? If the Royal Gambit could create an interstellar incident of great enough import, and then acquit itself well in it, they

could perhaps gain a scepter. The most likely current options are to urge for a crusade against the Kurgans or Vuldrok, create a new break in the Symbiot conflict, or ignite an incident with the Vau. Each of these options surely means untold misery for millions, all for the slight chance of a scepter for a few.

Even to conspire towards such ends is treason, for to put the empire at risk for personal gain is monstrous. Nonetheless, it is rumored that certain hotheads within the Gambit have proposed certain actions that could lead to such incidents. That they have so far been shouted down is evidence of the overall sanity still prevailing in the leadership, but some believe it is only a matter of time until desperation tips the balance towards the malcontents.

The Lost Scepters

There are five missing scepters. At least two of these are believed to be destroyed (one of them is thought to have been on Vladimir's flagship when it crashed into the sun following his death). The others are perhaps on lost worlds or are hidden somewhere within the Known Worlds. It is possible that the Vau or Symbiots have stolen one or two of them, but this is unsubstantiated rumor.

Finding these scepters is the single most important task within the Gambit, for it has the highest probability of success — which is saying much, for it is still a long shot. If these scepters were readily at hand, another party would surely have produced them by now. They provide no benefit when hidden, except perhaps to baffle Alexius' attempts to count his supporters among the Electors. Should a rival show up with more scepters than previously counted, it could throw off a slim majority.

The Gambit has certainly considered this possibility, and has sent members to infiltrate Royal Houses, Church monasteries and guild halls, all seeking whispers of the missing scepters. If they can steal something that doesn't officially exist, who could legitimately accuse them of thievery?

Baring this unlikely prospect, most young minor house knights instead seek these scepters in the hidden places, the forgotten ruins or lost worlds where their previous owners could have conceivably hidden them. However, this sends more and more sons and daughters into danger, robbing the houses of their next generation of rulers.

Planetary Conspiracies

Before humanity reached the stars, Holy Terra suffered more divisions than one can imagine occurring on a single planet. Hundreds of countries dotted the globe, and each seemed to feel that it had its own special place in the scheme of things. Nationalism reinforced these beliefs, and conspiracies often popped up to support one national group over others. This creed gave way to worldism during the Diaspora as each planet fixated on the idea that it was somehow extraordinary. Such ideas fell into disfavor during the Second Republic, but they did not disappear. Worldistic groups merely became submerged, promoting their agendas more quietly. With the Fall, however, they reemerged with a vengeance. Sometimes they tried to seize power, coming into conflict with nobles and the Church. Other times they focused on minimizing damage. We know that groups such as these were responsible for shutting down many of the jumpgates.

Some of these organizations still exist in the Known Worlds. We have dossiers on many of them in the Imperial Eye archives. I have documented some of the most notable here. Needless to say, many of them are religiously based. Maintaining such conspiracies over generations usually requires a spiritual mandate of one sort or another.

Children of Grange (Sons of Iver)

This old brotherhood seeks to protect what its members perceive as a sacred link between Iver and Grange, keeping the contacts with Iver pure and unsullied by Known Worlders. Intelligence seems to suggest that they had a secret jumpkey to Iver long before that planet was rediscovered.

It is believed that this conspiracy once included many members of Pandemonium's elite. However, after the mass exodus and deaths that followed the initial cataclysms, this brotherhood shrank, and its membership ranks are now surely too small to achieve any effective change, a few exceptional individuals aside.

Perhaps the most valuable secret this brotherhood seems to hide is more information concerning Pandemonium's second, dysfunctional jumpgate. This mysterious relic continues to baffle Scravers and Engineers alike. Although it appears to be incomplete — as if construction was suddenly halted — no significant access to its workings has yet been attained.

This could change, should the Children of Grange be convinced to yield up their store of secrets. We believe that they are unaware of the meaning of some of the information they hold. They have merely inherited it. Study of these

ancient secrets is vital to unlocking the secret of the gate — which in turn could unlock all gates.

Malignatius Husbanders

This extreme religious group believes the Prophet spent years of study on this world and they aim to protect it from the ravages of noble house interference. While they once harried the Li Halan authorities, they now threaten the Decados with their subversive activities.

These include not only the typical street-corner rantings well known on this world but also organized sabotage. Fanatics loyal to the Husbanders have been caught attempting to destroy planetary administrative data, deface official buildings and landmarks, and have even engaged in the kidnapping of certain Decados householders. So far, they have been unable to capture an actual noble, but attempts have been made, most of them uncovered by intelligence agents before they could take place.

Religious sectarianism is certainly widespread on this world, but the Husbanders have been able to do something few priests have — they have brought together many of these disparate sects in their drive to free the world from outside tyranny. The Decados have been much more lenient of free religious expression than the Li Halan ever were, but they will only allow but so much leeway until they bring their iron fist down. The slightest hint of political activity behind a sermon is enough to bring riot troops into a church, shutting it down and dispersing even its parishioners to labor camps.

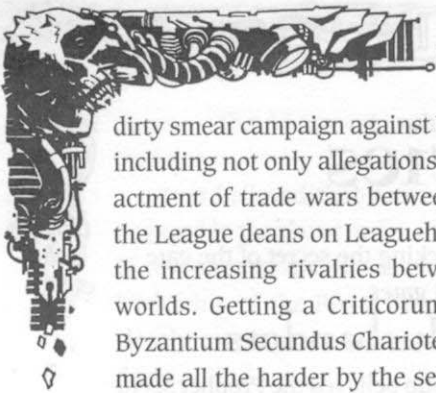
For this reason, the Husbanders are highly secret and communicate through code, hiding any political intent behind purely religious language. Their membership roles are obscure, although they are surely led by a charismatic monk. His or her name and description remains unknown to even the Jakovians.

Criticorum Rota

This odd civic group believes Criticorum's central position in the jumpweb has mystical significance, that it is the center of the "Eternal Wheel." They aim to return the world to its cosmopolitan significance from before Byzantium Secundus supplanted its position of prominence in the interstellar community.

Organized in a fashion very similar to the old Second Republic gentleman's lodges, this group of highly placed civil administrators, nobles and guildsmembers conspire to convince the influential to hold interstellar conferences, family reunions, Church meetings, and the like on Criticorum rather than other worlds. Towards this end, they have instituted a





dirty smear campaign against Byzantium Secundus officials, including not only allegations of corruption but also the enactment of trade wars between guild cartels. Indeed, even the League deans on Leagueheim have had trouble calming the increasing rivalries between guild chapters on both worlds. Getting a Criticorum Charioteer to work with a Byzantium Secundus Charioteer is normally a difficult task, made all the harder by the secret campaign of misinformation waged by the Rota.

We could easily ignore such squabbles, leaving them to the wisdom of planetary governors and League deans to unravel, were it not for the rumors that the Rota has been in contact with a lost world linked to Criticorum's jumpgate.

The name of this forgotten planet is as yet unknown — if it even exists. However, certain officials known to be associated with the Rota has disappeared on space journeys for months on end, their whereabouts unknown. They exit Criticorum's jumpgate but do not seemingly enter any other known system. Admittedly, it is difficult to coordinate intelligence efforts between the seven worlds linked to Criticorum, but the frequency of such disappearances points to explanations other than stealth ships.

Recent evidence shows that a unit of Charioteer Killroys is investigating, as are a number of Questing Knights. So far, if any have discovered the missing jumpkeys, we have not heard of it. This situation requires increased monitoring, and perhaps even the active participation of field agents.

Tethys Independence Front

Locals long accustomed to relative autonomy under the ever-changing rulership of the regents don't like the increasing central authority of Alexius' imperial court. Its recent rulings have limited freedoms on this world for merchants and independent guilds. The TIF seeks complete freedom from imperial control, believing that Tethys has long been considered a neutral world, and they wish to keep it that way.

To this end, they have resorted to sabotage and bribery, destroying Imperial records and corrupting officials. The former governor, Count Hugh Zarvmann Justinian, resigned under a black cloud of suspicion concerning his role in awarding spaceport docking privileges to Independence Front cronies over Imperial Navy ships. His replacement, Count Avarada Franka Torensen, is a Byzantium Secundus native with close ties to Alexius' court. Her appointment means an increase in direct imperial oversight, and she has already stripped the ranks of many administrative offices of their loyalists, replacing them with workers more aligned to Alexius than local interests.

This has only driven the Independence Front deeper underground, where they have begun resorting to terrorist tactics. The recent flitter explosion in the capitol city park

that took out an entire city block was officially deemed an accident, but the police forces are investigating a number of known Independence Front operatives who were in the area at the time.

The real danger, however, lies in the increased polarization of the populace into two warring camps: those who prefer the relative autonomy of Tethys' local industries and those who desire increased imperial support. The situation could spark a generational conflict, unless peaceful accords can be forged between the two sides. The more the Independence Front resorts to violence, the less likely such a pact will occur.

Madoc Soul Fishers

To many of the residents of Madoc, the oceans have special significance. There are unseen holy sites under the waters — not only those built by the ancestors of the Oro'ym, but human ones besides, ruins as old as the earliest Diapora settlements.

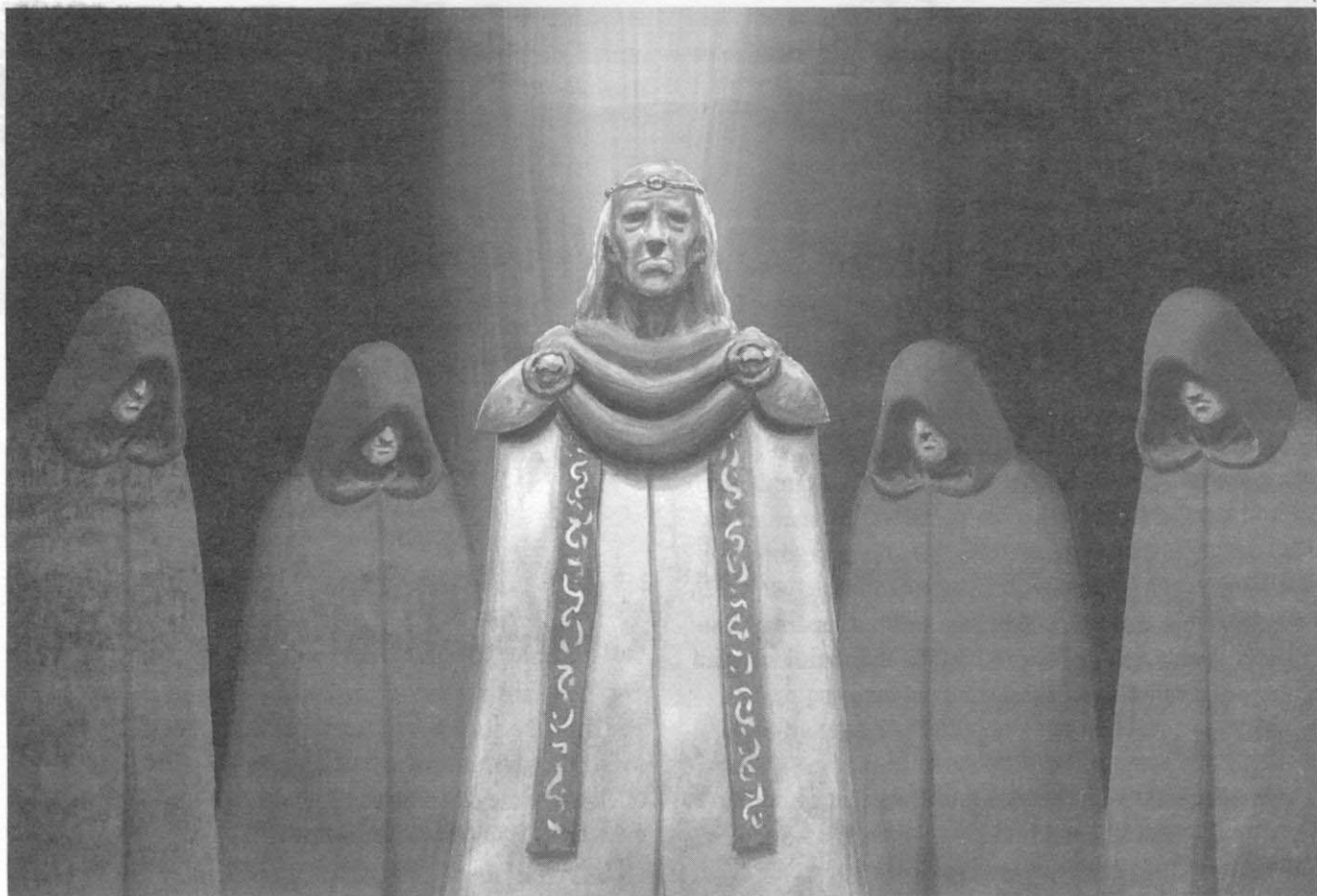
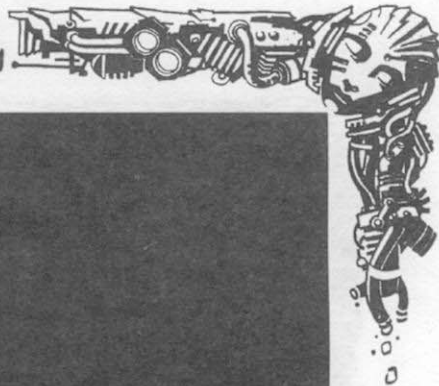
A loose-knit, anarchic religious brotherhood called the Soul Fishers believes that these underwater realms hold the key to autonomy from Known Worlds rule. While they are ostensibly freemen and often guildsmembers, they are all dissatisfied with current conditions not only on Madoc but elsewhere across the stars. They seek to create communities of their own, drop-out cultures beholden to no one but themselves.

Such groups are by no means rare or even remarkable. What makes the Soul Fishers dangerous was demonstrated by the Solchani Incident. League authorities tried to assert their trade monopolies over the independent fishers of the Solchani archipelago. Apparently, some (if not all) of the locals were Soul Fishers. They had access to an Anunnaki weapon of immense power, supposedly uncovered from a nearby undersea ruin. Three Soul Fishers engaged the uncanny explosive device, sacrificing themselves to destroy the League enforcers, all 30 of whom were wiped out to the man in the ensuing blast. The device survived and was secreted away by the surviving Soul Fishers, none of whom have since been seen. They are believed to have escaped to the high seas, and are perhaps supported by a network of fellow Soul Fishers.

The League has hired elite squads of Oro'ym commandos to track them down and recover the device, but even these amphibious natives cannot seem to locate the missing Soul Fishers.

The burning question here is: What kind of device is this and are there more such devices in the hands of the Soul Fishers? Are there other powers yet to be exhibited? In lieu of answers, the League has been very careful in its enforcement of tariffs against independent groups of late.





Artemis Refuge

A classic example of worldism, this group of political activists works in secret to safeguard Artemis from the impurity of the rest of the jumpweb. Its members seek to create a sanctuary for humanity against the time when the suns fade completely. Toward this end, they have infiltrated the governments of Artemis's cantons and planetary administration, helping to erect the world's strict immigration laws. They believe that, by controlling just who can settle on the world, they can create a perfectly controlled sampling of the best of humanity, all in preparation for their grand goal — to remove Artemis from the jumpweb by shutting down its gate.

Needless to say, this is at radical odds with the governing philosophy of Sanctuary Aeon as a whole, whose priests abhor the escapist and purist ideology of the Refuge. They can point to numerous passages from the Omega Gospels wherein Saint Amalthea specifically warns against such isolationism, regardless of the sinful state of humanity as a whole. The proper role of an Amalthean priest is to get her hands dirty with the work of the world, and to raise its standards by example.

The Refuge apparently believes otherwise. Its leaders seem to follow a secret scripture, the apocryphal Ophul Di-

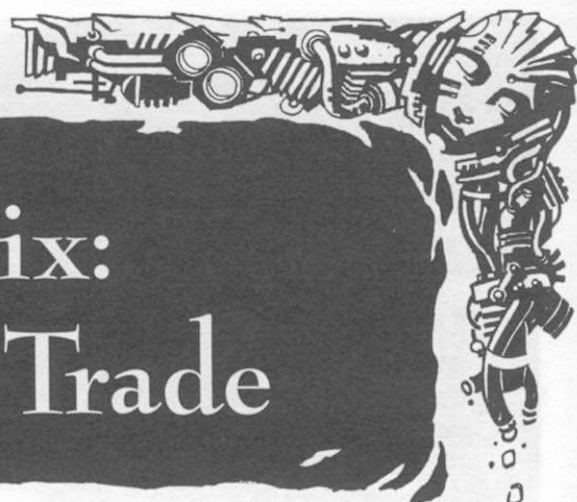
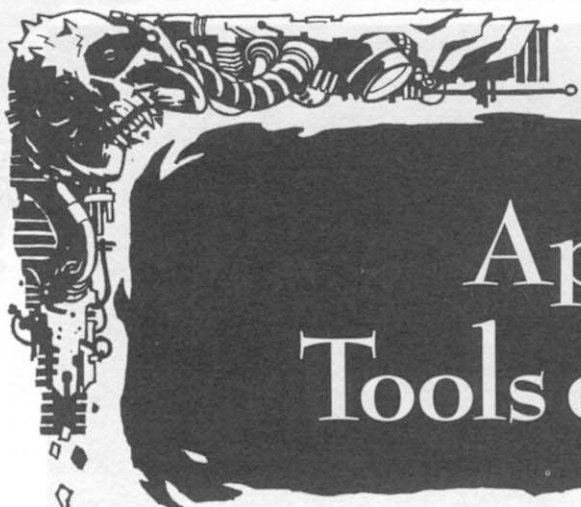
ary, written by Saint Ophul soon after the Fall. This renowned pillar of Amalthean thought urged the followers of Saint Amalthea to retreat from the horrors of the post-Fall universe into isolated monasteries, there to protect their wisdom and ways from the ravages of ignorance and bigotry that then ran rampant across the stars. He believed that only such removal could protect their knowledge from destruction, all toward the greater purpose of one day rejoining the interstellar community with their enlightened wisdom.

Saint Ophul attempted to create a network of such monasteries in the hinterlands of many worlds, but only one now survives on Velisimil. Nonetheless, the Artemis Refuge has taken Ophul's teachings to heart and seek to enact his plan on a grand scale, by removing the most valued physician's planet from the fold of civilization.

Its members are spread throughout the clergy and nobility of that world, and are rumored to be especially strong in the more traditionally democratic-leaning cantons. Hence, they are often confused with pro-Republican groups, when what they really desire is a form of egalitarian theocracy.

The Artemis Council of Bishops has requested the aid of the Syneculla in rooting out this harmful ideology, hoping to forestall the inevitable arrival of the Inquisition should the Refuge's actions become more obvious.





Appendix: Tools of the Trade

Equipment used in subterfuge and assassination — things a young heir needs to know so that he or she can avoid (or perform) surveillance and poisonings.

Gear

There are a variety of odds and ends that could prove useful in the underground trades.

Fortuitous Omega Gospels

TL 5+

Firebird cost: 50 +10 per tech level

It is said that the answer to all one's problems lie within the Omega Gospels. For these specialty editions, this is surely true. These hollow books can carry all sorts of items, from concealed knives and palm lasers to think machines and spy cameras. An ornate lock prevents the book from being opened by any without a key (+300 fb and TL 7 for a genetically locked version). In addition, the specialty shielding on the hand-sculpted, metal covers prevents security devices of the same tech level or less from viewing the contents.

Smart Clothes

TL 7

Firebird cost: 100 plus 20 per function

These normal clothes are impregnated with a network of nanites that can make the clothes form into pre-set shapes at a voice command, such as: "Rope" (makes a cape roll up into a stout rope), "Cloak" (links different clothes — shirts, pants, vests, etc. — into a single, encompassing cloak), "Butterfly" (a cape billows outwards to form two gently flapping wings). The latter betrays the origin of Smart Clothing as a fashion accessory. They are still mainly used by the wealthy to impress partygoers, although spies and sneak thieves can find uses of their own.

Surveillance

There are innumerable means by which to observe someone from the shadows or from a distance. The kinds of uses to which cameras and sound recorders can be put are fairly obvious, so they aren't included here. Tracking devices, however, are a staple of player character spies...

Tracers

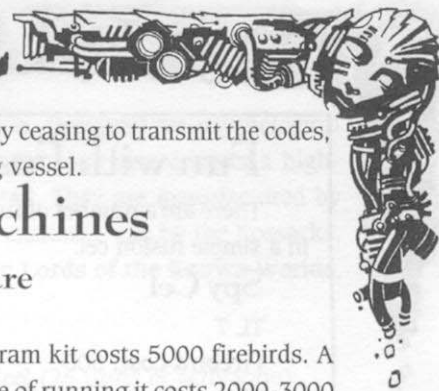
Tracers are devices that transmit their location in a very tight band on a specific frequency. Most are considered to be active transmitters, although they are usually detectable only by someone with the tracer's special receiver. They are used in the espionage trade to track suspicious individuals, usually after surreptitiously planting the device on their person or gear.

To successfully plant the device out of sight, roll Wits + Search. The victory points gained on the roll are contested against those gained by any search for the device.

The variety of tracing or location devices is startling. However, the important features are: Transmitting range (the maximum range it can broadcast its coordinates to whom-ever can home in on its special channel), size and concealability (some are simply slapped under a car while others must remain unnoticeable under a noble's collar), and durability (those meant to operate in foul weather or over long periods must be able to survive). The general rule here is that each category requires a certain tech level to function well. One category can be boosted at the same tech level only at the expense of another. In other words, a tracer can be made to transmit farther than usual at its present tech level but only by making it larger or more fragile (trading off more range for less concealability and durability).

To make devices with a higher tech level function, refer to the chart below: Halve (round down) all other categories for each extra tech level required. For example, to make a





microscopic TL 4 tracer, its range is only 6 km, its Vitality is 0 (a single hit will break it) and its battery life is six hours. However, the cost only rises by half the current cost for each extra tech level.

TL	Range	Size	Durability†
4	50 km	S*	Vitality 2
5	100 km	S*	Vitality 4
6	10,000 km	XS**	Vitality 8
7	Planetwide	Tiny***	Vitality 12
8	Interplanetary	Quantum****	Vitality 16
TL	Battery Life	Cost	
4	48 hours	20	
5	1 week	60	
6	3 months	120	
7	1 year	240	
8	Indefinite	500	

* Small devices are usually disguised as something else, such as a dagger or large belt buckle.

** Extra small devices can be brooches, pens, watches, etc.

*** Microscopic devices can be concealed as part of a cloak's weave, a hair on someone's head, a fingernail, etc.

**** Invisible to the naked eye. Quantum tracers can be placed on a target by having him ingest it or breathe it in. A quantum tracer cannot be detected without high-tech sensor devices.

† Once a device has lost its Vitality, it is not necessarily broken beyond repair, but it does cease to function. Devices that suffer more than twice their original Vitality in damage are demolished and cannot be repaired.

Jumproute Decoder

TL7

Firebird cost: 5000

This device attaches to a starship's sensors (which must have TL 6 EMS or better sensors), allowing them to read the unique patterns of jumpcodes transmitted by other starships as they open jumpgates. It allows a Wits + Science (Sensors) roll to discover what jumproute the target ship is opening. It does not provide the codes, however, so any pursuing ship must have jumpkeys or codes to that route — or else leap through the same jump as the transmitting ship.

This requires that a ship follow in armada fashion. If the following ships coordinate with the lead, they can make the synchronized jump without requiring rolls. If not, the pilots attempting to freeloader on another's jump must make Dexterity + Drive Spacecraft rolls; failure means the gate closes before the ship can enter its portal.

Additionally, this is a very tough maneuver to execute without being noticed by the lead ship. Make a series of sustained Dexterity + Drive Spacecraft rolls contested by the lead ship's pilot or navigator's Wits + Science (Sensors) roll. Whichever ship first collects six victory points wins — the surreptitious ship either succeeds in slipping unseen into the lead's jump wake or the lead ship senses its presence. It

can choose to halt the jump by ceasing to transmit the codes, or even fire on the following vessel.

Think Machines

Sentient Codeware

TL 8

Firebird cost: The program kit costs 5000 firebirds. A typical think machine capable of running it costs 2000-3000 firebirds.

This superb example of Turing programming is designed to operate in portable think machines that run that elite Engineers' language and possess TL8 pygmallium brains. It can instantly translate any spoken language into garbled code that can only be translated by its companion program, which must be installed onto a separate think machine (or else both programs will erase themselves, taking whatever data they can with them). Also, written words can be scanned and likewise garbled, and then translated and printed out on the companion machine.

Each program kit (which includes the original garbler and its translator) is unique — there is no universal program or key that can break the code created by it. It uses a highly advanced artificial intelligence that is nigh impossible to predict (although this has been done by certain brilliant individuals). However, the scarcity of pygmallium-equipped think machines — the program requires TWO such computers — makes its use quite rare.

Code Creatures

TL 8

PROSCRIBED

Firebird cost: The cost for the nanite manufacturing machine is 15,000 firebirds (add 7,000 extra for a private fusion generator).

One of the most advanced discoveries of the Second Republic, this highly classified science project is believed lost in the Dark Ages. However, it is clear that some intelligence agencies have used one or more such "creatures" during the Emperor Wars. They are examples of living cryptography.

A tiny drop of oil binds vast amounts of nanites, all linked into a complex artificial intelligence entity created as an emergent property of the device's complexity. The oil, once placed onto a living host, allows the nanites to seep into the body through sweat pores, where they proceed to spread throughout the system, creating a decentral matrix that can survive intact despite injury to any part of the host.

Once spread out, it can influence its host in subtle ways, urging it to avoid danger or certain situations, and even unconsciously guide him to certain destinations. Its sole aim is the delivery of its preprogrammed cyptic code to a predetermined destination or individual.

This programming is performed with a large machine



Fun with Fusion Cels

There are a number of functions that can be hidden in a simple fusion cel.

Spy Cel

TL 7

Firebird cost: 500

This perfectly normal seeming cel actually hides a nanotech omni-directional camera and recorder. Once placed in a device, it sends out microscopic tendrils that record images and sounds all around the device. The typical spy cel can hold up to 24 hours of continuous data, but its default mode is to record only when the device is in the presence of people. It can be changed to record continuously before it is placed.

A more advanced model (TL 8, 800 fb) can transmit its images and sounds within a 25 km area, and be remotely activated by whoever holds its controls within that zone.

Dummy Cel

TL 7 (or TL 8 if intended for higher-tech devices)

Firebird cost: 100

This looks just like a fully charged fusion cel (and will read as charged on any meter), but it doesn't work right. Each kind of dummy cel must be manufactured with a particular device in mind; once mounted in that device, it mimics proper operations but delivers nothing. Blasters fire plasma bolts that are really just light illusions, lasers fire bolts of light that do no damage, and think machines perform operations but crunch no data (in other words, they can take up a user's time but deliver no answers or correct functions). To detect a dummy operation, the user must make a successful Wits + Observe roll — even false blaster bolts can be explained away by a target's energy shield, so she must be clued in by something more than a simple ineffective shot.

Explosive Fusion Cel

TL 6 (normal size), TL 7 (miniature)

Firebird cost: 50 (+15 for TL 7)

This device looks and acts just like any normal fusion cel (TL 6 for normal size cels, TL 7 for miniature cels). However, once it has called upon more than one charge (such as more than one shot of an energy gun), it explodes, inflicting 9 dice of damage at ground zero. Its radius, however, is only three meters.

that creates the nanites and implants them in the oil. This complex device requires huge amounts of power, although it can convert a variety of materials into the nanites — food, furniture, garbage, etc. A think machine terminal allows the nanites to be coded with their cryptic information, which cannot be broken or revealed except upon delivery. Delivery is defined as the moment the nanites divulge their code to their destination or individual, leaving their host and forming into a data crystal that can be read by most TL7+ think machines. Supposedly, they can be tricked into delivery, such as by someone disguised as their data recipient.

The nanite manufacturing device could conceivably be tracked by monitoring power usage in a fief. However, wise users will acquire a separate energy source to power it, although this might require the secret allocation of vast sums of money, for no less than a cityblock fusion generator is required.

Hallucination Conjurer

TL varies

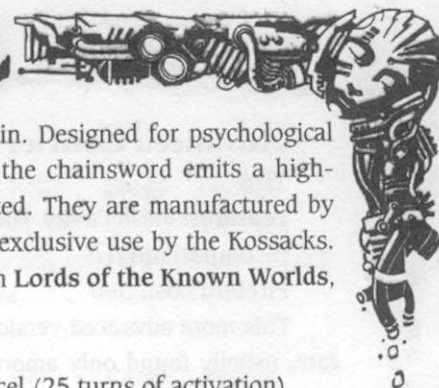
Firebird cost: varies

This odd device from the Second Republic era projects false but highly realistic images — such as a person sleeping in bed (snores and all) or hanging out with friends playing cards all night, while the real person is out sneaking around.

Originally developed for live theatrical performances — it was popular among guerilla street theater troupes — the Hallucination Conjurer can be found in three different models: the suitcase-sized Party Place™ model (TL 7, 3000 firebirds), the baseball-sized Theatre-in-the-Round™ model (TL 8, 5000 firebirds) and the tiny, pen-sized ILPD-2300 government model (TL 8, 10,000 firebirds). The latter is the rarest of all, for it was only made covertly for government uses. None of these models are currently manufactured in the Known Worlds, but working devices can still be found.

The first two devices project a light-based image into three-dimensional space. It is hard to recognize the illusion until one attempts to touch it, at which points its falsehood is revealed. Standard slides that come with the devices include idyllic vacation backgrounds (sun and surf) and well-tended parks or city streets (Second Republic era, except for those few examples of newer slides, developed by expert hackers). They also have software that allows them to take a snapshot of an area and reproduce a simulacrum of it, blending it to make it look like an extension of the natural landscape. These initiated many lawsuits when jokesters used them to create false streets over manholes or illusory bridges over cliffs. Luckily, most citizens of the era also had energy shields.

The government model of the device is the most highly desired, for instead of using tricks of the light, it projects an advanced synesthesia field that fools the brain, creating a



full sensory reality, complete with sound, smell and touch. The illusion cannot damage those who experience it, but it will appear real in texture and substance. Most models also work on Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar, but too little was understood of the other sentients' brain chemistries to effectively take them into account. Hence, it only works on humans and the Children of the Ur. This model was often used to create fake locations with which to lure criminals or spies. In one instance that has become a moral fable in the criminal community, an arms dealer was lured into a prison cell thinking it was a corporate executive's limousine.

Gamemasters and players are encouraged to get creative with these rare devices.

Weapons

Concealed Weaponry

In the realm of espionage, anything can be a weapon or device, from bishop's crosiers that conceal laser rifles and miters that conceal think machines to chewing gum that doubles as an explosive device. The sheer wealth of possibilities precludes their inclusion here. Instead, some examples are given. Gamemasters or players attempting to devise such equipment themselves should agree on just what is possible at what tech level and with what materials. Remember, the smaller something is, generally the higher its tech level. The same is true of durability; stronger and more lightweight materials are available at higher levels. However, the converse could also be that, the more complicated the device is, the more fragile it becomes, for its operation can be hindered with a malfunction to just one of its components.

Melee Weapons

Hollow Knife

This dagger is hollow down the center of its blade and hilt, allowing it to be filled with a poisonous liquid through the screw-off pommel. It can hold up to five doses of most poisons. Whenever the blade contacts resistance, it releases one dose. Only those blows that penetrate a target's armor and inflict at least one point of damage actually release poison into the bloodstream, although any form of resistance on the blade — armor, energy shield, brick wall, etc. — causes one dose to be released.

Baring the release of a dose or close examination of the blade, the knife appears as any other dagger; its special quality cannot be discerned by sight alone.

TL 4

ROLL	GOAL	DMG	STR	SIZ	COST
Dx+Melee	—	3	1	S	50*

* Does not include poison, which must be purchased separately.

Kossack Chainsword

Jakovian Kossacks on intimidation missions traditionally wield the fearsome chainsword, a thick saber with a

serrated-edged internal chain. Designed for psychological impact more than combat, the chainsword emits a high-pitched whine when activated. They are manufactured by the Metallurgers' Cartel for exclusive use by the Kossacks. (A chainsword is depicted in *Lords of the Known Worlds*, pg. 42)

TL5

Power source: Fusion cel (25 turns of activation)

ROLL	INIT	GOAL	DMG	STR	SIZ	COST
Dx+Melee	—	0/-1*	5/7**	4/5	L	150

* The second number is for when the chainsword is activated.

** An active chainsword acts like a vibrating blade against shields: add one to the shield's minimum rating and subtract one from its maximum threshold.

Ranged Weapons

Ring Laser

This finger ring — a thick, gold-plated band with a faux stone — can fire a one-shot laser beam. Once fired, its tiny fusion cel must be recharged or replaced (it takes two turns to replace one with a ready cel). Most wearers have their rings personally engraved with all manner of decoration to help hide their true purpose.

TL 7

ROLL	GOAL	DMG	RNG	SHOTS	RATE	SIZ	COST
Dx+Shoot	—	3	5/10	1	1	XS	400*

* 20/cel

Ring Dart

Similar to the Ring Laser in appearance, this version fires a tiny, sharp dart — usually coated with a drug or poison. As usual, at least one point of damage must be inflicted before the poison enters a victim's bloodstream. A contact poison, however, only needs to touch the victim's skin (although it can be blocked by armor).

TL 7

ROLL	GOAL	DMG	RNG	SHOTS	RATE	SIZ	COST
Dx+Shoot	—	2	5/10	1	1	XS	150*

* 5/dart

Cybernetics

Courier's Pocket (3 pts.)

TL 5

Features: Flesh Cavity, Hidden

Incompatibility: 1

Firebird cost: 330

This is a primitive cybernetic device commonly employed by agents (especially Jakovians) for smuggling information and small valuables (such as selchakah). It is a small, hollow compartment, usually located just beneath the ribcage, capable of concealing items smaller than a pistol. However, the compartment is not shielded from detection devices and can be discovered with a search.





Advanced Courier's Pocket (5 pts.)

TL 8

Features: Flesh Cavity, Hidden, Synthlife

Incompatibility: 3

Firebird cost: 390

This more advanced version of the Courier's Pocket is rare, usually found only among valued agents. Valuables carried within the cavity are undetectable by sensors less advanced than TL 8.

Drugs

Guafta

This bizarre beverage provides a mellow, happy buzz to its imbiber, accompanied by odd sensory hallucinations that may reveal others' emotional states to the drinker. After quaffing at least two glasses (one fifth of a bottle), the drinker may roll Perception + Empathy. If successful, he can begin to properly interpret hallucinations much like a psychic with Sixth Sense reads auras. However, the clues can include senses other than sight. For instance, a cinnamon smell may communicate that the person nearby is seeking an erotic encounter.

The drink is distilled on Madoc from a series of grains native to the few coastal regions, bolstered by hops and barley originally from Pandemonium. The secret, however, is in the addition of treated bwa'zee water —water infused with eggs from a native frog species, found in small ponds throughout the planet. Considered a delicacy by Oro'ym, this "egg water" can cause diarrhea and vomiting in humans if it is drunk without boiling. Boiled bwa'zee, mixed with honey, is added to the Guafta to give it its hallucinatory punch.

Needless to say, most Church officials look down upon the imbibing of Guafta and often sermonize against those who regularly drink it in the cosmopolitan cafes of Rampart, Leagueheim and other such libertine worlds.

The average cost for a bottle is 5 firebirds.

Simla Za Truth Serum

Supposedly concocted with herbs smuggled from Vau space, this liquid sold by Manitou apothecaries and black marketers is the foremost truth serum in the Known Worlds. It is very rare and highly expensive — a single vial (holding perhaps three doses) goes for up to 200 firebirds. However,

a single dose (injected into a victim's veins) will supposedly cause a victim to answer any query put to him with the utmost honesty. Even the thought of lying supposedly never occurs to the dosed individual. What's more, any memory of time spent on Simla Za is erased upon awakening.

Herein lies one of the drawbacks to the drug: it must be administered to the victim while he sleeps in a dream state (REM sleep). It will not work on those in deep sleep or who are unconscious (whether through wounds or other drugs). Once administered, the victim must be awakened, although the drug causes lethargy and makes this process difficult: initiate a series of contested actions between the dosed sleeper and the questioner. The sleeper rolls Calm + Focus or Stoic Mind while the questioner rolls Extrovert + Impress. Whoever gets the most victory points in three rolls succeeds: either the sleeper cannot be awakened or the questioner awakens him enough to begin extracting information.

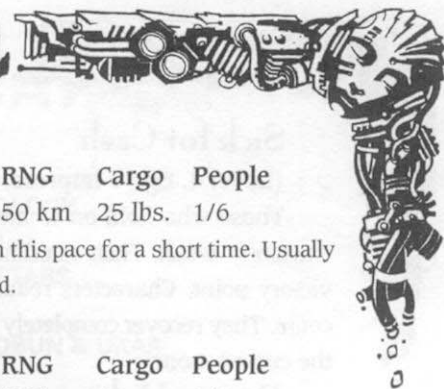
A dosed and awake victim cannot roll to resist answering any question truthfully. An interrogation session can last up to five minutes per dose, although only one dose may be administered within a 24 hour period (successive doses within the same period do not work, and only put the victim into deeper sleep).

Poison

Relon Ga

The Relon Ga shrub is native to the swamps of Cadiz and is common found as a spice in both Hironem and local human cuisine. It is, however, absent from the Decados palette, except among the poorest members of the house. When properly treated with certain synthetic chemicals, it becomes a powerful poison without any alteration to its taste. Relon Ga has been successfully transplanted to Byzantium Secundus, Vera Cruz and several other worlds, and has become a staple of meals in some regions of these planets. Its poisonous properties are a closely guarded secret among Houses Decados, Li Halan and Van Gelder. The poison version of the spice is nearly undetectable in meals. Once ingested, it is slow-acting, manifesting symptoms in humans similar to a mild case of indigestion. If, however, no treatment is administered within three hours, enough poison enters the bloodstream to painfully kill the unfortunate gourmet. The poison has no effect on Hironem.





Vehicle

Air Cart

This looks like a standard, everyday, single-horse cart or perhaps a low-tech, self-propelled ground car. It is actually a flitter. When a lever is engaged, the false sides fall off and gravity fins slide from the frame. Repulsor pads on the bottom engage and lift the craft into the air, allowing the driver to escape whatever pursuit was behind him. The cart animal is left behind, free to wander, its ties and reins detached.

Cart

Speed	ARM	Fuel	RNG	Cargo	People
6 km/hour*	5d	Feed	50 km	25 lbs.	1/6

* Cart animals can only maintain this pace for a short time. Usually the cart travels at half that speed.

Flitter

Speed	ARM	Fuel	RNG	Cargo	People
600 km/hr	5d	Fusion	3K km	1 ton	1/4

Vitality levels: Ruin/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Weapons: None

Tech Level: 6

Firebird cost: 30,000

Filthy Lucre: Mammonist Theurgy

A number of Mammonists have managed to manifest the power of money in extraordinary ways. Serfs have long believed in cursed money, and this power might be part of the reason. Mammonists curse actual coins and then pass them on to whomever they want to effect — the curses never affect their creators. The curse stays with the coin, and if the possessor leaves it at home or passes it on to someone else, the curse follows the new owner of the coin. Money can be uncursed in a number of ways. Using the Cleansing theurgic rite on it is the easiest way, but the cleanser must get at least as many successes as the Mammonist did. Otherwise, the theurgist only reduces the effects of the curse by the number of victory points she rolled.

These are theurgic rites, but are unheard of outside of this conspiracy. It is not based on Pancreator worship but upon the peculiar religious ideas of the Mammonists. All of these rites (except for Money Shock and Exploding Coin) can be resisted as described in the main rules, but only if a character has reason to believe he is being influenced by his money.

Unless stated otherwise, the rite's target must have the coin on his person — the touch range applies to the coin. It also applies to the theurgist during casting—he must touch the coin to curse it. One firebird may be cursed per rite, but additional firebirds can be affected by spending Wyrd extra points during casting:

Wyrd spent	Number of coins affected
1	1*
2	10
3	50
4	100
5	500
6	1000

7	5000
8	10,000
9	50,000
10	100,000

* Or two crests, or four wings, or eight talons.

Fool for Money

(Level 1, Wits + Charm, G, touch, perpetual, 1W)

Money has the power to cloud people's minds and limit their thinking. A coin cursed with this rite reduces its possessor's Wits roll goal numbers by 1 + 1 per victory point.

Blind for Money

(Level 1, Perception + Charm, G, touch, perpetual, 1W)

The desire for money can blind people to everything going on around them. Money cursed with this rite reduces its possessor's Perception roll goal numbers by 1 + 1 per victory point.

Cursed Coin

(Level 2, Ego + Impress, GP, touch, perpetual, 1W)

Money cursed in this way actually attracts danger to people. Attacks targeting the possessor seem to find the victim more easily. Money cursed with this rite increases other people's goal numbers when they attack the holder by 1 + 1 per victory point.

Weakness for Wealth

(Level 3, Endurance + Vigor, GP, touch, perpetual, 1W)

This coin brings about a true malaise in its owner. All its possessor's goal numbers for physical tasks (Strength, Dexterity and Endurance) are reduced by 1 + 1 per victory point.



Sick for Cash

(Level 4, Ego + Impress, GP, touch, perpetual, 1W)

Those who hold on to money cursed like this become extremely weak. Their maximum Vitality falls by 1 + 1 per victory point. Characters reduced to 0 or below fall into a coma. They recover completely as soon as someone removes the cursed money.

Burn a Hole

(Level 5, Ego + Focus, L, touch, perpetual, 1W)

This money actually harms its possessor, causing 1 point of damage + 1 per victory die either the first time he touches it or at the will of the ritecaster. The caster must choose which type of activation the coin bears when he curses it. The range for a willed burn is sight. After the coin has been activated, it returns to its normal, uncursed state. The coin can only be made to burn once, after which the coin must be cursed again for it to further damage anyone.

Burst of Money

(Level 6, Ego + Focus, L, touch, perpetual, 1W)

This money harms its possessor and those around him, causing 1 point of damage + 1 per victory die as if it were a grenade. The coin is activated either by touch or at the ritecaster's will, just as with the level 5 *Burn a Hole*, above. The cursed money is destroyed in the explosion.

Money Flow

(Level 7, Wits + Focus, GP, touch, perpetual, 1W)

Whoever possesses this coin must make a Wits + Focus roll to avoid immediately losing (misplacing, squandering, etc.) any money she receives. She must roll more successes than did the coin's creator. Thus, if during a work shift, a bartender receives this coin along with 20 others, she must roll to avoid losing the 20. The cursed coin is not lost in this manner. Until it leaves her person, she may continually lose money (she must roll every time more comes into her possession). However, due to the fact that it is often the sole coin remaining after multiple losses, many victims come to believe it is a lucky coin and vow to keep it!

Loss of Value

(Level 8, Extrovert + Focus, GP, touch, perpetual, 2W)

Whoever possesses this coin must make a Wits + Focus roll to avoid losing his most valued possessions. To avoid this, he must roll more successes than did the coin's ritecaster, and must roll for a number of possessions equal to 1 + 1 per victory point gained in cursing the coin. The gamemaster should decide which possessions the character values most. This does not always represent the most expensive items the character owns. The cursed coin is not lost in this manner, although it can only affect its possessor once. The possessor, however, can never regain his items until he gets rid of the curse. Even if someone gives him back his belongings, he will promptly lose them again.

Flood the Market

(Level 9, Ego + Impress, GP, touch, one week, 2W)

The ritecaster curses a coin with one of the rites above and then casts this rite upon it. That coin (or coins, if he spends Wyrd to increase the number) becomes contagious, cursing any coins it comes in contact with. These coins will in turn spread the contagion to whatever coins they touch. The effect lasts for only a week, but that is often long enough to harm a regional economy. This rite can, of course, be cast once again when the effect of the first rite wears off, introducing new cursed money into the economy. A prolonged slump in a single region, however, may attract Kalinthe occult investigators — or worse: Reeve Auditors, who know of the Mammonist conspiracy and wipe it out with extreme prejudice wherever it is uncovered.

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